Innovative pedagogies series: Education as the practice of transformation

Developing transformative pedagogies through programme design

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Introduction

Once upon a time, long long ago, yet not so far from now, I was a new lecturer, teaching a large Education class consisting of mainly mature students and mainly women. Like so many of us, especially at the earlier stages of our careers, I was given a module guide already produced, with set readings and learning outcomes already determined, and asked to teach it.

It was fairly standard stuff – the sorts of theorists and readings you might expect in an ‘introduction to’ Education module: Dewey, Kolb, Knowles. Towards the end of the module, there was a session on language, mainly drawing on the work of Bernstein. Here, I thought, was my chance to link my teaching to my own pedagogical interests and I decided to introduce some additional readings to the students.

I chose to focus a single hour of the session on the work of three feminist writers – Dale Spender, Audre Lorde and bell hooks. I spoke for a short time, gave out some readings and asked the students to discuss the issues in groups. The discussions seemed animated – so far, so good. I then asked for feedback. A man jumped up, demanding to know why I was giving the class “this feminist rubbish”. Why, he asked, was I trying to indoctrinate them with my radical ideas. He would, he said, be making a formal complaint.

I was on an hourly paid contract with no job security. This felt like – probably was – a serious threat. I took a deep breath and tried not to let my voice shake. I told him I was surprised that as we were so near the end of the course, no-one had complained that the only theorists we had discussed before that afternoon were male. I told him that it was my job to open up new ideas and challenges to people. I told him that the purpose of group work is to share ideas and perspectives with other people. Other women began to speak. They said how exciting they found the new ideas in the three texts. They started to engage in a debate on gender, language and learning. The session was over almost before it had begun. Several women followed me out into the corridor. They all said, in varying ways, “I didn't like to say anything in the session, but …”. They told me how affirming they found the texts. In particular, the small group of women of colour who followed me out told me how marginalised they had felt before that afternoon. All the women said they did not have the “courage” to speak in the large lecture room, especially as they perceived the male student as “aggressive” and “threatening”. But they thanked me for letting them see the texts, and asked what else they could read. I went home exhausted yet also confirmed in the ways in which I wanted to explore and develop my approaches to pedagogy and to ‘Education’ as an academic discipline.

*(Jackson 2004)*

Like many of my students, for much of my adult life I have been trying to locate myself in an academy which has often felt alien and isolating to me, forever trying to fit myself and my work within more ‘traditional’ academic teaching. This has too often denied my own non-traditional, gendered and working-class entry into
higher education, leading me to want to find ways to be “differently academic” (Jackson 2004, p. 55) and to challenge ways of being and becoming academic through feminist and critical pedagogic approaches. If education is the practice of freedom (Freire 1976; hooks 1994), then whose freedom is being practiced; whose freedom is already perfected; and whose freedom is yet to come?

It is something of the development my own pedagogic practices that I want to outline here, thinking about how these practices relate to wider conceptualisations of learning and teaching. I will primarily explore this through describing my work on a new Masters programme where I was looking for ways to develop the spaces in Education classrooms where we can learn to transgress rather than to conform. In doing so, and working in and through spaces of transgression, the spaces in-between, I was interested in exploring the possibilities of transformative spaces in Education programmes.

Transformation can be painful: Kafka (1912) described metamorphosis – the process of transformation – as a painful and difficult attempt to adjust to new conditions. Adjusting to new conditions can be difficult, although the difficulty can be worked through by opening up spaces. Indeed, the personal, professional and political costs of transgression can be high, as I demonstrated above: transgression from prevailing systems of higher education; transgression across identities; transgression through narratives and ways of being; and transgressions through and beyond disciplinary boundaries.

But important as those transdisciplinary boundaries are to me, I also want to consider Education as discipline, both as an academic discipline and through the disciplinary practices that embed us all in constructions of knowledge and power (Foucault 1991). I will explore ways in which we might re/imagine our pedagogic practices, asking what it means to teach Education and to what extent learning Education can become a transformative process. In doing so, I will primarily draw on a Masters’ programme that I developed on ‘Education, power and social change’, using this to illustrate how my pedagogic practices evolved within an institutional context; the impact of new pedagogic proposals; and ways in which new innovative pedagogical practices might be adapted and adopted within the broad field of education studies. These pedagogic practices include drawing on critical and feminist pedagogic approaches to explore constructions of knowledge, ‘truth’ and power, starting from an epistemological and political base, embedding pedagogic and conceptual frameworks. However, I will begin by considering Education in the higher education classroom both as an academic discipline and as the practice of transformation.

**Disciplining Education**

This report focuses on Education, probably one of the most problematic of the disciplines. Maybe everyone says that of their own discipline and the concept of ‘discipline’ is far from straightforward (Krishnan 2009). But ‘education’ is so often taken as a description of what goes on in teaching institutions, a process of facilitating learning, not an academic discipline. And herein lies a problem. When people ask me about my academic discipline, and I say ‘Education’, they are likely to be puzzled. For although there is a common sense understanding of what is meant by education, educationalists are more likely to be identified as practitioners than are, say, historians or biologists. And to complicate matters further, add to that a question about whether Education really can be a discipline.

An academic discipline is a field of study that is researched and taught, but most usually a field of study that is defined, bounded with fences and knowledge claims. It consists of tribes and territories (Beecher and Trowler 2001). It does not spill over into other territorial domains, into neighbouring fields; does not enmesh and entangle itself into tapestries of messy and over/flowing patterns. Yet Education does just that, doesn’t it? It crosses boundaries – boundaries for example of sociology, psychology, history - but also transcends them. So a question that I want to leave hanging in the balance for now is whether or not Education is, or can be, an academic discipline, or whether it is a multidisciplinary field. Indeed, I want to go beyond that, and ask
whether Education at its most transformative lies in the spaces in-between or beyond the disciplines, in a way that is transdisciplinary.

In considering the rise of the social sciences in the 19th century, Elana Michelson (2015) argues that this must be understood “not only as the emergence of new disciplines and knowledge-practices, but as ... a justification for middle-class power and hegemony” (p. 46). It is not difficult to envisage ways in which a mapping out of the territory of Education became part of the ways in which to uphold the status quo of the (male) middle-classes, showing Education as the practice of some very particular freedoms, but limiting possibilities for the practices of others. For example, the discipline of Education developed in the universities in a very specific way with a clear agenda on training teachers so that they in turn could educate the working class masses. As Brian Simon explains:

> Education as a specific focus of study did not enter universities in Britain until comparatively recently. It did so as a result of an external demand on the universities - to participate in the professional training of teachers. It was, therefore, a product of the rise of mass systems of education which were brought into being in most advanced industrialised countries as a result of industrialisation and urbanisation. (Simon 1983, p.1).

With the entry of Education as an academic discipline within the universities, a body of (a particular kind of) knowledge began to develop located within the growing development of disciplines such as Sociology in the 1950s and 1960s, ‘Education Studies’ (rather than teacher training) began to emerge as a field in its own right (Blake 1996; McCulloch 2002; QAA 2007), marking a transition to education for social change; followed by more recent concerns with education for personal and skills development (see for example, Leitch 2006).

If we add to the mix, then, a debate about the ways in which Western higher education culture determines the academic agenda in relation to what constitutes a discipline or academic knowledge, a dialogue has to follow about social differences, minority groups and hierarchical structures, including issues of representation among different groups in the population. Questions have to be asked about constructions of ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’, and about the power structures that can leave these questions hanging in the balance, unanswered or, at worst, not even imagined or asked. It was questions like these that were at the forefront of my consideration in designing and developing a new Masters programme in Education, that I will go on to discuss below. Drawing on feminist and critical pedagogies, I start by outlining some of the key issues that informed this new programme, an MSc in Education, Power and Social Change.

**Innovating in the ‘Education’ classroom: developing spaces of transformation**

In hierarchies of learning, teaching and assessment, the academy becomes the dominant producer of knowledge, although it also has its own hierarchies of power and control (see Burke and Jackson 2007). Discourses of learning and teaching regulate and normalise gendered and classed, racialised and ethnicised understandings of what learning is and who counts as a learner. Learning and its assessment can be mechanisms for exclusion and social control and, while ‘difference’ is always connected to wider social, material, cultural and political inequalities, under-represented groups are often constructed in ‘lack’. Negotiations into and through education and learning are complex and learners, teachers and the institutions in which they are located need to find ways to transgress and challenge the status quo. The ways in which ‘knowledge’ is named, determined and recognised is through discourses embedded in Western paradigms. What counts as knowledge appears incontestable yet it is both contestable and partial, disempowering all but dominant groups. Despite popular beliefs to the contrary, the creation of ‘knowledge’ is neither impartial nor accidental. All knowledge is not equally privileged and what is ‘known’ and who the ‘knowers’ are is highly politicised. Some knowledges count, while others do not, legitimising and de-legitimising beliefs and practices (Jackson 2010). Different realities, different ways of knowing and
experiencing the world, need to be acknowledged and understood and I will go on to show that this is central to transformative pedagogies in the Education classroom.

Education is always a certain theory of knowledge put into practice, and it is therefore always political (Freire 2004). Nevertheless, current political interest in knowledge societies remains in the main unproblematised. Although knowledge societies are about identifying, producing and disseminating information to build and apply knowledge, it has been argued that they require an empowering social vision that encompasses plurality, inclusion, solidarity and participation (UNESCO 2005). There must be recognition that ‘knowledge’ is partial, and embedded in power relations. What can be ‘known’ and who can be a ‘knower’ creates both meaning and oppression:

Different knowledges and their possibilities are differently distributed to different social groups. This distribution of different knowledges and possibilities is not based on neutral differences in knowledge, but on a distribution of knowledge which carries unequal value, power and potential. (Bernstein 1996, p. 8).

When power relations are masked, inequalities between social groups become legitimised. Bernstein (1996, p.170) says that a central question to ask is who recognises themselves as of value, and what images are therefore excluded by the dominant image of value? However, the question is not just who recognises themselves as of value, but also how this recognition occurs (or not), and how it is enabled or constrained, issues that were paramount in a programme on Education, power and social change. Policies, practices and ideologies of higher education help define and determine a nation’s focus on the ways in which social justice is perceived, as do the way these are acted out in Education programmes in universities. Successful teaching involves much more than the transmission of content and skills: it is about more than the mere transmission of knowledge: it is about developing the courage to take imaginative leaps of transformation. Einstein is credited with saying – and who am I to argue with Einstein1 – that: “Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world.” Or put it another way:

A defiant imagination ... defies the constraints of expectation and the everyday ... because the imagination ... is necessary to the achievement of all we hope for as a society. (Wyman 2004, p. 18).

Putting aside for a moment the ‘we’ of that sentence – a ‘we’ that might well only include some of us – I do want to hold onto the idea of imagination. For in many ways, transformative practice is about developing pedagogic imaginations. It involves the process of effecting change in our current frames of reference; about imagining new possibilities, developing Education as the practice of transformation. I used these issues, concerns and ideological positionings to transform the Masters programme in Education through critical and feminist pedagogic approaches which question claims to truth and knowledge, including the role and authority of the teacher, and rest on visions of transformation (Jackson 2004).

Evolving pedagogic practices: re-imaging ‘Education’

Programme development: changing contexts

When I started as a lecturer at my current institution, in 2001, I was appointed in part to teach an (already running) certificate, diploma and MA in Teaching in Lifelong Learning. It was in fact a teaching certificate with some additional modules and a dissertation to build into a diploma and MA. As I began to re-focus some of my work, looking at changing market demands as much as anything else, this evolved into an MSc in Lifelong

1 and so a good example of the power of disciplines and knowledge
Learning, Policy and Practice aimed at practitioners in a wide range of lifelong learning settings and contexts in a political context – both in the UK and beyond – of developing policies for lifelong learning. The programme aimed to engage with these developing policies which it linked to practice. Its departure from an MA to an MSc was intended to attract more social science students yet there was something else – a more hidden agenda that arose from departmental discussions – which was about the intended ‘seriousness’ of the programme. Constructions of hierarchies of knowledge suggested that a Master of Science degree would be more attractive to prospective students than a Master of Arts degree in a market focussed on skills for employability, a market which supported individualised learning embedded in structural power relations.

The course guidelines continue to implicitly focus on employability, describing the programme as being ‘for those who wish to develop their understandings of current issues and debates in lifelong learning, and to critically inform their practice’. The programme, in the guidelines at least, appeared not to challenge conventional teacher/learner relationships: the programme would enable students to develop understandings and would inform their practice. The programme consisted of six modules:

Module 1: Lifelong learning: policy and practice, encouraged students to explore the relationship between issues raised by the course with their own practices in the workplace or voluntary of community work.

Module 2: Widening participation and social inclusion, explored constructions of gender, social class, race and ethnicity, and the implications for social inclusion (and exclusion).

Module 3: Lifelong learning: developing perspectives, consisted of a series of student-led seminars, where students could expand upon and develop their own particular interests in lifelong learning arising from modules 1 and 2.

Module 4: Researching lifelong learning, introduced students to critical debates and issues in research methodologies, including constructions of ‘knowledge’, theoretical perspectives and ethical issues.

Module 5: Action research: professional development, provided an opportunity for students to undertake an action research project, developing their capacity for reflective practice in relation to their own professional value base.

Module 6: Dissertation.

As the brief module outlines show, although the programme had a strong focus – as the title and its evolved history suggests – on education policy and education practice, it also explicitly taught ‘education’ though the lenses of culture, identity and ‘difference’. It aimed develop understandings and inform in more student-led ways than the guidelines might suggest, introducing students to debates about ways in which knowledge is constructed, and to enable them to develop reflective practice, through student-led seminars and through an action research project.

Programme development: from policy and practice to change and transformation

With my growing interest in transformative learning, and my growing confidence to develop a programme that more closely aligned with my values and belief systems, as well as my research interests, in 2008 I joined with other interested colleagues to develop a proposal for a new MSc in Education, Power and Social Change.

The ‘team’ consisted of a core of three - myself and two colleagues who were hourly paid – and a wider advisory board. From the outset, we were determined to include ‘power’ in the title, setting up something of the programme’s ideology at the outset. This proved to be contentious: the advisory board were perfectly happy to accept ‘Education and social change’ but were reluctant for ‘power’ to be included in the title, which was little recognised as a feature of an MSc in Education. By this time in my career, it was less risky for me to
take the stance that I did: that considerations of ‘power’ underpinned this programme and that it was not possible for me to develop a programme on Education and social change without being explicit about power constructions. However, I was very aware that it was more difficult and complex for my two colleagues, who wanted to work on and with the programme because they were ideologically committed to it but also because they wanted the work. Power at play.

I needed agreement from the advisory board so that I could submit the proposal, a board that could act as gatekeeper and indeed block the proposal. Nevertheless, the title was eventually agreed and a successful programme proposal submitted. This time, the programme specifications were more explicit, stating:

This exciting new course addresses key debates in the study of education, power and social change from an interdisciplinary perspective. Themes, issues and methodologies are developed from a range of viewpoints ... This programme explores the links between education and social and political movements and will develop understandings of how 'education' is a contested field which should be viewed within a globalised and post-colonial context.

Here, the underpinning pedagogical approaches can be seen, at least implicitly. The themes, issues and methodologies would be developed from a ‘range of viewpoints’, including interdisciplinary perspectives and including the viewpoints of the programme participants. The field of ‘education’ in this programme would be challenged and contested, placing it within the contexts of globalisation and post-colonialism, including – as one of the early course readings shows:

| the effects of race, culture, class and gender in postcolonial settings; histories of resistance and struggle against colonial and neo-colonial domination; the complexities of identity formation and hybridity; language and language rights; the ongoing struggles of Indigenous people for recognition of their rights. (Pearson 2008, in Spring 2009, p.14). |

The programme explicitly recognised that both students and teachers – and we are all both at times – are part of complex social, cultural, political, ideological and personal circumstances and was underpinned by feminist and critical pedagogies. Penny Welch has suggested that feminist pedagogy is based on three principles:

- to strive for egalitarian relationships in the classroom;
- to try to make all students feel valued as individuals;
- to use the experience of students as a learning resource. (Welch 1994, p.156).

Kathleen Weiler, on the other hand, goes further, stating that while feminist pedagogy is about questioning the role and authority of the teacher, explaining difference, and valuing personal experience, above all feminist pedagogy rests on a vision of “social transformation” (Weiler 1991, pp.149-50).

All of these were central in our discussions about the development of the programme. And in considering these issues, the programme team also drew on other critical pedagogies, including those of Freire, who stated in his Pedagogy of Indignation:

There are questions all of us must ask insistently that make us see the impossibility of studying for study's sake. Instead, we should ask 'In favor of what do I study? In favor of whom? Against what do I study? Against whom do I study'. (Freire 2004, p. 60).

This programme was as interested in these ‘againsts’ as the ‘fors’, and aimed to be explicit about this. Nevertheless, what it could not do was be explicitly against the pre-determined learning outcomes that the programme team was required to write in its original proposal.
Assessment and the tyranny of learning outcomes

The team thought long and hard about this, and struggled with the learning outcomes we had to write in advance, grouped in ways that the institution required at the time: subject specific, intellectual, practical and personal and social. A learning outcome is a statement of what a learner is expected to know, understand or do at the end of a period of learning (e.g. a programme, module or session). Pre-setting learning outcomes in programme and module specifications does little to enable students to determine for themselves what it is they hope to achieve at the end of a period of learning; nor does it recognise that such hopes change over a period of study and beyond – surely that is what learning is, isn’t it?

Biggs (2003) argues that:

The teacher’s job is to create a learning environment that supports the learning activities appropriate to achieving the desired learning outcomes. The key is that all components in the teaching system - the curriculum and its intended outcomes, the teaching methods used, the assessment tasks - are aligned to each other. All are tuned to learning activities addressed in the desired learning outcomes. The learner finds it difficult to escape without learning appropriately. (Biggs 2003, p. 1).

With a critical pedagogic focus that aims to challenge the ways in which teachers construct and determine what is to be ‘known’, that students have to achieve pre-determined learning outcomes is problematic to say the least. But in working towards transformative pedagogies in the Education classroom, any idea of students learning ‘appropriately’ seems astonishing. As Hussey and Smith (2010) argue, the growth of managerialism has misappropriated the ways in which learning outcomes are written and used, leading to their distortion. They are used as apparent objective and measurable devices to monitor performance in ways that has little, if anything, to do with the development of learning.

Nevertheless, we could find no way around having those pre-stated and pre-determined learning outcomes – ‘by the end of this session/module/programme students will be able to …’, whether they want to or not. Looking back at the programme proposal, there is little in the learning outcomes that suggests challenges to the role and authority of the teacher, or the importance of the development of new perspectives arising from students’ experiences. There are no opportunities for students to develop their own learning outcomes, nor indeed for any of us to challenge the need for learning outcomes at all. The learning outcomes for Module 2, for example – a module on Education, Power and Resistances - include:

**Subject specific**

1. Discuss and evaluate discourses on ‘universal rights to education’.
2. Critique how the power of dominant ideologies shape educational policies and practice, drawing on a range of global examples.
3. Analyse the concept of social exclusion and discuss possible origins using a number of examples.
4. Analyse the resistances arising from the development of socially excluded groups.

**Intellectual**

Apply theoretical perspectives to critically analyse a range of educational developments.

**Practical**

Critically read and analyse key texts, make notes and structure written work appropriately.

**Personal and Social**

Distinguish between academic and political positionings in educational development and reflect on their personal values and beliefs.
And yet there is something, isn’t there, at least in the final outcome, which includes personal values and beliefs. And there is a clear outcome about the power of dominant ideologies (although it does not specifically include the dominance of learning outcomes). In addition, each session started and ended with the opportunity for the classroom community of learners and teachers to reflect on and engage with the learning outcomes, at times relating these to assessment, and at times collectively thinking critically about them.

As I have been arguing here, and have argued elsewhere (Burke and Jackson 2004), the setting of learning outcomes and the practices that assess their achievement can operate to privilege certain knowledges and truths, and therefore identities. Essay writing, for example, is embedded in academic conventions, and privileges those who can claim the authority to know as well as what type of knowledge is deemed worthy in higher education. An authorial voice which ‘argues’ does not allow for doubt or differing perspectives to develop. This does not normally include storytelling nor even, in too many cases, use of the first person, ensuring that gendered, classed and racialised positioning remains Othered.

The programme specifications for the MSc Education, Power and Social Change state that:

Assessment will be developmental and will include case studies and student presentations as well as essays. Although there will not be examinations in the core modules, writing-up of case studies and in-class assessed student presentations will guard against plagiarism. Student presentations in the dissertation/action research module will enable the tutor to assess work in progress.

I note now, as I noted then, that the justification in the programme specifications for different forms of assessment was to ‘guard against plagiarism’, not to guard against constructions of what it means to be ‘academic’, or to develop ways for collaborative endeavours and the development of new knowledges. There is no specific reference in the programme specifications to students also being able to assess their own work in progress. Nevertheless, that is what students did. For example, in Module 2, Education, power and resistances, assessment in part consisted of group presentations. Students were asked to work together in a community of practice, to present a case study that drew on their own experiences, their readings of ‘texts’ and their engagement with the course and their developing interests. They were asked to assess their own case studies and those of others, drawing on key conceptual issues that had been considered in the programme, especially power and resistances.

Module 1, Education, Globalisation and Change, was assessed through three pieces of coursework including a reflective log. Its guidelines state:

1. Each student will submit a personal log of their reflections on their progress academically throughout the module.
2. The short target length of 1,000 words, over about 10 weeks, is designed to encourage you to sit back and think about what is happening in terms of your own academic development.
3. This is not a week-by-week account of what took place in class, but your personal, thought-through responses to issues emerging from what is taking place on the Masters...
4. ... the log could include items you are raising around deeper questions provoked by your study, discussions and wider reading. For example, you could ... show how issues and concerns are emerging for you out of your Masters work and your reflection on what it’s stirring up in your mind. You might have a strong reaction to something you’ve discovered and want to write about that, digging and probing in writing, as you explore its implications for you.
5. Above all, the log is an opportunity to take time out and think about what’s impacting on you; where your enthusiasms and deep interests lie, or how they are emerging...
The assessment sought to enable learners to reflect on and use their personal experience and those of others in theoretical and analytical ways. Students were encouraged to develop critical thinking, drawing on and extending their own experiences, and challenging different perspectives about the world around them in a range of contexts. The approaches were characterised as critically reflective and inquiry-led active learning, and recognised that learning is an emotional as well as an intellectual activity.

Telling stories: reflective practices/constructing ‘knowledges

I want to pause here for another story, another once upon a time, a long time ago, when I was teaching on an access to social work programme. Students had been asked to write a reflective piece on their experience of the course and the ways in which their views had been shaped through their engagement with the programme. One of the students wrote a deeply personal story in which he narrated ways in which he had always recognised his own oppression as a black working-class man but, until studying on the programme, he had not realised that he also oppressed others – women. I was deeply moved by the piece and felt re-affirmed in my teaching...

Fast forward a year or two, when I was working on my PhD and interviewing women about their experiences in higher education. One woman told me that she had always struggled in a very gender-defined relationship, expected to do paid work outside the home and unpaid work inside, noting the physical and emotional labour that goes with it. She went on to say that prior to her enrolling for her degree, her husband had taken an access course, and that he had taken it with me. It turned out to be the same man. She said things had been really hard before he took the programme and I waited for the ‘but’, the change, the happy ever after. However, instead she went on to say words to the effect of: “but then it became so much worse. He refused to do anything in the home or with the children, or to give her any support, shouting that he had his access studying and homework to do”.

I am not sure what that demonstrates. Maybe don’t believe everything that you’re told, but maybe something more. But with that proviso, I want to argue that narration and story-telling are important parts of knowing, allowing for the ‘trying on of different points of view’ and disorientating dilemmas (Kroth and Cranton 2014, p. xiv) that trouble claims to truth. As I show above, from the outset the programme team wanted to ensure that there was ample opportunity for story-telling on the programme, for the creation of spaces for reflective practices and for communities of practice to develop through the group work embedded in each session. We were aware that communication can sometimes appear to happen in different voices (Gilligan 1993), voices emanating from multiple traditions, cultural origins and identifications. However, I am not sure we took sufficient account of the tyranny of participation (Gourlay 2105), a ‘telling' that Beverley Skeggs (2002) describes and that may be so evidently apparent in the story above. Students can be forced into particular ways of telling and of knowing what is required of that ‘telling' in higher education (Steedman 2000). This may be especially the case when that telling is being assessed, when ‘the imperative to produce oneself ... relies not just on access to and control of symbolic resources, but also on knowing how to display one's subjectivity properly' (Skeggs 2002, p. 973), with particular narratives becoming necessary as new truths.

According to Ricoeur (1991), our narrative identity is made up of our subjective identity in relation to both history and fiction. He describes the ‘storied self’, demonstrating how our identity becomes entangled in the stories we tell of ourselves and are told by others. Feminist theorisations of auto/biography also disrupt conventional taxonomies of biography and autobiography, disputing divisions of self/other, public/private, and immediacy/memory. ‘The auto/biographical I’ (Stanley 1992) signals ways in which knowledge is constructed through multiple layers of meaning. Constructs of self are negotiated around complexities of insider/outside and belonging/unbelonging. Ricoeur describes three moments – “having-been”, “making-present”, and “coming-towards”. Memories of what has been can both sustain and disrupt a sense of self, although the creation of new memories can be a political act of coming-towards. Having-been and making-present, can show the potential for becoming, although ‘becoming’ is complex and messy, and is intersected, fluid and transitional, mobilised through different emphases and negotiations. It was the hope of the programme team that, recognising this messy process, our students would find ways of becoming through
the freedom to explore and to challenge and to critique, developing what I came to call relational ways of knowing, developing new perspectives in relation to what they were learning.

I have previously conceptualised some of these pedagogic proposals as the development of relational capital (Jackson 2010) which arises from the relational understandings of and between the different voices, histories and memories. Relational capital is political, and relational understandings, per se, are about an investment in the development of shared consciousness, learning through spaces in which we learn to re/cognise ourselves and others, and to be recognised in return, enables us to develop different knowledges and understandings about our relationships within competing and sometimes colliding worlds.

Classrooms are complex spaces – spaces of past, present and future possibilities; of stories and histories and memories; of gendered, sexualised and racialised identities. They are microspaces made up of structures derived from social, historical, economic, political, ideological and cultural conditions and power relations. It is through such conditions and relations that identities evolve. When power relations are masked, inequalities between social groups become legitimised. Bernstein (1996, p170) says that a central question to ask is who recognises themselves as of value, and what images are therefore excluded by the dominant image of value? However, the question is not just who recognises themselves as of value, but also how this recognition occurs (or not), and how it is enabled or constrained. In the classrooms of the MSc Education, Power and Social Change, I explicitly engaged with these issues. As Adrienne Rich states:

> When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing. Yet you know you exist and others like you, that this is a game with mirrors. (Rich 1979, p. 199).

I was, and remain, mindful of the power relations that enable or destroy re/cognition, by which I mean not just identification but also re-thinking the world around us. Students were continually encouraged to critically engage with a wide and diverse range of texts: their own stories, other students, lecturers, written and spoken texts, poetry and so forth. No one text was signalled as dominant, as ranking more highly, although we did look at sources, too, and think about what these might mean. For example, at the start of the second module I discussed some of my own research findings and asked students to critically consider these findings by working in groups to analyse some of the quotations from the research and consider what conclusions they would draw, and why. In the second week of the second module, I returned (see opening section) to language, drawing on bell hooks to illustrate my points. Bell hooks shows how language can be, and is, used to oppress and dominate, but that those who are oppressed can use language to their own ends. It needs to be “possessed, taken, claimed as a space of resistance” (hooks 1994 p.169). True speaking, she says:

> is not solely an expression of creative power; it is an act of resistance, a political gesture that challenges politics of domination that would render us nameless and voiceless. As such, it is a courageous act”. (hooks 1989, p. 8).

And although I wanted (still want) my students to be able to construct new knowledges, to offer those acts of resistance, to be differently academic (Jackson, 2004) should that be what they choose, they also need to be conventionally academic to succeed at university, although ‘success’ too is contested and political. How, then, can the power and the politics be challenged?

**Moving on: Developing pedagogic practices of transformation**

Throughout his life's work, Freire has viewed education as a political act (Jackson, 2007). Teaching, he believes, can never be divorced from critical analysis of how society works, and teachers must challenge learners to think critically through social, political and historical realities within which they are a presence in
the world. This is precisely what the MSc in Education, Power and Social Change set out to do. Freire says that:

Education makes sense because women and men learn that through learning they can make and remake themselves, because women and men are able to take responsibility for themselves as beings capable of knowing – of knowing that they know and knowing that they don’t. (Freire 2004, p. 15).

Different realities, different ways of knowing and experiencing the world, cognitions, re/cognitions and mis/re-cognitions, need to be acknowledged, explored and understood. The Education classroom (as all classrooms) is a kind of diasporan space (Brah 1996), made up of indigenous populations2 who have a strong sense of belonging (e.g. in the world of higher education) and those who have travelled into and inhabit different worlds, making and re-making themselves. Diaspora is a space inhabited both by those who have migrated into it but also “by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous (occupying) ... the privileged space of legitimate claims of belonging” (Brah 1996, p. 178). But while diaspora is about loss and exile from known worlds, it is also about developing flexible and/or alternative ways of being (Rassool 1997), about hope and new beginnings (Brah 1996). Diaspora is about movement which is emotional and psychic and well as physical, as new belongings and identities in the fluid spaces of the discipline of Education are negotiated and constructed (Jackson 2010).

In developing the pedagogic principles of the programme, I was interested in learning and teaching which recognises such spaces, enabling the “trying on of different points of view” (Kroth and Cranton 2014, p. xiv). If “good teaching is to temporarily estrange students from what’s familiar” (James and Brookfield 2014, p. xiii), then narration and storytelling are an important part of developing new knowledges through challenges to old ones. Storytelling can (and sometimes does) lead to transformative dialogues, although the course team recognised too and directly engaged with our students in considering narratives of resistance and of struggle that we felt were a necessary component of the creation of new ways of knowing. We acknowledged the difficulties of conversation, and the making of meaningful connections with lived experiences, that follow from the trying on of those different points of view.

The pedagogic proposals of the MSc were to enter the spaces in-between (in-between the learning outcomes, concerns with plagiarism, measures of assessment), spaces for the creation of developing, hybrid and new knowledges. I was particularly interested in finding that fluid space, that gap between the spaces of ‘being academic’, that allow for pedagogies of transitions and transformation. I encouraged all of us in the classroom to draw on a variety of texts - those written and spoken by ourselves and the authors we encountered, as well as through other media such as quilting and photographs – to find our spaces of possibility, and spaces to dream. For:

The more education becomes empty of dreams to fight for, the more the emptiness left by those dreams becomes filled with technique, until the moment comes when education becomes reduced to that. Then education becomes pure training, it becomes pure transfer of content, it is almost like the training of animals, it is a mere exercise in adaptation to the world. (Freire 2004, p. 84, original italics).

The MSc aimed to be so much more than an adaptation to the academic world. Despite the tyranny of learning outcomes, the need for formal assessment and programme specifications and examination boards and so forth, it aimed to open up spaces for transformation and transgression and the possibilities of dreams

2 But I also refer back to Pearson (2008) (see above) noting that Indigenous peoples too have to struggle for rights.
for which it is worth fighting in full recognition of the power of constructions of what is means to be an ‘academic’ programme.

Happily ever after?

The team working on the MSc consistently insisted that we question the ideological and discursive practices that become ‘education;’ the dominant practices of learning and teaching; the politics of struggle and resistance in and through education. The programme set out to develop cultures of learning that deviated from previous iterations of the Education Masters programmes. It sought to find ways not only to recognise the power relations embedded in constructions of knowledge and of learning, but also to find ways for teachers and learners to resist and reclaim them. This may have been easier for teachers than for learners – who, after all, were aiming to achieve a Masters’ in Education – but it may not.

The cost of risk taking can be high, as can the emotions needed to become a part of such a classroom (see Burke 2015). In leading the programme I asked that we all, in our multiple roles as learners and teachers, developed our pedagogic imaginations, recognising that knowledge is constructed and that teachers also learn, and learners also teach, emphasising a focus on learning and teaching to transgress, rather than learning and teaching to conform. In that, and in its engagement with power, social change and the politics of resistances, I very much hope that the programme succeeded in its aim of education as the practice of transformation.

But how do I know? What was the impact of these pedagogic proposals for finding transformative spaces in the teaching and the learning of Education? In truth, I don't know. The programme received positive student evaluations which at times indicated an impact beyond the stated learning outcomes, and external examiner reports were often glowing, recognising the ways in which we aimed to do things differently. I know that the students often went on to develop careers in diverse contexts (3rd sector organisations, journalism, community work …). But there is much I don't know. Although the current focus on learning outcomes suggests otherwise, the outcome of any learning cannot be ticked off at the end of a session, module or programme, at least not if the aim is to encourage risk taking, allowing contradictions to emerge and opening spaces to experiment with differing realities. Any impact – on learners, teachers, institutions and beyond - may be immediate, of course, but it may not. At interview, the majority of students stated that what interested them in applying was the work ‘power’, which they said seemed to set this programme apart from other Education Masters. And perhaps the impact of engaging with Education, power and social change, with politics and resistances, can never be measured.

Would I do things differently, starting again? Perhaps. In trying to imagine new possibilities so I could think about a new coming-towards (Ricoeur 1991: see also above), I'd want to continue to re/imagine my pedagogic practices and think (once again) about learning outcomes and assessment and try to find some spaces of and for transgression. I acknowledge that in many ways the tyranny of learning outcomes are not possible to resist, with an institutional (indeed, sector) demand that are set in advance, are measurable, demonstrably achievable and assessable. But this does not mean a passive acceptance. My pedagogic proposal includes acknowledging these issues not just within the team but with our students, using this to demonstrate and consider power and dominant paradigms of Education. I would be more explicit in asking students not just to consider what outcomes they hope to achieve for themselves, if they choose to think in 'outcomes', but to have opportunities to individually and collectively reflect on their learning development, reconsidering and amending goals, expectations, hopes and dreams throughout a learning process, recognising that learning extends beyond the classroom door as well as beyond the life of the programme. I would ask them above all to remember Freire's warning of the emptiness of an education without dreams for which we should fight (Freire 2004). And in my own fight for dreams of new pedagogic proposals, I'd want to do more to consider the power of description (Clegg 2015) and be much more explicit about those pedagogic proposals from the outset so that they become visible not just within the classroom, but beyond.

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And do those in the Education classroom (as teachers and as learners) live happily ever after? The truth is I don't know: some of us may and some of us may not. But designing programmes that work explicitly with and in transformative pedagogies that transcend disciplinary and institutional boundaries; that recognises the power of the discipline of Education; and which enables us to transgress rather than conform, has to be worth the risk.

References


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