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De-territorialisations for pedagogical co-creation: Challenging traditionalistic pedagogies with students in higher education

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Abstract

The notion of pedagogy tends to be understood as the domain of teachers, this is a reductive way of thinking about pedagogy. Instead, in this paper I explore the heteroglossia of pedagogy through the Deleuzian-Guattarian notion of assemblage. Through this approach, pedagogy is an open debate which needs to involve students to co-create the learning environment in Higher Education (HE). Drawing on data collected with first year undergraduate students and through an action research methodological approach, I will argue that collaborative and progressive pedagogies in HE must go beyond the authority of the teacher and offer students in-class opportunities to negotiate the usual power relationships that characterise traditionalistic pedagogies. Whilst there is a stronger emphasis on engaging students differently in HE, it is important to also reflect on the dynamics that emerge from initiatives that seek to redress the pedagogical imbalances that the traditionalistic classroom perpetuates, such as enforcing a prescriptive curriculum where knowledge is transferable, inert and closely policed to satisfy performative regimes of assessment. I suggest that the notion of assemblages can help us understand the solidified and accepted classroom pedagogies as *territories* which are still normative in education, including HE, therefore, mapping out these territories open up possibilities for *de-territorialisations*.

Practitioner Notes

1. Pedagogy as more than a rational method.
2. Understanding pedagogy as an 'assemblage' allows for a more critical appreciation of its component parts, therefore allowing us to change it.
3. Relations of power in the UK Higher Education sector is nuanced and pedagogy is now closely managed as part of a hierarchy. Creative pedagogies can offer both teachers and students more egalitarian dynamics in in the Higher Education classroom.
4. Using Deleuze and Guattari to frame power through de-territorialisations serves two important purposes. Firstly, it outlines the inequalities within a 'territory', and secondly, it stimulates resistances and contestations to challenge established inequalities.
5. Collaborations and co-creations can create meaningful learning.

Keywords

Pedagogy, assemblages, Deleuze and Guattari, territorialisations, de-territorilisations

Introduction

Traditionally, pedagogy has been understood as the science of teaching and the domain of teachers; within Higher Education (HE) this means that the power lies with the tutor or lecturer. However, in recent years new managerialism in HE has de-skilled tutors and pedagogy has come under the control of managers whose work in most cases bears no correlation to the classroom (Giroux, 2010). Having worked in schools for many years, I encountered perceptions around pedagogy that were very ‘technical’, normally equated to ‘schemes of work’ or *formulae* for teaching. This paper focuses its discussion on problematising these linear and neat ways in which we tend to think about pedagogy through selected theoretical contributions from critical pedagogy, by Freire (1970; 2005) and Giroux (2010) and the Deleuzian-Guattarian notion of assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013). Running through this paper is the argument that the notion of pedagogy has been reduced to a rationalised and often hierarchical process where the teacher as an expert ‘teaches’ students through an ‘idealised method’ which very often lacks collaboration. In this paper, I present a pedagogical intervention for sparking collaborations in the HE classroom. The research was conducted in the UK HE context and involved work with first year undergraduate students on a Bachelor (BA) Education course. My purpose of focusing on assemblages and critical pedagogy seeks to harness them to critique societal inequalities and systems of power, but also as a set of theoretical tools to make sense of the empirical data to be presented later in this article. I do not suggest that thinking through critical pedagogies, or through assemblage theory, is a *panacea* for problems of access, social justice and attainment in HE. However, I do consider that a re-theorisation through Deleuze and Guattari can help generate a more nuanced understanding of how pedagogical approaches contextualise ‘meaningful learning’ as a more emergent and fluid process. These understandings can help students take more critical ownership of their learning, whilst helping educators in HE recast some of their pedagogical practices. Also, these reconceptualisations of pedagogy can be an invitation to Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to move away from micromanagement and support staff and students to develop more flexible ways towards teaching, learning and assessment.

Literature review: De-territorialising higher education – whose power?

There is an expectation that pedagogy is primarily a teacher’s concern, yet, this perception overlooks the multiple institutional pressures and the role students can play in pedagogical experiments. To continue to disrupt the narrow perceptions on pedagogy and step away from normative binary oppositions of students as power-less and teachers as power-full, this section discusses some of the nuances changing the position of teachers in HE under a neoliberal agenda. Similarly, it further problematises the ways in which pedagogy is understood as linear and predictable. The literature reviewed unravels the pressurising context surrounding students, teachers and pedagogies in HE, turning the spotlight on the elusiveness of power in the HE classroom. Whilst power struggles are presented as more intricate than they appear, the section also develops some of the potentialities of thinking about power through Deleuze and Guattari (2013) and revisiting the rich understandings of pedagogy through the work of Paulo Freire (1970; 2005).

This paper employs selected Deleuzian-Guattarian (2013) notions to theorise the HE classroom as a territory with power imbalances, and where institutional expectations are constantly remade by the actions and agency of lecturers and students. The notion of assemblage is used to make sense of pedagogy as a composition of numerous parts and connections working together. Assemblages have been conceived by Deleuze and Guattari (2013) as transformative happenings “of actions and passions ... intermingling and reacting to one another enabling difference and change through acts

of de-territorialisations” (pp. 102-103). Thinking about classroom pedagogies necessitates thinking about power and its movement, not just its rigidity. For Deleuze and Guattari discussing assemblages is incomplete without the element of power as explained through territorialisations and de-territorialisations. Similarly, I propose in this paper that any attempt to create inclusive or collaborative pedagogies requires us to make sense of pedagogy as an assemblage. Trying to define the notion of assemblage implies a recognition of power scapes; an “assemblage has both territorial sides, or territorialised sides, which stabilize it, and cutting edges of deterritorialization which carry it away” (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 103). The territory becomes the accepted cultures and set of practices that exert power over everything, including people; whilst the de-territorialisations are the subversions and disruptions to the territory and its accepted relations. So, I use the logic of assemblages and Freirean critical pedagogy to both, describe the dominance of traditional pedagogies in HE, and also co-create collaborative classroom pedagogies which can de-territorialise traditionalistic pedagogies, uncovering ways to wrestle power back into the HE classroom through more creative pedagogical assemblages.

To this effect, *whose knowledge is valid? Who has the power to create a curriculum, the power to decide assessment strategies and pedagogical approaches?* The immediate answer to these questions might point to the lecturer. Yet, there are many other institutional complexities intermingled in the teacher-student relationship, such as managerialism in HE with strong roots in neoliberalism (Klikauer, 2015). The HE sector has changed since the 1980s when management emerged as the “optimal form of organisational governance” in public sector institutions including HEIs (Shepherd, 2018, p. 1672). These crevasses, which point to how power is more than just hierarchical, make Deleuze and Guattari (2013) particularly useful for questioning the way in which power is perceived both as contained and as a duality; instead, they conceptualise power as nascent and flowing through the assemblage. In this way we can think beyond the traditional oppositional nature surrounding the teacher-student relationship. As the subsequent sections will show, some of the resulting cultures from managerialism pervade classroom pedagogies, pacifying students through students as consumers discourses, and de-skilling teachers through micromanagement of curricula and assessment strategies (Deem, 2011).

Moreover, through assemblage theory the notion of pedagogy can be explained and analysed more meaningfully by exploring the associations among students’ experiences of schooling, the dominant teaching trends in HE, and the emerging ways in which we pursue student engagement and constructive learning in HE. The concept of assemblage “provides a useful way of describing how things combine together in complex configurations that seem momentarily stable” (Taylor and Harris-Evans, 2018, p. 8). To explain further how assemblage theory uncovers a more multifaceted interpretation of pedagogy, I want to introduce Deleuze and Guattari’s (2013) argument of the ‘feudal assemblage’, as it helps to re-pose questions on how we relate to our educational environment. Deleuze and Guattari (2013) use the example of the feudal assemblage to help us think about the versatility of associations:

We would have to consider the interminglings of bodies defining feudalism: the body of the earth and the social body; the body of the overlord, vassal and serf; the body of the knight and the horse and their new relation to the stirrup; the weapons and tools assuring a symbiosis of bodies a whole mechanic assemblage (p. 103).

Through this example, Deleuze and Guattari explain feudalism as the associations among lands and peasants, lords, iron, horses, weapons, and the new powers to subjugate and rule the land. In this case, we would need to consider the longer distances that (some) humans were allowed to travel on

horseback and by using stirrups; the new military powers that were created by humans' use of iron to wield armours, weapons and swords, and the new military strategies of war employed as a result. This paper offers new associations for the classroom, explained further in the findings section, aimed at contesting the traditional ways in which learning in HE happens. Deleuze and Guattari (2013) suggest assemblages can offer a way to place some analytical attention on the relationships and transformations that occur if we seek to alter an established territory, such as the classroom. Small changes can dramatically effect what arises as a whole, making classroom interactions and the development of content more equitable and collaborative. Assemblages are understood as complex territories, imbued with power, which are made up of moving and more stable elements and which normally lead to changes in how something is perceived (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013).

Importantly, the notion of assemblages can be useful for disrupting the hierarchy in knowledge transmission and dissemination in HE. Some of these traditional power imbalances arise from the narrow assumptions that suggest teachers must know everything and are in charge of the transmission of knowledge, thereby constructing the student as a passive receiver. These perceptions have been further complicated by the importance given to league tables in HE and the rise of 'new managerialism' in universities, which suggests that HEIs as businesses dependent on government funds must be "required to justify the expenditure of public funds and demonstrate value for money" (Deem, 2011, p. 48). The resulting environment in HE is a 'marketised' one, where there is an overt management of not just sites, finances and resources, but also of "staff and student cultures, curricula, research and classroom pedagogies" (Shepherd, 2018, p. 1670). Importantly, this paper also refers to how these power struggles in the HE environment, when underpinned by critical pedagogy, can generate de-territorialisations opening up possibilities, potential, allowing students and teachers to experiment, contest top-down management of teaching and learning; pushing boundaries in the classroom more collaboratively.

Another theoretical framework which helps rethink current pedagogical practices emerges from the work by Paulo Freire (1970). The precepts of critical pedagogy offer another/additional systematic attempt to think through society's inequalities and capitalism as starting points for critique, and that it is through critical thinking that social change should begin. At the centre of Freire's pedagogy is the notion of 'humanisation.' Freire (2005) contends that societies have deep inequalities which are dehumanising to the individual, "while humanization and dehumanization are real alternatives, only the first is the people's vocation" (p. 43). Freire argues that as we are systematically dehumanised and oppressed in society; the role of education should be to rehumanise us all. Society's inequalities are perpetuated because oppression leaves us oblivious to the inequalities we experience and therefore reduces our action against dehumanisation and oppression. Freire's (2005) pedagogy explores dehumanisation as "not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, as it is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human" (p. 44). Such notions from Freire's pedagogy offer a reimagining of education and its purposes, and this too was also an important feature in how Freire wanted to disrupt the understanding of 'the teacher.'

On the role of teachers, Freire (1970) wanted to prevent their de-humanisation in a system where he argued knowledge is uncritically passed down to students. Instead, Freire wanted to re-shape the teacher-student relationship from one defined by the oppression of institutions, to one where there is an egalitarianism marked by collaboration and partnership. His arguments influenced critical pedagogue bell hooks (1994), who in her work also critiqued the "approach to learning that is rooted in the notion that all students need to do is consume information fed to them by a professor and be able to memorize it and store it" (p. 14). Both Freire and hooks are concerned that the only option available to educators is to become oppressors once they become teachers working in systems of

education. Consequently, in this paper I also propose that collaborative pedagogies are significantly liberating, not just for students, but also for teachers, who themselves are working in an environment where they are surveyed, micromanaged and controlled.

By redefining the nature of pedagogy from just a method to a (re)humanising force we can re-imagine the ways in which teaching and learning takes place in HE. Traditionally, classroom dynamics have been constructed as the responsibility of the teacher, but as discussed in this section, teachers are increasingly scrutinised through the proliferation of managerialism and reductive metrics. Yet, Freire's proposition points to a more redistributed and collaborative approach; pedagogy as synergy. It is at this point where assemblage theory facilitates reinterpretations of how pedagogy has been conceived. This synergism that Freire refers to can also be captured through how the notion of assemblage diffuses the focus of pedagogy as the responsibility of one or another, instead, it highlights the collectivity, passages, transformations, planes of continuity that are not fixed on one specific starting or ending point. Therefore, discussing students' experiences and mine, using the logic of assemblages enables me as a researcher and as a pedagogue to find connections and ruptures that are marked by reflexivities which transpose traditional classroom dynamics. Like other research using assemblages (Feely, 2019; Taylor and Hughes, 2016; Ringrose and Renold, 2014; Renold and Invinson, 2014; Taylor, 2013; Ringrose, 2011), my focus is to couple assemblage theory with critical pedagogy to create a collaborative and liberatory environment.

Fieldwork and methodology

This study was conducted with undergraduate students starting their degrees in education. There were twenty-two students registered on the course but the number of students participating was twenty since a couple of students never started the course. The study took place in the UK HE context over twenty-four weeks. This paper has employed action research as its main method. Action research has been described as a very "liberating form of professional enquiry because it means that practitioners themselves investigate their practices as they find ways to live more fully in the direction of their educational values" (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011, p. 8). Action research is a very popular method in education because the world of teaching, and formal education in general, are always under scrutiny, and therefore whilst managers employ metrics and targets, teachers and practitioners seek to establish improvement through reflective practices. I was drawn to this method since it allowed me to go through a cycle of self-recognition and reflection which is at the centre of how action research works as a method. This cycle has been discussed in various research methods literature (Cohen et al., 2017; Coe et al., 2017) but my approach to this method aligns itself more closely to how Pickard (2013) discusses this cycle as starting with identifying problems, planning actions, implementing actions, followed by a process of evaluation and reflection.

Against the backdrop of the numerous calls in academic literature to reform pedagogies and student engagement in HE (McIntosh and Warren, 2013; Pokorny and Warren, 2016; Lea, 2015; Abegglen et al., 2020), identifying a problem was not difficult. Namely, I wanted to create a more collegiate environment where students' experiences and collaboration was at the centre of the syllabus. While planning and thinking through possible interventions I was very conscious of the need to recognise students for the experiences they bring and the people they are, rather than turning the intervention into another attempt to just bring academic skills up to an expected level. Whilst it is important for students to understand and meet the expectations of studying in HE, it is perhaps equally important for educators and staff in HE to allow for the individuality of students and the uniqueness of their experience to guide classroom pedagogies where the subject allows it. Since the context of the module was a first-year undergraduate unit exploring debates in education I wanted students to draw

on some of their current and previous experiences to decolonise the curriculum and provide multiple angles to the topics explored as part of the module. Yet, the challenge remained, how do we as educators encourage critical reflection in students without leading them to an expected outcome? And, how can we evoke in students collaborations and co-creations that challenge the *status quo* in the HE classroom? This paper deals with some of these research questions.

Moreover, as an educator and researcher I understood the bias and positionality that I bring to the research context and this influenced my action-planning. This is an important part of action research and another one of the reasons why I followed this method as “in action research the researcher is already inside the context and has considerable tacit knowledge of the situation. Far from having a negative impact on the research, this is what gives the investigation credibility in terms of problem solving and solution testing” (Pickard, 2013, p. 162). Therefore, my action planning was underpinned by reflection and self-criticism, reflecting carefully on the suggested actions not becoming directives, but rather provocative and inviting questions and activities, all aimed at stirring students’ interest in self-discovery. These processes are closely linked to conducting action research and “it is only through rigorously and consciously questioning our own beliefs, biases and convictions that we can reconsider those preconceptions and transform practice” (Pickard, 2013, p. 162). However, I did not want to do this alone but rather guided by my students’ learning.

Consequently, my actions were not to develop a neatly structured or scaffolded approach to classroom delivery as I could run the risk of silencing the students’ voices. Instead, my approach was based on disrupting the normality of the HE classroom through de-territorialisations of co-creation. In this paper I discuss the introduction of two pedagogical approaches, the *(Un)knowing Runway* and *Knitting Knots*, both of which pave the way for students’ collaboration and co-creations. The findings section will explain these dynamics in more detail and explore how authority and knowledge can be recast in the HE classroom.

Through these methodological reflections I concluded that my actions would be, firstly, to evaluate student questionnaires to capture the dominant territories and student imaginaries around HE learning. Secondly, I wanted to engage students in collaborative criticality and not just knowledge exchange. Thirdly, by stipulating this as an action I also had to re-think what would be the most suitable environment for this to happen. As a result, I decided to run workshops instead of formal lectures, content would be secondary and interwoven with a key critical reflections summary at the end of each session. Thirdly, the key critical reflections summary would be a collection of thoughts which students themselves would write on sticky notes during the session, and after group discussions.

To understand how students felt in the classroom I collected some initial data at the beginning of the module during the second week of teaching. An anonymous evaluation sheet was used to gather information on fifteen students’ initial ideas and expectations on what sessions would/should be like, these were the fifteen students who attended on that session. Students responded well to taking part in this evaluation exercise and all forms delivered on the day were returned at the end of the session. Equally, a review form was given to students again towards the end of the module, in their twenty-fourth week of teaching. Students’ responses are presented and analysed in the next section.

Findings

De-Territorialisations of co-creation: Authority and knowledge

In this section I present some of the territories of power assembling the lecturer as knowledgeable and students as lacking in knowledge. Some of the initial findings pointed to how students understand the position of the lecturer as both authoritative and knowledgeable. In turn, students also refer to their learner identities passively, as evidenced in some of their responses: “I prefer to wait for the lecturer to tell me what’s important”; “my interest drives me but I need to wait to be told what we are doing” and “hopefully I can just sit and listen, I don’t feel I need to do much more at this point.” In response to these findings, I outline two approaches which became very liberating for students and also for me as an educator, they helped challenge the traditional approach to lectures, whereby the voice of the lecturer dominates classroom talk. The approaches are underpinned by the notion of “de-territorialisation” which “change in nature” the abstract and normative lines that make up a territory (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013, p. 9). In this way the classroom interventions, the *(Un)Knowing Runway* and *Knitting Knots*, are discussed as changing the established territory of the contextualised HE classroom, whereby, for example, the lecturer stands at the front and students sit, the lecturer talks and students listen, or where knowledge is sourced from content presented by the lecturer and not as generated collaboratively. The *(Un)Knowing Runway* and *Knitting Knots*, flipped the traditional classroom interactions, enabling a collaborative classroom vernacular, spearheaded by student interactions, student and lecturer movement across the classroom space, and very importantly, knowledge production as budding and pulsating, as happening and not as transmissible.

There are many territorialisations of power underpinning formal education, however, there were two which were pervasive in the data: territorialisations of authority and knowledge. There was an overwhelming consensus in initial questionnaires that students expected lecturers to “lead”, to “talk in lectures”, “to be very knowledgeable” and to “show expertise in lectures”; against this, students also thought of themselves as lacking in knowledge. When prompted to generate ideas about how their learning could contribute to the module, some responses included: “maybe at the end when I know more”; “I can’t tell my tutor what to do” and a very polite “no, thank you.” Students seemed uncomfortable with the idea that they had knowledge which could have some place in the module and that their input could modify the curriculum and enrich classroom dynamics. The way in which education, and more specifically schooling happens, has helped to make it increasingly difficult to face the dynamics of power in an unromantic way. In this way the teacher and the student have traditionally been saddled with the burden of, for the former, needing to show knowledge, or risk being perceived as unskilled, lacking in subject knowledge or expertise, and for the latter, an unquestionable abiding to authority which confuses teaching with learning (Illich, 1995). An important pedagogical question arose early on; if students have been taught this message consistently through their schooling, how can HE education disrupt some of the territories of power that turn knowledge in the classroom into a hierarchy?

Assemblage thinking played an important role in responding pedagogically to the issues identified throughout the study. As stated earlier, this paper proposes that pedagogy can be perceived as an assemblage; this proposition helps identify the component parts or ‘singularities’ of a dynamic. For instance, how the classroom is arranged socially, culturally and spatially with students sitting individually and only speaking at designated times, whilst still focusing on the overall relationality, such as how changing one component can affect what happens subsequently (Taylor, 2020, p. 255). Having mapped out some of the territorial assemblage of my HE classroom as thrusting the position

of the lecturer as knowledgeable and authoritative; I wanted to challenge this precept of power through student-lecturer de-territorialisations of co-creation.

The (un)knowing runway

In what follows I discuss how the *(Un)knowing Runway* opened up possibilities for a more distributed learning experience, carefully assembled through student talk and interactions challenging traditionalistic pedagogies. Informed by the data and the hierarchical conceptualisations of knowledge emerging from students' comments, the *(Un)knowing Runway* emerged as an effort to capture students' version of what it was we should learn, what they thought they already knew, but most importantly, what they felt was unknown and how they came to know anything. Students were asked to prepare some of their thoughts during seminar group discussions and make notes for the following session titled *Critically Exploring the Meaning and Purposes of Education*. I brought a spool of A3 paper which was rolled out in the middle of the classroom from the back of the room to the front of the room. I also brought various, different coloured pens for students to jot down their key ideas, notes and reflections. Students were very enthusiastic when it came to populating the paper with their thoughts; some students filled the paper with their thoughts as pairs, others did it individually and others were standing with their groups giving their ideas to peers writing on behalf of the group. Working with the paper in this way allowed students to group themselves organically, without instruction from the lecturer and the writing of key ideas came in the form of questions, short sentences, and even drawn emojis to show likes and dislikes of points. The *(Un)knowing Runway* sparked student interactions and discussions which became an organic process "whereby grey areas can be opened up for expression and discussion, where ideas take off and new connections are made" (Renold and Marston, 2018, p. 4).

Led by critical pedagogy this approach allowed for student-lecturer co-creations of classroom content, decentring the position of the lecturer as transferring knowledge. Instead, it shows how knowledge can emerge "only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other" (Freire, 2005, p. 72). The *(Un)knowing Runway* is a classroom pedagogical (art)efact, I place brackets around the word 'art' to signify how the method has been used as an artistic methodology because of its potential to engage participants in research more spontaneously and artistically (Renold, 2017). Creating knowledge collaboratively requires a recognition of how knowledge could be considered to be an assemblage involving experiences, cultural, historical and social discourses, and facts. These views on knowledge sit tightly within a critical pedagogical approach to knowledge production. For instance, Freire's critical pedagogy frees knowledge from its inevitable reproduction, rather, it involves an understanding of how human life is shaped, but not determined, by socio-economic conditions. Similarly, Giroux (2010) argues that knowledge within critical pedagogy turns the spotlight on the "crucial necessity of not only reading the world critically but also intervening in the larger social order as part of the responsibility of an informed citizenry" (p. 716).

The collaborations among students and the spontaneity with which they poured their thoughts onto the paper was so distant from the comments made by the same students in the initial student questionnaires. Their responses in the final student questionnaires at the end of the module featured many comments on the *(Un)knowing Runway* as "the best part of the module"; "awesome activity and I felt like I had lots to say", with some students saying "as a shy person I couldn't talk in class but I felt my words were heard through the paper"; "I liked this paper runway activity because of lots of people who normally stay quiet, talked and took part" and "it made such a difference to make our thoughts visible and sort of public." These statements point to what has been referred to by

Walter and Earl (2017, p. 150) as “public pedagogy” where there are more free associations among members forming a “collective pedagogy of demonstration”, not just discussing that things should be done differently but actually doing things differently.

The co-creations produced by students offered a re-balancing of power in the classroom; de-territorialising the systemic expectations of teachers as the authoritative knowing subjects who lead classroom talk and learning. In turn, students accepted passivity in the HE classroom was also challenged, with students even changing the linearity of the paper (back of the room to the front of the room) as set up by the lecturer. In this way the spatial politics of the classroom were also changed through the *(Un)Knowing Runway*, which after three sessions grew into an expansive root-like shape because of all the additions attached by students, defying the initial instruction of the lecturer, the habitual pecking order of the classroom, such as lecturers teaching from the front of the class to a quiet seated audience (Taylor, 2019). Both traditionalistic forms of authority and knowledge creation associated with HE teaching were subverted through this form of collaboration. What is more, this de-territorialisation of co-creation served to expand the syllabus of the module and enrich the pedagogical dynamics characterising the HE classroom.

Knitting knots

Underpinned by the notion of assemblages, I wanted to elicit students’ educational biographies with a focus on relationalities. The educational experiences of students were an integral part of the module syllabus, and a way to engage students’ deeper critical reflections of how schooling could be an integral part of how we understand the notion of education, but not necessarily all that defines it. In past years, students had produced a written account of their educational biographies and they were used for seminar discussions. However, the text, whilst read as a group and discussed, still remained individual accounts and students struggled to think of their educational experiences as collective. To this effect, I devised an approach which I called *Knitting Knots*, inspired by Deleuze and Guattari (2013), who suggest, assemblages “are in constant variation” and movement and “the circumstances must be taken into account ... a performative statement is nothing outside of the circumstances that make it performative” (p. 95). Students were asked to think about their educational biographies and produce short accounts focusing on a significant ‘event’ in their educational lives. The focus on ‘event’ is a Deleuzian attempt to avoid a historical or chronological account which is what students had produced in past years for this task. Following a Deleuzian-Guattarian framework to shift tutor-led classroom dynamics meant to seek the “associationism” that characterises life (Deleuze, 2005, p. 9), whilst also inviting students to shift the traditional educational assemblage of the tutor dominating classroom talk and interaction.

Therefore, *Knitting Knots* was designed to help students explore the connectivities and meshed nature of their educational biographies; encouraging students to weave an all-embracing narrative that accounted for similarities and collectivities. Knitting as a pedagogical asset has been used in feminist scholarship to elicit a different type of dynamic in a group, and to challenge traditional approaches to gathering data, understanding knowledge production and democratising classroom talk about sensitive issues (Harrison and Ogden, 2020; Literat and Markus 2019; Niccolini et al., 2018). Importantly, this would then allow students to co-create a pervasive version of how education impacts on all and not just focus on one salient feature, normally determined by the educator.

Some of the initial findings pointed to how students understand the territory of HE study and learning as a solitary activity. The position of the student was always referred to as isolated and strongly led by the position of the lecturer. Within this understanding it is very difficult to delve into pedagogies of collaboration and co-creation. When prompted to comment on how they think

learning happens, the findings pointed to how students regarded themselves as needing to “find a quiet place to study”, “deal with questions themselves”, or “learn from lectures and lecturers” and “avoid too many distractions like too much socialising in class.” The notion of learning emerging from the findings suggested a necessary isolation and seclusion which would facilitate learning, similarly, the lecturer emerged as all-knowing in the students’ own notion of learning. Other ideas such as learning from peers or other people did not have a place in how learning was understood at this stage. Many of these perceptions can be challenged and opened up through creative pedagogies, thus, *Knitting Knots* moved students along de-territorialisations of knowledge and authority in the classroom, by navigating their educational experiences more collaboratively and organically.

Students were asked to prepare their educational biographies for the next session and that they should make efforts to present them without notes or written prompts. At the start of the following session students found the classroom reorganised with seats arranged in an oval shape, no desks in front of chairs to encourage more talk and less writing, and yarns of colourful wool placed in the middle of the classroom. Students were asked to take their seats as they would normally do for each session and to start sharing their educational biographies with others, unraveling the wools of yarn as they spoke and passing the threads to others, depending on whose turn it was next and also on similarities.

In order to encourage students to think broadly about this task, I gave myself as an example and shared a very significant aspect of my own educational biography. This is referred to by hooks (1994) as “self-actualization” (p. 15), the need to be able to ‘let students in’ as educators, instead of asking students questions, without being able to open up about their experiences. Working with yarns of wool in this way eased students into discussions that knitted points and couplings of various critical discussions on the politics of schooling. For instance, being made to feel “like a problem just because you spoke your mind”, or “feeling powerless when you were just labelled and teachers give up on you.” Yet, students also initiated different threads of debate emerging from others’ comments, such as, debates around being a university dropout, which they were all surprised to find out I was, having dropped out of my first degree in Journalism. Talking to my students about dropping out, prompted others to tell their own stories of dropping out, and how they did not want to “bring this up because it is a failure.” This in turn led to another very critical discussion of how schooling deals with failure and how our fear of failure is learnt in schools. For Freire (2005), pedagogy is not a method or an *a priori* technique to be imposed on all students but a political and moral practice that provides the knowledge, skills, and social relations that enable students to explore the possibilities of what it means to be critical citizens while expanding and deepening their participation in the promise of a substantive democracy. The many jointures and connections were tangibly actualised through all the many colourful threads that students held in their hands, interlocking around their fingers and wrists, including mine. The resulting nexus made of wool embodied the many critical reflections and co-creations interweaving learning; learning as a notion was no longer a singular happening where students need to feel separated and atomised.

Conclusions

Within the context of a UK HE module for first year education studies undergraduates, this paper has utilised assemblage theory to explore the university classroom as a complex territory where traditionalistic pedagogies continue to impede co-creations and teacher-student collaborations. The data were collected through fieldnotes and student questionnaires which proved very useful as a tool for collecting student feedback when implementing new teaching and learning pedagogies. The way the questionnaires were conducted – at the beginning and towards the end of the module – allowed

for an evaluation of students' perceptions on various aspects of teaching and learning before and after the two pedagogical ventures, the *(Un)knowing Runway* and *Knitting Knots*.

The HE classroom emerged as a territory where knowledge and authority continue to be scaffolded hierarchically, with too much dependence on constructions of lecturers as 'all-knowing' and 'responsible for all the learning that happens.' By contrast, this paper has explored how teaching and learning in HE have come under a wave of managerialism which subjects lecturers and students to metric rationalities and reductive understandings of study at university as a product. Consequently, students were reported as feeling a sense of strangeness and displacement in their own learning because the educational system reproduces the notion that learning is an individual process where knowledge is transferable. There was a clear under appreciation of collective and collaborative pedagogies that galvanise students into challenging perceptions of learning as a necessarily solitary and individualised process. Against this backdrop critical pedagogy maxims served as additional analytic junctures in discussing not just whether we should, but how we could make higher education classrooms more creative, collaborative and liberatory spaces.

An important theoretical angle emerging from this paper is the idea of de-territorialisations of co-creation, emerging from assemblage theory, the two de-territorialisations explored in this paper helped students and the lecturer to make sense of the very 'stubborn' and governing power traces in the HE classroom. Two presiding power imbalances within the territory of the classroom, as identified through the analysis of student questionnaires, were the nature of knowledge as given by the lecturer, and authority as only belonging to the lecturer. These precepts were then challenged or de-territorialised through the dynamics and co-creations made possible by the introduction of the *(Un)knowing Runway* and *Knitting Knots*. These undertakings created a more distributed sense of ownership over teaching and learning where the voices of students ushered in significant learning that went beyond the set module syllabus.

Through the pedagogical explorations in this paper, it is possible to consider ways in which the HE classroom could be de-territorialised to benefit students and widen student-teacher collaborations. It is important to reflect further on how the notion of de-territorialisations of co-creation could be used as an underlying approach to spark meaningful change in how pedagogies are perceived in higher education. However, far from this falling on the shoulders of individual educators, this should be a university wide discussion where different approaches are considered to allow for a diversity of approaches to emerge, as this should not become just another standardising practice.

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