

## **Pedagogical Relations in Higher Education: Power, Identity and Positioning (0065)**

### **Outline**

Research concerned with improving higher education (HE) pedagogies must take into account that HE is a diverse, complex and differentiated system, in which contested ontologies and epistemologies play out across and within different disciplinary fields (Burke and Jackson, 2007; Crozier et al, 2008). Research by Hockings et al (2008) illustrates that the development of 'inclusive classrooms' and pedagogies must be sensitive to the complexities of diversity, as well as draw on a range of student-centred practices. Jary and Shah (2009) argue that consideration of HE pedagogies must acknowledge the different experiences of learning that students draw on in the formal HE environment. These studies emphasise the significance of student identity on pedagogical relations and place issues of diversity and difference as a key concern. However, although there has been a growing body of research focusing on the relation between student identity, diversity and HE pedagogy (Crozier et al, 2008; Hockings et al, 2008; David, 2009), there has been a dearth of research that has specifically addressed the complex relationship between formations of identity and pedagogical relations.

This paper explores how students engage and disengage with HE pedagogies (Hockings et al, 2008) across different disciplinary and subject spaces with particular attention to the impact of social identities on pedagogical relations in HE classrooms. The paper draws on critical and feminist theories of pedagogy to broaden the mainstream focus on teaching and learning methods and styles. Such an approach places concepts of power and positionality at the centre of analysis to consider the ways that the politics of recognition and identity shape complex pedagogical relations between different HE participants. Such a perspective is not only interested in the different and fluid positionings of students and teachers in complex pedagogical relations but also in the epistemologies and disciplinary contexts that profoundly shape and frame pedagogical relations. Critical and feminist pedagogies draw on theories of power to illuminate the complex relations between students and teachers in dynamic social spaces in which different teaching and learning identities, practices and experiences are produced, resisted and performed.

Power is not seen as monolithic within this theoretical framework; power is understood as re/shaping pedagogical relations and experiences in and across changing social, cultural, spatial and (micro)political contexts. Power is not an oppositional force that predictably benefits one group above the other but rather moves fluidly across and between differently positioned subjects.

The teacher is not seen to 'have the power' to give to the students but rather power is generated, exercised and struggled over within lived social spaces such as classrooms and lecture theatres. Furthermore, power is not tied to one single source, but is interconnected to multiple dynamics, including space, place, time, context, identity and inequality. Power shapes pedagogical relations in profound and unexpected ways and this is inextricably tied to questions of knowledge, authority and representation. As such, pedagogy, curriculum and assessment are not separate entities but overlapping and intersecting dimensions of educational practice in which power plays out in different ways, depending on context, relations and identities. Pedagogies are thus profoundly shaped by the different power relations at play, the changing contexts in which teaching and learning takes place and the identities and relations of teachers and students. Simultaneously, pedagogies are constitutive of identity formations through the discursive practices and regimes of truth at play in particular pedagogic relations and spaces. Pedagogies both shape and are shaped by complex identity formations, epistemological frameworks and processes of recognition, as well as notions of 'right' to participate in higher education. Pedagogies do not simply reflect the classed, gendered and racialised identities of teachers and students but pedagogies themselves are classed, gendered and racialised, intimately bound up with historical ways of being and doing within higher education spaces. Pedagogical relations are thus deeply implicated in the processes and politics of recognition and misrecognition.

Key questions the paper will address include:

- How do students and teachers engage with, produce, resist and experience the different pedagogical relations at play?
- How is this different across different disciplinary fields?
- In what ways do the politics of identity and recognition shape and/or constrain pedagogical relations, experiences and practices?

The paper will draw on case-study, qualitative research funded by the Higher Education Academy, including semi-structured interviews with 64 undergraduate students across 5 different disciplinary/subject areas, student forum discussions, focus group discussions with teaching staff, and observations of taught sessions. The analysis will be framed by critical and feminist theoretical perspectives (Freire, 1970, 2004; Luke and Gore, 1992), drawing on the key concepts of pedagogy, power, identity formation, recognition, and positionality. The overarching rationale is a commitment to participatory research methodologies that are underpinned by reflexivity and praxis (Lather, 1991), drawing on methods such as forums and discussion groups to critically engage the research participants beyond conventional data collection.

This paper places such methodological approaches as central in exploring teachers' and students' positions and identities within complex pedagogical relations. The paper will argue that the development of inclusive practices in HE requires moving beyond instrumentalist discourses of 'delivery' and 'styles', which overlook complex pedagogical relations and the unpredictable, unstable and generative nature of power and identity formation.

## References

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