

Changing Pedagogical Spaces in Higher Education

Diversity, inequalities and
misrecognition

**Penny Jane Burke, Gill Crozier
and Lauren Ila Misiaszek**



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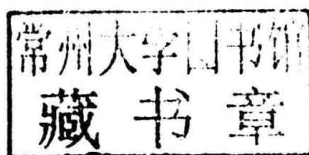
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Changing Pedagogical Spaces in Higher Education

Higher education is in a current state of flux and uncertainty, with profound changes being shaped largely by the imperatives of global neoliberalism. *Changing Pedagogical Spaces in Higher Education* forms a unique addition to the literature and includes significant practical pointers in developing pedagogical strategies, interventions and practices that seek to address the complexities of identity formations, difference, inequality and misrecognition.

Drawing on research studies based across California, England, Italy, Portugal and Spain, this book analyses complex pedagogical re/formations across competing discourses of gender, diversity, equity, global neoliberalism and transformation, and aims:

- to critique and reconceptualise widening participation practices in higher education
- to consider the complex intersections between difference, equity, global neoliberalism and transformation
- to analyse the intersections of identity formations, social inequalities and pedagogical practices
- to contribute to broader widening participation policy agendas
- to develop an analysis of gendered experiences, intersected by race and class, of higher education practices and relations.

Changing Pedagogical Spaces in Higher Education will speak to those concerned with how theory relates to everyday practices and development of teaching in higher education and those who are interested in theorising about pedagogies, identities and inequalities in higher education. Engaging readers in a dialogue of the relationship between theory and practice, this thought-provoking and challenging text will be of particular interest to researchers, academic developers and policy-makers in the field of higher education studies.

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Introduction

Higher education is currently in a state of flux and uncertainty, with profound changes being shaped largely by the imperatives of global neoliberalism. The impact of global neoliberalism intersects with a range of other potent forces, changing the higher-education landscape in contemporary times. This includes the forces of globalisation, neoconservatism, corporatisation, new managerialism, neocolonialism, neopatriarchies and enduring forms of institutional racism. In this contemporary and changing landscape, there is increasing pressure for universities to position themselves as ‘world-class’, and to compete in a highly stratified field driven by discourses of ‘excellence’ and league tables. Within such a frame, quality is often in tension with equity because it is reduced to neo-liberal principles and limited measurable outputs.

Against this highly competitive and hierarchical terrain, a policy focus on widening participation (WP) in higher education (HE) has emerged, emphasising neoliberal notions and outcomes mostly concerned with the types of employability and development of skills and competencies that promote an efficient and competitive workforce in the context of global knowledge economies. Widening participation policy has been dominated by debates about ‘fair access’ and has tended to be preoccupied with ‘raising aspirations’ of those individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds deemed to have potential and ability. Such debates tend to overlook the interconnecting structures, systems, practices, discourses and cultures of higher education that are complicit in the social, economic and cultural reproduction of inequalities and exclusions in and through higher education.

The increasing levels of instrumentalism and utilitarianism shaping discourses of widening participation have been challenged for failing to engage significant and complex questions relating to the right to higher education, not only about who has access, but also about the purposes of participation, and what it means to participate, in higher education in the twenty-first century. The notion of ‘diversity’ has been embraced to some extent. However, this notion fails to problematise the ways that diversity is intertwined with difference, misrecognition and inequality, and raises key challenges for academic practices, identities and frameworks, including higher education pedagogies. Researchers have

pointed out that much of the widening participation policy agenda focuses on access in relation to entry routes into higher education, projecting the problem as ‘out there’. Although we agree that questions of who has the right to higher education are deeply entangled in the inequalities that are produced and reproduced through compulsory schooling systems, we are concerned to bring attention to the ways that higher education pedagogies might also be complicit in the reproduction of inequalities even after entry to higher education has been achieved.

Indeed, we argue that there has been a lack of attention to the challenging question of *participation*, and how it is conceptualised across different pedagogical contexts, including the different and contradictory spaces of universities. This book explores those questions and considers the ways that universities themselves might support the participation of diverse groups, or might be exclusive – in terms of being subtly, but powerfully, exclusionary – of difference through their standardising and homogenising practices. Although there has been increasing attention to questions of ‘inclusion’ in higher education pedagogy, a deeper analysis of pedagogical experiences reveals that ‘inclusion’ itself often acts as a form of symbolic violence, as the individual is expected to fit and conform to the dominant values, identities and practices of pedagogical participation. This tends to value some dispositions and exclude others, an approach that is often framed by particular ontological perspectives that reproduce the ‘subject’ of participation in ways that misrecognises those constructed as ‘Other’.

In the book, we look at these processes of exclusion and marginalisation through the lens of difference in relation to formations of gender, class and race, drawing on our research data to illuminate our analyses and arguments. One of our concerns is the remedial nature of the initiatives designed to widen participation in higher education, which are couched in the problematic language of ‘support’ and ‘need’. Although we acknowledge the importance of identifying ways to support students from marginalised and/or under-represented backgrounds with their university studies, we argue that the way this is imagined and enacted is fraught with taken-for-granted assumptions about who ‘the participant’ in higher education is and should be. The focus tends to be on transforming the individual student subject, which is constructed through discourses of ‘neediness’ and connected assumptions of lack and deficiency, to become a particular kind of (neoliberal) participant that is ‘independent’, ‘resilient’, ‘confident’ and ‘employable’. The problematic nature of each of these concepts for the production of pedagogical identity is left unexplored, while the pedagogical practices historically embedded in social exclusion are also not subjected to examination. The limited and limiting forms of support that are provided to university students tend to be remedial in nature, outside of the programme of study and designed to re/form those students identified as ‘non-standard’ into legitimate student-subjects of hegemonic discourses that frame what a student is and should be. This requires the ‘non-standard student’ to

participate in processes of self-transformation and self-regulation, to become ‘fixed’ and to become a ‘proper’ university student, fitting in to the hegemonic discourses and frameworks (although these themselves are complex, shifting and contradictory). Support also tends to be peripheral to the programme of study with structures and mechanisms designed to change *the student rather than the pedagogical spaces and practices that are (re)productive of multiple forms of inequality*.

The target groups that have been constructed through equity and widening participation policies according to gender, class and race and other intersecting differences such as age, ability, family background, migration/refugee/asylum status, gender identity, and sexual orientation, religion/or lack thereof, inter/nationality and so forth, and which are different in different countries (see for example Burke and Kuo, 2015), are useful but are also problematic as the politics of recognition and misrecognition play out across multiple differences and intersections across, between, within and against policy and official discourses and systems. It is important to raise awareness about the complexity of these issues around targeting and subjective formation in the development of pedagogies for social justice.

We develop the concept of pedagogic participation to consider the relationship between formations of difference and higher education participation in and across contested pedagogical spaces. Drawing on Nancy Fraser (1997, 2003), we consider possibilities for creating ‘parity of participation’ in relation to the social justice struggles of redistribution, recognition and representation. How might higher education pedagogies create spaces for the parity of participation across and between these three inter-related social justice domains and complex formations of inequality and difference but in ways that acknowledge the lived and embodied ‘cultural politics of emotion’ (Ahmed, 2004) that play out in pedagogical spaces?

This book argues that widening participation necessitates the social and cultural transformation of higher education structures, practices and discourses that have been produced over time by those in privileged, authoritative and powerful social positions. Although we need to understand the histories by which certain higher education pedagogies have formed, such as lecturing and teaching, we also need to pay close attention to the ways contemporary political influences are impacting on pedagogical identities, reframing to some extent, depending on the particular university context, what it means to be a university student. The call to diversify student constituencies in higher education requires serious attention to current cultural, pedagogical and educational practices because they are deeply embedded in the very structures, values and perspectives that are reproductive of social inequalities and injustices in the first place. However the reproduction of inequalities becomes more complicated to map as pedagogical spaces are textured, reformed and reshaped by complex intersections of difference. This is multilayered within a globalised HE landscape that contains increasing and contextually varied forms of neoliberalism, corporatisation and shifting political

forces that create increasingly complex forms of inequalities within pedagogical spaces.

Widening participation requires a deep and sustained engagement with questions of difference and the ways that difference is continually reconstructed in and through pedagogical spaces, as well as unequal power relations. Therefore, drawing on the wider body of work on teaching in higher education, the book makes a unique contribution to the development of HE pedagogies, aiming to:

- critique and reconceptualise widening participation practices in higher education through a focus on changing pedagogical spaces;
- consider the complex intersections between difference, equity, global neoliberalism and transformation;
- in relation to this, analyse the intersections of complex formations of difference, subjectivities, inequalities and pedagogical practices;
- contribute to broader widening participation policy agendas, paying close attention to pedagogical issues beyond 'raising aspirations' and 'fair access';
- develop an analysis of gendered experiences, intersected by race and class, of higher education practices and relations, with attention to the complex formations of masculinities and femininities in pedagogical relations and practices.

This book draws on and pulls together two recent qualitative projects on higher education pedagogies. The first was an in-depth participatory research project, 'Formations of Gender and Higher Education Pedagogies' ('GaP'), conducted in England and funded by the UK's Higher Education Academy (Burke et al., 2013). The second was an expansion project of GaP, funded through a Fulbright fellowship (Misiaszek nee Jones) (supported by the Paulo Freire Institute-UK and the Centre for Educational Research in Equalities, Policy and Pedagogy, University of Roehampton), examining pedagogical relations, identities and experiences across the European contexts of Spain, Portugal and Italy as well as the US context of California. Details of the GaP project are included in Appendix One and details of the Fulbright project are included in Appendix Two. A table outlining the student participants' pseudonyms and demographic information is included in Appendix Three.

Drawing on critical and feminist post-structural concepts of pedagogy, both projects set out to challenge hegemonic discourses of teaching and learning, to identify the complex ways that identity formations of gender and other social differences (such as class, ethnicity and race) profoundly shape pedagogical experiences, relations, subjectivities and practices. Both projects explored the ways that inequalities, exclusions and inclusions operate at the micro level of classroom practice, as well as wider macro contexts of global neoliberalism and higher education.