

## **Identity Formation, Pedagogical Practices and Widening Participation**

In the context of rapidly changing higher education policy frameworks, hegemonic discourses of widening participation largely construct utilitarian notions of teaching, learning and participation. Furthermore, with the ongoing intensification of the marketisation of higher education, in which students are increasingly constructed and positioned as HE 'consumers', pedagogies are often shaped by economic orientations and imperatives. Yet, the dynamics, relations and experiences of teaching and learning are intimately tied to the ways that identities are formed, mis/recognised and embodied. The research underpinning this paper will show that discourses about 'what higher education is for' are contested, challenged and produced through pedagogical identities and practices.

The paper draws on critical and feminist theories of pedagogy (Freire, 1970, 2004; Luke and Gore, 1992) to broaden the mainstream focus on teaching and learning methods and styles and to interrogate instrumental and utilitarian approaches to widening participation. The paper places concepts of power and identity formation, or subjectivity, at the centre of analysis to consider the ways that the politics of recognition shape complex pedagogical relations between different HE participants. I am interested in the different and sometimes fluid identities of students and teachers as well as the institutional and disciplinary contexts that 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, excluded and performed.

This paper will show the ways that pedagogies are profoundly shaped by the different power relations at play, the changing contexts and spaces in which teaching and learning takes place and the identities and relations of teachers and students. It will also illuminate the ways that pedagogies are constitutive of identity formations through the discursive practices at play in particular pedagogic spaces and disciplinary contexts. 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. Although concerns to develop inclusive practices in higher education are connected to policies of widening participation, there has been little explicit attention to pedagogical participation in research or policy. This paper will draw attention to the competing discourses of participation in the accounts of higher education teachers and students and the ways these discourses shape pedagogical identities, relations and experiences, as well as competing understandings about what higher education is for.

I draw on the concept of embodied identities to explore the working of power and difference and the ways that these are marked and inscribed on the body, as well as resisted or subverted through 'practices of the self' (Foucault, 1984). This is powerful for thinking through the ways that different bodies are

positioned, mobilized and regulated in relation to complex inequalities across pedagogical spaces and relations. Embodied identity helps to think through the ways different bodies take up and use the pedagogical spaces available, and the ways that pedagogical spaces and practices are constructed and re/shaped in relation to the different bodies that move through and are positioned within them. I also draw on the concept of 'subjectivity' to highlight the relational, discursive and embodied processes of identity formations and to consider the ways people 'are both 'made subject' by/within the social order and how they are agents/subjects within/against it' (Jones 1993, 158). The discursive constitution of pedagogical identities is located within debates and policies that generate particular understandings of 'participation', 'higher education' and 'university student' and this is increasingly tied in with polarising discourses (Williams, 1997) of the worthy or unworthy 'WP student'. Hegemonic discourses of WP constrain and make possible competing understandings of what it means to be a university student and contribute to contestations about what (and who) higher education is for.

The paper draws on case study, qualitative research funded by the Higher Education Academy. The data drawn on includes semi-structured interviews with 64 undergraduate students across 6 different disciplinary/subject areas (Creative Writing, Business/Computing, History/Classics, Philosophy, Dance and Sports Science) and 7 focus group discussions with teaching staff, as well as observations of pedagogical practice and relations. The overarching rationale of the research is a commitment to participatory research methodologies that are underpinned by reflexivity and praxis (Lather, 1991), drawing on methods such as forums, workshops and discussion groups to critically engage the research participants beyond conventional data collection and through dialogic pedagogical spaces.

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