Rethinking Pedagogical Practices: Alternative Approaches to Feminist Education

Researcher: Robyn Ausmeier

Final MA Thesis

Main Supervisor: Christine Quinan

Support Supervisor: Emilia María Durán Almarza

Utrecht University and the University of Oviedo

GEMMA Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies

June 2019

GEMMA Consortium Page

Rethinking Pedagogical Practices:
Alternative Approaches to Feminist Education

Researcher: Robyn Ausmeier

Main Supervisor: Christine Quinan

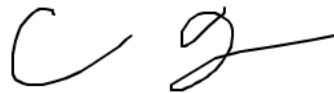
Support Supervisor: Emilia María Durán Almarza

Utrecht University and the University of Oviedo

GEMMA Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies

June 2019

Approval signed by main supervisor:



ALMA MATER STUDIORUM
UNIVERSITÀ DI BOLOGNA

Utrecht University

ugr Universidad de Granada

Universidad de Oviedo
Universidá d'Uviéu
University of Oviedo

UNIVERSITY of York

Abstract

This thesis explores alternative approaches to higher education, questioning current pedagogical practices and envisioning future possibilities. More specifically, the research focuses on creative and collaborative methods of teaching and learning, challenging the constructed divisions between producers and receivers of knowledge. Drawing on interviews I conducted with students and lecturers in the GEMMA Master's Degree programme, I analyse some of the obstacles to transforming the university – including institutional pressures and the growing influence of neoliberalism – and I examine prospective areas for change. The research also centres decolonial approaches, highlighting the need to disrupt and deconstruct conventional learning structures and the potential to imagine new forms of engagement. Throughout the thesis, I foreground the importance of collective work, discussing co-creational teaching strategies and emphasising shared accountability for what happens in the classroom space. Additionally, I question the different spaces where learning takes place, and I underline the role of friendship and interpersonal connections in educational processes. Focusing on Gender Studies classes, this work also provides a self-reflexive analysis of feminist education, encouraging more critical interrogation of the ways in which we allow and perpetuate unequal power relations. Looking forward, I invite further discussion and call for us to continue questioning, to think beyond the current confines and to collectively work toward alternative futures for higher education.

Keywords: feminist pedagogy, classroom space, decolonial, collaborative learning

Acknowledgements

First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor, Christine, for the ongoing feedback and support. Thank you for your detailed edits, insightful comments and reassuring presence. You have been a huge help during the writing process, and I have learnt so much from you over the past two years. Your hard work does not go unnoticed and is much appreciated.

Thank you also to my second supervisor, Liamar, for your helpful advice and feedback, and to my other teachers, not only in the GEMMA programme, but also every teacher before this (even though you are unlikely to read this). Doing research on teaching practices has made me more aware of the immense task and numerous obstacles faced by teachers. I really appreciate the important and transformative work you do, in the face of constant pressure. Thank you.

A big thank you to my research participants, who willingly gave up their time to talk with me and provided so many valuable insights. This thesis would not have been possible without your input. I began this research with a few ideas, but it is through the interview conversations and everyday interactions that this work has taken form.

To my classmates in the GEMMA programme, who have been with me every step of the way. Thank you for the many hours of discussion (inside and outside of the classroom), for both procrastinating with me and motivating me to stop procrastinating, for all the coffee dates and lunch breaks, and for always pushing me to think more critically and creatively. It has been such an enriching experience meeting and learning from all of you.

To my parents, who inspired my love for learning. Thank you for encouraging me to always remain curious and to never stop questioning. I am so grateful for your constant support and understanding, even while we are countries and continents apart.
To my mom, a teacher and lifelong learner, our various chats about education have informed many of the ideas in this thesis. You are a constant inspiration to me.
To my dad, the most positive and cheerful person I know. Thank you for teaching me to never lose hope and to always keep going.

Writing this acknowledgement section has enabled me to think about the countless people who have helped me along the way. This also makes me realise that I do not thank these people enough. So thank you for what I have already mentioned and so much more.

Contents

Introduction ... 1

0.1) The Research Process ... 3
0.2) What is GEMMA? What is Gender Studies? ... 6
0.3) Research Significance ... 8

Chapter 1. Possibilities, Limitations and Potential Futures ... 11

1.1) A Critical and Engaged Pedagogy ... 12
1.2) Critiquing Neoliberalism ... 16
1.3) Resistance from Within ... 17
1.4) Decolonising the Classroom ... 19
1.5) Rethinking Space and Place ... 23

Chapter 2. Activating Uncomfortable Emotions ... 29

2.1) A Pedagogy of Discomfort ... 32
2.2) Embracing Ambiguity ... 37
2.3) Unproductive Guilt ... 39
2.4) Questioning Safe Spaces ... 40

Chapter 3. Creative Pedagogies: Forging Alternative Spaces ... 47

3.1) Spaces of Learning ... 48
3.2) Inspiring Excitement in the Classroom ... 53
3.3) Strategies for Collaborative Education ... 56
3.4) Obstacles to Alternative Pedagogies ... 61

Chapter 4. Horizon Thinking: What Next? ... 66

4.1) What Brings Us Hope ... 67
4.2) Moving Forward: Changes and Recommendations ... 72
4.3) Constructing Something New ... 76

Final Conclusions ... 80

Bibliography ... 84

Introduction

Over the course of my education, from primary school to high school to university, I have encountered various classroom formations and different approaches to teaching. These have each influenced my ways of thinking, of seeing the world around me and of relating to knowledge production. Despite the different settings and times, there have been several similarities in the structures and functioning of these learning spaces. For example, there is the common format where one teacher stands in the front of the class, facing rows of tables and chairs for the seated students. The uncritical acceptance of this classroom structure prompts the question of why learning environments are positioned in this way, and whether it is possible or preferable to rethink our conceptions of the classroom space.

Reflecting on my own experiences, as well as the experiences of those around me, I have come to question conventional class constructions and engagements, realising that there are multiple ways to do education, and that there is a need to think beyond what we know or have been told about teaching. In this research, I therefore interrogate some of the current approaches to feminist pedagogy, specifically in Gender Studies classrooms, placing the focus on not only past and present structures, but also on the future potential and alternative possibilities.

This research topic emerged from conversations I have had over the past two years with other students in the GEMMA Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies, where we spoke about different teaching strategies, what worked and what did not, and how this differed from our previous universities and past educational experiences.[1] Through these interactions, I found that each person had different and unique ideas for transforming pedagogical practices. This led me to think about ways of bringing together individual insights to envision new educational structures which would be beneficial to the collective group rather than a select few. Building on this, I searched for existing work on alternative pedagogies, and I discovered a wide range of literature which offered critiques, questions and suggestions for changing approaches to higher education (Friere 1970; hooks 1994; Boler 1999; Mbembe 2016; Parker, Smith and Dennison 2017; Vergès 2019). My research therefore aims to assemble different ideas, to open and renew

[1] See page 6 for further information about the GEMMA programme.

the discussion and to encourage a further examination of the way university classrooms are shaped and function.

When I speak about classroom space in this thesis, I refer to both the physical classroom environment, which includes the structuring of the space and the way in which the tables, chairs and learning materials are set up, as well as the more abstract space in terms of classroom dynamics and interpersonal exchanges. I also emphasise the different power relations which influence structural and social arrangements of the classroom, recognising the ongoing colonial legacies which have informed many of our classroom interactions. More specifically, these colonial repercussions are seen in the separation between producers and objects of academic knowledge, where white, European men have been historically positioned, and continue to be positioned, as the knowledgeable subjects in contrast to the Other (Parker, Smith and Dennison 2017, 234).[2] These positions also determine who feels comfortable speaking in academic spaces and whose voices are commonly silenced. Power differences clearly influence classroom interactions, and I will further examine their implications in this research. Additionally, I question our understanding of the learning space, and I extend this conversation beyond the classroom walls, exploring where and how we learn.

This thesis is divided into four chapters, which each address a different set of concepts and concerns. The analysis is based on textual engagement with different work on education and teaching strategies, as well as a set of interviews I conducted with students and lecturers in the GEMMA programme, which I describe and discuss below. In Chapter 1, I offer an overview of the relevant literature, engaging with ideas around critical pedagogies, neoliberalism in academia, decolonial education and innovative approaches to learning. Following this, Chapter 2 questions the functioning of discomfort and ambiguity in the classroom, examining how we can use discomfort to question internalised prejudice and deep-seated beliefs. Chapter 3 proceeds with a focus on alternative pedagogies, exploring strategies for inspiring excitement in the class, opportunities presented by collaborative learning and the obstacles to reshaping pedagogical practices. Finally, Chapter 4 underlines the need for forward thinking, looking toward potential

[2] The Other in this case refers to anyone who is not a white, European man. In other words, those who belong to commonly marginalised race, gender and nationality groups. This also includes anyone who has been typically denied access to the academy and knowledge production due to being part of excluded population groupings.

futures and emphasising the roles of hope in this process, as well as providing recommendations for the future of the GEMMA programme.

Before beginning the first chapter, I provide a description of my research process, explaining how I have carried out this research and the reasons for these choices. I also give an overview of the GEMMA master's degree, discussing what this entails and why I have decided to focus on the experiences of those within this programme. Additionally, I question what we mean by feminist teaching, and how Gender Studies is defined or understood by my research participants. Throughout this research I highlight creativity, collaboration and thinking beyond the current limitations, and this is something I would like to centre from the outset.

0.1 The Research Process

I conducted this research using qualitative methods, collecting my data through a series of interviews with eight second-year students and two lecturers involved in the GEMMA programme, discussing some of their experiences within different learning environments and working with their suggestions for rethinking approaches to teaching and learning. These conversations largely informed and shaped the direction of my thesis, acting as a starting point for the discussion and raising questions about both the obstacles and opportunities for transforming higher education.

All through my university career I have been interested in learning strategies and structures, and this also inspired my focus on this topic. My undergraduate thesis explored high school teachers' experiences of teaching about gender and sexuality in South African schools, and I have been involved in a number of teaching initiatives over the years, working as an academic tutor, a facilitator for the Gender and Sex Project,[3] a high school English teacher and a peer educator for the Young Women's Leadership Project.[4] Through these experiences, I have come to question the ways in which educational institutions are structured, and I have spent

[3] The Gender and Sex Project is a student society at the University of Cape Town which organises educational workshops in local high schools, and it is aimed at creating a space to discuss issues relating to sexuality and gender identity.
[4] The Young Women's Leadership Project is an action research group focused on educating university students about sexual and reproductive health rights and building feminist leadership skills.

considerable time thinking about different approaches to teaching, and how to break down hierarchical structures in the classroom. Considering this, while I am speaking as a student in the GEMMA programme, I also reflect on the interplay between student and teacher, questioning how we can rethink this dynamic.

For this thesis, I employed a feminist research framework, focusing on intersecting hierarchies of power and examining how power relations shape the classroom space as well as my own research process (Hesse-Biber 2011, 4). In doing this, I position myself within the research, recognising that what I choose to include and exclude is largely informed by my personal experience and how I relate to the findings. I have therefore tried to adopt a self-reflexive approach, which is central to feminist studies, constantly questioning how my positioning has influenced my understanding of education practices and what I see as potentially transformative strategies. Reflecting on my data collection and analysis, I also find it important to highlight some of the obstacles I encountered, and to acknowledge differences between my expectations and the final outcomes of my research. In doing this, I highlight my position as an imperfect researcher, challenging the notion of the infallible academic which is often promoted in university spaces.

Considering my connection to the programme, it was easy to find GEMMA students to interview, and I found that the participants were very open and enthusiastic about sharing their experiences. I did not have any set requirements for participants, although I did decide to interview students in their second year, as they could compare pedagogical approaches between universities, since each GEMMA student attends two different institutions while in this programme (as I explain in Section 0.2 below). In addition, the second-year students have a better understanding of what the programme entails. Aside from two students who come from the same country, all other participants have different nationalities, both European and non-European. The sample also includes participants of different races, gender identities and ages. I have kept the identities of my participants anonymous, using pseudonyms and leaving out any identifying information. This was done so that they could speak more freely in the interviews and to avoid exposure, considering the small and connected nature of the GEMMA programme. Participants were given the option to pick a pseudonym, so most names are self-assigned, and they were also able to indicate their preferred pronouns.

I chose to interview people from different partner universities (for example, not only students who have been at Utrecht University or the University of Oviedo), so we could discuss a range of approaches and not only those specific to these two institutions. Since various European universities are included in the programme, the findings are not limited to a single context, and I have focused on similarities as well as differences in teaching approaches. I do not mention or speak specifically about the individual institutions, as my focus is not on interrogating individual structures, but rather examining trends in educational practices and questioning why these approaches have remained dominant.

In the process of planning my research, I also decided to interview lecturers to offer another perspective, considering institutional barriers, preferred teaching methods and perceptions of student engagement. While I had originally planned to include an equal number of interviews with lecturers and students, I found it much more difficult to arrange meeting times with the lecturers, and I therefore conducted most of my interviews with students. This also reveals some of the structural conditions in which teaching occurs, considering the heavy workloads and time pressures faced by teachers. While I was initially hesitant about only including the responses from two lecturers, I found these insights to be extremely valuable for my research and made the decision to include them.

I would also like to emphasise the importance of friendship and interpersonal connections for my research. Many of the participants in this research have been friends or close acquaintances, and although this could be seen as a conflict of interest, I view these connections as holding potential for collaborative learning and contesting the neoliberal focus on individualism in university spaces. On this point, I want to mention a lecture given by Political Scientist Nikita Dhawan, as part of a lecture series on decolonising the human at Utrecht University (2018). In this talk, Dhawan highlighted the importance of friendship in our processes of learning and deconstructing. She spoke about deep, meaningful friendships as being the key to alliance building and allyship. This is something which stuck with me and I would like to highlight the importance of friendship in enabling us to think differently, to reposition ourselves and to inspire us. Coalitional politics are therefore central to my research approach, and it is through collaboration that I have been able to critically evaluate my own viewpoints.

My intention with this thesis is to question, to call out and to leave space for disruption and contention. This is something which I continue to navigate, asking how I can recognise my

complicity in exclusionary academic spaces, and subsequently reshape this into something productive, as opposed to empty rhetoric. Notably, I do not claim to have the answers, and I have used this writing process as a means of working with my own discomfort and trying to bring the unseen and/or unspoken to the forefront. This means questioning myself every step of the way, asking why I chose the research participants that I did, why I deleted that sentence and added another, why I was unsettled by that comment, which arguments I wanted to defend, and what I intend to do with this research. These are not easy questions to ask or answer, and constant interrogation can be frustrating and seemingly unproductive, sitting with a single paragraph for hours, and constantly dealing with self-doubt and the question of 'So what?'. However, I maintain that the process of self-questioning should be unnerving, ongoing and messy, and if this process is simple then I am doing something wrong.

0.2 What is the GEMMA Programme? What is Gender Studies?

The GEMMA Master's Degree in Women's and Gender Studies is a two-year postgraduate programme operating across seven different European universities; namely, the University of Granada, University of Lódź, Central European University, University of Bologna, Utrecht University, University of York,[5] and University of Oviedo. GEMMA has been running since 2006, and it is an Erasmus+ programme which receives funding from the European Commission. Students in the programme have a home university, where they complete their first year of study, and a mobility university, which they attend for the first semester of the second year, with the possibility of either remaining or returning to their home university for the final semester. The GEMMA Master's Degree is described as a "joint interdisciplinary programme" and includes students from a range of different backgrounds and countries, both inside and outside of Europe.[6]

I entered the GEMMA programme as a student in September 2017, with Utrecht University as my home institution and the University of Oviedo as my mobility. Considering this, when speaking about the GEMMA Master's Degree, I situate myself as someone within the programme (i.e. adopting an insider position); however, at the same time, I recognise that each student's

---

[5] This is a newer addition to the consortium, and it was officially added in September 2018.
[6] Information about the GEMMA programme is found on the website https://masteres.ugr.es/gemma/.

experiences will be different, considering the varying home and mobility routes, the courses we follow and the separate backgrounds. I therefore speak from a place of experience, as well as a position of unknowing, learning from other students and lecturers in the programme, who may have a very different perspective and experience from my own. This unknowing is also an entry point for exploration and a reminder that there is always more to learn, and that we are all both knowing and unknowing subjects.

Given that the GEMMA degree is a master's programme in Gender and Women's Studies, it is important to question how we define or understand Gender Studies. As a relatively new academic field (arising in the 1960s), and due to its interdisciplinary nature, there is still some uncertainty around the status of Gender Studies within academia.[7] Additionally, Gender Studies has come under threat across Europe (and worldwide) due to the rise of right-wing populism and attempts to delegitimise its place in higher education institutions (Redden 2018). To offer a better understanding of what I mean by Gender Studies, I build on the responses given by my interview participants.

Notably, I asked each of my respondents how they would define Gender Studies, and what makes it different from other disciplines, and there were both similarities as well as differences in the conceptions. Something which many participants mentioned is interdisciplinarity, and how Gender Studies combines different methodologies, knowledges and interests. One of the lecturers I interviewed, Linda, noted that what distinguishes Gender Studies is its political implications as it "attracts people that have a commitment to make a change". Another student participant, Alice, stated that when explaining Gender Studies to other people, she always brings in feminism and intersectionality, highlighting the central aims of including multiple perspectives and encouraging critical thinking.

Several participants also mentioned how Gender Studies has become more recognised and established over the years, and some saw this as a move toward becoming a separate (distinct) discipline, with its own methodologies, terminologies and organising principles. However, this was also seen as a cause for concern, as there are risks of being depoliticised through further institutionalisation. Another understanding is that Gender Studies is a kind of approach which moves across boundaries and resists packaging. Following this view, Alice commented that

---

[7] See Chapter 1 for further discussion on the inception and growth of Gender Studies (or Women's Studies).

"[Gender Studies] is not just something that I can say, okay I have studied it, so now I know about that. It's something that has a reflection in my life and continues to have it". Considering these differing notions of what Gender Studies is and does, it is evident that this is not a conventional or easily defined 'field' or 'discipline' and that there is a need to further interrogate how we, as Gender Studies scholars, would like to position ourselves within academic contexts.

Another question I ask is what it means to do feminist teaching or to have a feminist classroom; in other words, how do we combine feminist principles with teaching practices. This is a complicated question to answer, as feminist teaching means different things to different people, and there is not one fixed understanding of what it means to do or teach feminism. However, there are some underlying ideas and approaches, and I will briefly outline my conception of feminist pedagogy. Primarily, I see feminist teaching as being concerned with disrupting hierarchies of power, aiming to contest and challenge the structures which enable racism, homophobia, transphobia, sexism, ableism and other systemic inequalities, although the methods and ways of approaching this remain varied and open-ended.

In addition, feminist teaching is also centred on critical thinking and self-reflexivity, calling for us to confront and analyse our own complicity within these unequal systems. According to bell hooks, the feminist classroom is a space "where students [can] raise critical questions about pedagogical process" (1994, 6). However, hooks also notes that this critical interrogation is not always enacted in practice, and that feminist classrooms can also be spaces where exclusions and discrimination continue to surface, especially in relation to race (1994, 113). It is therefore necessary to keep questioning what we learn, how we learn, and what we have chosen not to see or talk about. Following this, I contend that if we are to do feminist work, we must constantly examine and work on our own pedagogical practices, considering both the potential as well as the limitations offered by feminist teaching.

0.3 Research Significance

My research on alternative approaches to education aims to contribute to existing discussions and debates and to offer possibilities for doing education differently. This rethinking of academic space is something which requires further attention, and through questioning current

pedagogical practices, the aim is to bring together suggestions for more inclusive and transformative classroom formations. By focusing on future potentiality and collective processes, I also intend to challenge the very individualistic and output-focused academic culture which is commonly encouraged in higher education institutions. Additionally, through this research process, I encourage further conversation on the colonial legacies and power relations which shape the classroom environment, and I see this interrogation of power dynamics as crucial in order to create more transformative and disruptive academic spaces.

While there has been significant scholarship on introducing creative approaches to education in primary and secondary schools, this does not often extend to higher education, and there is a need for further research on rethinking teaching practices in universities. For this reason, my research addresses a gap in the current literature, and can provide an important contribution to the field of education studies, while also offering a feminist approach which addresses multiple oppressions and axes of power. This thesis highlights the importance of action, and it is socially relevant due to both its content and its focus on theorising practice and practising theory. I also hope to compile the recommendations from this research and to propose these as a potential resource for other scholars, with the intention of inspiring further discussion around pedagogical structures.

Drawing on interviews and the experiences of several people involved in the GEMMA programme, I have tried to include multiple voices, enabling a new set of views and alternative perspectives. Through discussions with other students, I have realised that there is a wealth of experience from which to draw; however, these insights have not been acknowledged, and there is potential for much greater engagement if these thoughts are given the space to be expressed. Additionally, by contesting the structure of the classroom itself, this research can challenge ways of producing knowledge. I do not offer one overarching solution or resolution, but rather outline a set of possibilities, offering a potential way forward. The task of reshaping academic space and decolonising the university is evidently a timely and important one, and this research can both add to and build on the current debates.

A Call for Further Engagement

Moving forward, I invite further interaction and discussion on the topics which I examine in this thesis. In the following chapters, I consequently pose several questions about our understanding of feminist pedagogies, different approaches to classroom spaces, and alternative futures for education. While I provide some ideas or tools for engagement, I also leave this as a work in progress, refusing any final resolutions or endpoints to the conversation. Instead, I welcome commentary, contradictory or supplementary visions and further inquiries. Therefore, while there are evidently limitations to this research, my hope is that I can take this knowledge and open it up to further, more collective discussion. Following this, I call for readers to ask additional questions and to continue the process of reimagining and reclaiming academic space.

Chapter 1

Possibilities, Limitations and Potential Futures of Education: A Theoretical Framework

Introduction

> Knowledge emerges 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 1970, 72)

Educational practices in higher education are constantly being evaluated and critiqued, with routine feedback procedures, lectures focused on new ways of teaching, assessments on the reported progress of an institution, and discussions on the changing nature of the university (where profit is becoming a driving force and universities are increasingly being run as businesses). In this way, the classroom appears to be a space of fluidity and change, where teaching practices are continually negotiated. However, despite the illusion of transformation, these spaces can become rigid and unchanging, where the structures of power remain the same, and clear divides are established between the 'holders' and 'receivers' of knowledge, or between the inside and outside of academia.

A growing body of scholarship has investigated pedagogical structures, offering analyses, criticisms, suggestions, personal accounts, ethnographic studies and close examinations of the way in which the classroom functions as a space for learning and (ideally) transformation (Freire 1970; Mohanty 1990; hooks 1994; Hames 2014; Norlander 2014; Mbembe 2016). In this chapter, I will examine and discuss these scholarly texts on educational practices and classroom spaces, providing a theoretical basis for my research and introducing some of the central debates. In doing this, I aim to identify spaces for intervention, relating this to the field of Gender Studies and the potential for alternative approaches to learning. Linking to the chapter's epigraph by Paulo Freire (1970), my focus is on the invention and reinvention of the classroom space, questioning how we relate to each other, to the learning environment, to spaces outside of the university, and ultimately, what kinds of education systems we envision for the future.

Notably, when I speak about 'we' in relation to pedagogical change, I am referring to everyone interested in the transformative potential of education. In this way, I use 'we' and 'us' as a call to action.

Before analysing alternative approaches, I will first explore the concepts of critical pedagogy and engaged pedagogy, as described by Paulo Freire (1970) and bell hooks (1994), presenting key questions concerning the role of the teacher and the environment in the learning process. Next, I interrogate the growing depoliticisation and neoliberalisation of the university space, looking at the effects of a globalising knowledge economy. In doing this, I focus on arguments introduced by Achille Mbembe (2016) and Chandra Mohanty (1990), inquiring how the so-called 'neoliberal turn' has shaped current approaches to education. I follow this with a discussion on decolonising the university, considering different understandings of what it means to decolonise education, and questioning how we can put decolonial thinking into practice (or if this is even possible). Subsequently, I examine studies aimed at rethinking educational space and place, discussing creative approaches to the classroom setup, as well as exploring some of the work being done in primary and secondary education.

At its basis, this analysis is centred on the area of Gender Studies in the European context, considering its place in the academy and assumptions about the 'discipline', although the discussion is not limited to a singular space. This chapter does not propose solutions or recommendations, but rather situates my research within the wider discursive area, connecting the debates on decolonial education, neoliberalism, and creative approaches to the classroom. Many of the issues I discuss have been approached in different fields of study, including Education Studies, Sociology and Anthropology, and in order to conceptualise new possibilities, it is necessary to build on and connect the varying ideas which are being circulated. Tying together these different strands, in this chapter I ask how we can do education differently and I raise several questions which will be taken up and expanded upon in the subsequent chapters.

1.1 A Critical and Engaged Pedagogy

For this research, I am particularly interested in educational approaches which unsettle and disrupt conventional ideas of the classroom as a singular space, and which challenge the

positioning of students as passive consumers of knowledge. I focus on the ways in which pedagogical practices can be both liberating and confining, holding the potential to subvert as well as to reinforce the status quo. Considering this, I aim to further explore these contradictions, questioning what it means to resist from within the system, and how we can imagine (and encourage) a critical and engaged pedagogy. Critical pedagogy is an approach to education which opposes structures of domination and promotes a critical consciousness among students and teachers, requiring each person to question the tools used to oppress them, as well as their role in the oppression of others. In other words, a critical pedagogy encourages us to be actively involved in our own 'enlightenment' while resisting complacency and challenging our complicity in an unequal system.[8]

Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) has largely informed conceptions of critical pedagogy; there, he emphasises the need for education which is radical, disruptive and ultimately liberating. Specifically, Freire critiques the "banking" model of education, where the teacher imparts information and the students receive, file and store this without questioning or contesting it (1970, 72). In such a system, a hierarchy is already established, with the teacher constructed as all-knowing, and therefore beyond critique, while the student is positioned as unknowing and in need of instruction. Learning is therefore conceived of as something stationary or passive, which can be simply given and received, and this removes its transformative potential. Countering this, Freire argues that we must challenge this hierarchy of knowing, and he maintains that knowledge is formed through ongoing inquiry and engagement with people, ideas and places, requiring us "to come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (1990, 83). It is therefore only through interaction and contact that we can create, mould and reform knowledge systems.

Notably, Freire highlights the importance of co-intentional education, where both students and teachers are responsible for producing, negotiating and sharing knowledge, and where the banking model is therefore rejected in favour of a more participatory and critical approach (1970, 69). For this (alternative) model, there is a need for dialogue, debate and co-creation, which I emphasise as being crucial to the learning process, if we are to become critical thinkers

---

[8] I approach the term 'enlightenment' critically, recognising the problematic ways in which enlightenment ideas have been presented, where this is linked to an intellectual (European) elite and schemes of so-called development. My conception of becoming 'enlightened' is contrastingly related to becoming self-conscious and aware of our own positioning.

capable of questioning not only 'external' problems but also our own approaches. However, despite emphasising co-creation, this is not to say that the educator does not hold valuable skills and insights, but rather that this is not a one-way interaction, and that students and educators each enter the classroom with their own knowledges, histories and capabilities. Additionally, Freire calls for educators to be involved in a constant process of self-examination, taking shared responsibility for the creation of a learning environment which fosters critical thinking and disrupts power imbalances (as discussed by hooks, which I expand on below). Another key component of the critical approach to education is creativity and inventiveness, and therefore "[the] freedom to create and to construct, to wonder and to venture" (Fromm, quoted in Freire 1970, 68). This aspect of wonderment and invention is central to my work, and it is evident that if we do not constantly question and reinvent our approaches, there will be limited potential for change.

While Freire's writing provides many entry points for my analysis and identifies sites for transformation, there are also areas for further exploration. Specifically, Freire's writing speaks about education and liberation more generally, and while this is applicable to different situations, it is also necessary to look at the context, acknowledging that each of our experiences – and the challenges accompanying this – will be different. Additionally, Freire presents a (somewhat) set distinction between the oppressed and oppressor, and although he troubles this distinction, the discussion remains focused on a more general understanding of these two groups (i.e. not applied to a particular site or space). For example, this is visible in the way he phrases and sets up his discussion on liberation and transforming one's consciousness, as he argues "the behavior of the oppressed is a prescribed behavior, following as it does the guidelines of the oppressor" (1970, 47). In this quote, it appears that the oppressor and oppressed are easily separable and can be placed within specified categories; however, this is not always the case.

Consequently, I argue that the workings of power in the classroom are far more complex, and that these are often unseen and entwined. Incorporating an intersectional approach, it is clear that each person enters the class with a set of complex and interwoven identities, and that these can both privilege and oppress. For instance, although the teacher holds a certain power in the classroom (the power to lead the discussion, to give emphasis, to assign grades), this power can be undermined depending on other factors (e.g. race, gender, ability, age). For

instance, if a teacher is younger, they may be treated with less authority or assumed to be less knowledgeable. Additionally, educators are similarly repressed by the system and face another set of restrictions, where power is not clear-cut, and subversion becomes more elusive. Consequently, I aim to further explore these power differentials, looking at how this plays out in the classroom space, and discussing whether it is possible (or even preferable) to completely reform the structures of power.

Moving on from Freire's ideas on pedagogy and liberation, my theoretical understanding of critical pedagogy is also shaped by bell hooks' *Teaching to Transgress* (1994), and specifically her conception of an engaged pedagogy. This approach explores the possibility of learning as revolution, and it focuses on the role of excitement and pleasure in the classroom. hooks notes that when you lose the sense of excitement in education, "The university and the classroom [can begin] to feel more like a prison, a place of punishment and confinement rather than a place of promise and possibility" (1994, 4). Following this, knowledge becomes about information only and it simply reinforces domination, fixating on the end goal (graduating and leaving) as opposed to the ongoing process of learning, unlearning and relearning. Linking this to the previous discussion, both Freire and hooks call for a reinvention of the classroom, and a reinvigorated approach to pedagogy which challenges apathy and an acceptance of 'the way things are'.

An engaged pedagogy, as explained by hooks, is necessarily strenuous and intensive as it requires us to focus on personal and community wellbeing, in addition to critical thinking and questioning power (1994, 15). This includes the wellbeing of teachers, and hooks argues that educators should similarly be attuned to their own self-actualisation and involved in a continuous process of discovery (1994, 15). However, this commitment to wellbeing and excitement in class is, as I will elaborate below, increasingly being challenged by the neoliberal model of education, which stresses productivity over everything else. Despite this, it is important to emphasise the notion of pleasure in the classroom and to counter conformity through constant disruption and intervention. Building on hooks, I am interested in whether we can renew ideas of learning as revolution, and how it is possible to revitalise or reimagine approaches to academia. This requires further experimentation, and I maintain that education which does not stimulate interest and excitement will not inspire action and therefore lacks transformative potential.

Another central part of hooks' pedagogical approach is her emphasis on collective work, and her view of the classroom as a communal space (1994, 8). Like Freire, hooks also encourages open dialogue as a crucial component in the classroom, and she states that we must deconstruct the outdated belief that only the educator is accountable for the class dynamics (1994, 8). Additionally, there is an emphasis on student contributions in class, and hooks argues that if these are used constructively "they enhance the capacity of any class to create an open learning community" (1994, 8). In this way, students are not only there to 'receive' knowledge, but also to participate in the construction of knowledge, and they are repositioned as active contributors, which in turn can promote more animated involvement and a sense of purpose. However, this may be a more idealistic scenario, and in reality, creating a communal space comes with a complicated set of challenges and does not always produce desired results.

This tension between intention and actuality is something I will further explore in my research, and while I focus on imaginative approaches, it is clear that there are institutional barriers and material limitations (e.g. restrictive policies, top-down approaches, competition culture, reliance on funding) which can impede our envisioned transformation. Additionally, it is crucial to recognise that each classroom space is different, and therefore teaching strategies need to be adjusted, reshaped, and reformulated to fit the changing nature of the classroom (hooks 1994, 10). Teaching therefore requires flexibility and movement, and it becomes "a performative act" (hooks 1994, 11) where the script and performance can change depending on the audience and the room. Following this, there is also space for improvisation, for creativity and for expressions of emotion. My conception of an alternative pedagogy consequently embraces fluidity, feeling, critique, divergence and collective work, making room for changes and welcoming disruption.

1.2 Critiquing Neoliberalism

It is increasingly difficult (if not impossible) to talk about the state of 'the university' today without mentioning neoliberalism in academia, and the commodification of academic knowledge.[9] As noted by Achille Mbembe, higher education is currently facing a global

---

[9] Although I talk about 'the university', implying something singular or uniform, I would like to stress the importance of contextualising, noting that not all academic institutions follow the same trajectory. However, there can be links made between academic trends both nationally and globally, and this is particularly relevant considering increased globalisation and global market forces.

restructuring, and these changes are intimately tied to global capitalism (2016, 37). More specifically, there is a growing push to denationalise higher education in favour of economic integration, encouraging ties between universities and transnational corporations (Mbembe 2016, 37). In this way, the global market influences the functioning of universities worldwide, with institutions being run according to a business model, and success determined in terms of commercial value (Mbembe 2016, 39). What this means is that there is a greater focus on output and efficiency, and less importance given to personal development and wellbeing. Consequently, students are viewed as customers or consumers, and education becomes the commodity. Following this, neoliberalism is used as a means of regulation and governmentality (Robinson and Richardson 2015, xxi), prescribing an educational framework which allows limited room for creativity, innovation or non-conformity.

According to Gender Studies scholar Brenda Weber (2010, 127), neoliberalism also neglects systemic inequalities (e.g. systemic racism and sexism within the academy) by prizing merit and academic excellence while ignoring the ongoing structural barriers and power imbalances. As a result, a person's worth appears to be based on their productivity and "ability to compete in a global market" (Weber 2010, 127), with less focus on pedagogical structures and the exclusionary nature of the academy. While this presents a gloomy outlook on the current state of education, it is still possible to challenge this system, and scholars such as Mbembe call for decolonial praxis to break the cycle of neoliberal education, as I will explore later. Additionally, in light of this neoliberalisation, it is now especially important for us to examine alternative approaches to education and to question how the current system exacerbates power disparities. A starting point for this is to analyse both visible and unseen ways in which neoliberal forces currently shape our educational practices, thereby identifying spaces for change. Linking back to Mbembe's words: "We need a more profound understanding of the situation we find ourselves in today if we are to better rethink the university of tomorrow" (2016, 37). Put differently, we cannot conceive of different futures if we do not first recognise and examine the current arrangements and obstacles.

1.3 Resistance from Within

Considering that my study focuses on Gender Studies classrooms, and the pedagogical practices within these, it is necessary to unpack the nature of these spaces, their place in the academy

(thinking about complicity as well as disruption), and the potential for critical education. Women's Studies programmes initially arose alongside oppositional social movements in the late 1960s in the United States (US), and they drew on the frameworks of other interdisciplinary programmes, such as Black and Ethnic Studies, which already existed (Mohanty 1990, 188).[10] In view of this, Women's Studies employed similar pedagogical and research approaches, aimed at creating "counter-hegemonic discourse and oppositional analytic spaces within the institution" (Mohanty 1990, 189). While this was the initial conceptualisation, what I am more interested in is how the 'discipline' of Gender Studies presents itself today,[11] and in this section I question the influence of neoliberal policies, the issue of depoliticisation and the claims of inclusion versus realities of exclusion.

Linking to current experiences of Gender Studies classrooms, Chandra Mohanty (1990) as well as Gloria Wekker (2016) have spoken about the underlying racism in this discipline, which continues to position white students as unmarked, and therefore able to speak on behalf of everyone, while people of colour are constructed as "the authentic voices of their people" (Mohanty 1990, 194). In this way, an insider and outsider status is established, and despite an emphasis on self-reflexivity, the discipline continues to uphold whiteness as the 'norm'. While Mohanty speaks about Gender Studies in the US context, and Wekker situates her discussion in the Netherlands, both note that these classes are largely dominated by white women, and they observe similar tendencies toward maintaining a status quo which privileges white, Western voices.

More specifically, Wekker discusses how Gender Studies centres the discourse on intersectionality, and although recognising intersections of power and privilege, race (especially the workings of whiteness) continues to be neglected, with racism spoken about as a problem happening 'out there' (2016, 27). In this way, despite its potential as a transformative intervention, intersectionality (as it is commonly used within the academy today) loses its

---

[10] Although initially termed Women's Studies, focusing within binary categories and specifically on women's experiences and knowledge, the discipline has evolved to look at intersecting power dynamics (yet the practice of this can be debated). Considering this, there has been a renaming of the discipline as Gender Studies in many institutions. I therefore refer mostly to "Gender Studies", although I will use "Women's Studies" when speaking about the earlier programmes.

[11] As discussed in the thesis Introduction, there is a debate about whether Gender Studies is its own discipline, or if it should be termed as something different (e.g. an approach, an inter-disciplinary programme, an area of study).

disruptive nature and instead becomes a buzzword which circulates without critical dissection. Furthermore, Wekker notes that there is "a general ethos of avoidance, fear, and displacement" when it comes to speaking about race (2016, 52), leading to a further silencing and complacency.

Another concern which is raised by Mohanty – relating to the above discussion on neoliberalism – is that Gender Studies has been assimilated into the neoliberal hierarchical system, losing its political essence through institutionalisation (1990, 189). This raises the crucial question of whether it is possible to resist from within, and additionally, how or if Gender Studies practitioners can become counter-hegemonic forces rather than collaborators in a fundamentally unequal system. Returning to Mohanty's critique, she also speaks about the individualisation of academic knowledge and practice, whereby the focus is on personal politics (including individual problems, experiences and actions) rather than the underlying and embedded structures of power (1990, 204). In this way, she notes that the "the personal is political" becomes "the political is personal" and in turn there is a depoliticisation of the educational space. As a response, Mohanty calls for a public culture of dissent, where we centralise the politics of everyday life and root our discussions in materiality (1990, 207). Using this approach, she also urges us to view ourselves as activists within the academy, and to fight on a collective level to challenge the nature of the academy. This can be connected to the points raised by Freire and hooks on collectivity, and taking this further, I argue that it is only through continuous and collective resistance that we can withstand growing neoliberal forces. Additionally, if we are serious about challenging this, neoliberalism cannot be used as a reason for inactivity, and should rather be viewed as an impetus for communal action.

1.4. Decolonising the Classroom

Decolonisation is a complex and complicated commitment to radical reformation, a commitment to action, to unsettling, to disrupting (Tuck and Yang 2012; Mbembe 2016; Nye 2012). It is not easily definable or neatly discernible, and it is a continuous process with no foreseeable end point. When looking at critical pedagogies and disruptions to the current education system, decolonial thinking is central to my approach, and decolonial theories have informed (and continue to inform) much of my research. For example, I focus on deconstruction and

interruption, and I centre discomfort and unease, which is fundamental to decolonial processes. Considering this focus, it is necessary to outline my understanding of decolonisation, how I view this in relation to educational models, and to interrogate the contradictions in my own approach, as well as the limitations and dangers of appropriation.

Firstly, I examine some of the different definitions and understandings of decolonisation, as this relates to education. Because decolonisation is about unsettling, it requires discomfort and uneasiness rather than reconciliation. According to Malory Nye, decolonisation is therefore "not about 'finding room' at the table, it is about changing the room" (2018, 4). In this way, Nye centres the importance of change and disruption as opposed to simply shifting narratives. Following this, Ngugi (cited in Mbembe 2016, 35) argues that decolonisation is the starting point for a new struggle, and this concerns not only what is being taught (i.e. whose histories and struggles are being highlighted, and from which perspective(s)), but also under what terms and conditions we are being taught, and where this teaching is taking place.

Decolonisation therefore calls for us to grapple with inherited colonial systems of education, and to question the spaces where we teach, looking for different understandings of what it means to learn or educate. It also requires us to break away from conventional visions of the university, interrogating what we mean by 'the university', and how these conceptions have been formulated (Mbembe 2016, 32). Taking this into account, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang argue that "Decolonisation is not an 'and'. It is an elsewhere" (2012, 36). This idea of an 'elsewhere' implies the possibility of a different approach, of breaking with the old and creating something new, of potential and hopefulness. The challenge, however, is deconstructing the 'here and now' while also establishing something new, as well as trying to ensure that this elsewhere does not replicate similar models of domination.

Additionally, I would like to emphasise the importance of the prefix "de-" in decolonisation, which indicates removal, separation, negation, reversal or intensity.[12] This "de-" suggests breaking with the past and actively working to disentangle. Decolonisation is therefore not about moving on or stabilising, and it is necessary to consider the work of this prefix – how it activates and offers a divergence from past approaches.

---

[12] *Dictionary.com*, s.v. "de-".

As mentioned above, decolonisation is messy and disruptive. There is no set template for how to do decolonial work; however, it is clear that decolonising cannot be purely theoretical and necessitates active interference. I am particularly interested in the messiness which comes with decolonising, and how we can oppose a neoliberal model of order and efficiency by embracing mess. This conception of decolonisation as disruption has been discussed by various scholars and activists, who similarly conceive of decolonial work as fundamentally unsettling, chaotic and messy. For example, Frantz Fanon explains decolonisation as a "program of complete disorder" and he asserts that it is not a friendly undertaking or an offer of compromise (1963, 36). Taking this into account, Tuck and Yang maintain that decolonisation cannot be mapped onto an already-existing framework, even if this framework is critical and counter-hegemonic (2012, 3). This links back to their argument that decolonisation is not an 'and' – it is not in co-operation with something else, and it cannot be approached as a side project or afterthought. Accordingly, we must distinguish between the decolonisation project and other (seemingly) related programmes which are intended to challenge the status quo, especially when these are pseudo-intentions.

For example, Louise Autar (2017, 318) highlights the distinction between decolonising and diversifying, in relation to education, noting that diversity projects tend to adopt an additive approach, where they attempt to include 'diverse' voices without changing the framework or questioning the institutional barriers. On the other hand, she states that decolonisation must decentre the norms and should occur on every level of the university, from management policies to teaching practices to individual research methods (2017, 318). In doing this, the disruption should not be restricted to a singular space and should aim beyond the confines of the classroom.

However, when discussing decolonisation in relation to academia, there is a risk of commodification or depoliticisation, where 'decolonisation' becomes something comfortable, thereby losing its necessarily disruptive nature.[13] As noted by Tuck and Yang, this superficial inclusion "is a form of enclosure, dangerous in how it domesticates decolonization" (2012, 3). By making decolonisation (or what is claimed as this) something easily definable and contained,

[13] This links to the earlier discussion on intersectionality, and how this has become a buzzword in academia, depriving the term of its more radical understanding. When considering the inclusion of decolonial discourse in academia, it is therefore crucial to question the similar risks of co-optation, and how to avoid the same patterns of appropriation.

this enables an appeasement of guilt, or a claim of innocence, which in turn halts critical self-reflection and intervention. Tuck and Yang therefore argue that our work cannot be decolonial unless it unsettles innocence and continues to be something uneasy, forcing us to confront our own complicity and the ongoing implications of colonial power (2012, 4).

While I have highlighted the centrality of discomfort in decolonial work, it is also important to consider the roles of hope, joy and interpersonal relations in decolonising, as this is what can sustain us, enabling decolonial thinkers and activists to continue disrupting and resisting. For example, writer and filmmaker Frances Negrón-Muntaner (2019) speaks about the possibility of cultivating decolonial joy, through the act of glimpsing different decolonial futures (which I discuss in Chapter 4), thereby inspiring action and new forms of relationality. This joy as well as hope in the future can be fostered through collaboration, and I am therefore interested in the power of friendship and intimate connections, stimulating alternative ways of being. I have already underlined the need for collective work in pedagogical approaches to the classroom, however, I would like to further link this to friendship and everyday personal relations. Hunt and Holmes' work (2015, 167) on a decolonising queer politics is especially useful here, as they discuss the possibilities presented by "intimate geographies of allyship". In particular, they look at how we can cultivate solidarity across differences, stressing the importance of trust and communication in these connections (Hunt and Holmes 2015, 161). At the same time, there is still space for tension as well as a need to challenge dominant ideas so that unequal power dynamics are not reinforced within intimate spaces.

Hunt and Holmes also emphasise reciprocity and accountability within relationships, noting that this requires active effort, self-reflection and open conversations (2015, 161). Therefore, to do decolonial work, we must start by looking at our day-to-day social interactions, questioning how we can enact an everyday decolonial queer politics. Connecting ideas of decolonising and queering, Hunt and Holmes present these as interlinked practices which interact across spaces, and which both offer disruption and alternative possibilities (2015, 156). Specifically, they speak about queer as a verb, as deconstruction and a challenge to normative constructs of identity, knowledge and place. Following this understanding, queerness is not only about gender identities and sexualities which are deemed as non-normative, but also fundamentally about action, movement, and destabilising power relations. Additionally, queering is perceived as something political and engaged. Proceeding from this, a decolonial queer praxis is about

actively addressing issues such as colonialism, globalisation, neoliberalism and nationalism, and contesting colonial conceptions of gender and sexuality (Hunt and Holmes 2015, 156).

In my research, a decolonising queer politics offers new possibilities for disruption, and different ways of approaching ourselves and our intimate relations. In terms of daily interactions, connecting processes of decolonising and queering can be a means of holding us accountable in our friendships and relationships, staying constantly aware of the ways in which colonial constructs continue to shape our everyday exchanges. This relates to our classroom relationships (e.g. with classmates, teachers and colleagues), encouraging us to continuously question how power relations influence day-to-day exchanges in the university space.

Furthermore, university classrooms are often important spaces for forming friendships and creating alliances, and it is necessary to acknowledge the importance of cultivating bonds in the classroom, while remaining conscious of the power differences at play. Coalitions within the classroom can present new possibilities and can unlock spaces for communal intervention. Following Holmes and Hunt, I therefore argue that everyday alliances are vital for decolonial practices. Building on these possibilities for subverting or reforming educational spaces, the next section will take up the question of how to do education differently, considering how education systems have changed and continue to change.

1.5. Rethinking Space and Place

When analysing pedagogical structures, it is crucial to consider where education takes place, and how the environment influences our learning experience. Within the field of education studies, there is a growing focus on modern and flexible learning environments, with scholars examining how these spaces shape classroom processes (Wells, Jackson and Benade 2017; Thompson 2005; Norlander 2014; Benade, Bertelsen and Lewis 2017). However, these studies are often centred on primary and secondary education, and there is a need for further investigation into the setup and functioning of the university classroom. Additionally, in discussions on decolonial education, it is important to incorporate an analysis of the changing (or unchanging) learning space, and to look at the connections between the environment and the possibilities for alternative education.

One question which recurs in my research is where learning takes place, or what is meant by educational space. In other words, does learning occur primarily in the classroom, at home, on the internet, through discussions with classmates, or all of the above? In a recent study, Peter Norlander (2014) asked high school students where most of their school-related learning happens, and over two-thirds named the home environment, with many others mentioning online spaces, and a much smaller group recognising the classroom as their central learning space. Norlander therefore raises the question of what should be done at school, and what should be done at home, and correspondingly, whether the classroom space is enabling the kind of formative education we envision (2014, 156). Following this, if the classroom has become a somewhat restrictive or limiting space, my question is how (or if) we can change this, as I will discuss in Chapter 3.

On the issue of transforming the classroom space, various teaching practitioners, academics and architects have suggested more flexible and updated learning structures. For example, in an article on modern learning environments, education scholars Alastair Wells, Mark Jackson and Leon Benade (2017) call for a renewed focus on the classroom space, and they argue that we need to shift our ways of thinking about teaching and learning, introducing more future-focused educational spaces. This future focus challenges the one-size-fits-all approach employed since the industrial era, when education was focused on producing a specific type of graduate, prepared to enter straight into a structured work environment (Benade, Bertelsen and Lewis 2017, 37). In comparison, a modern learning environment equips graduates for an ever-changing economy, where the job market is highly volatile and flexibility is necessary.

Considering this, Wells, Jackson and Benade build on some of the ideas proposed by French-Swiss architect Bernard Tschumi, who speaks about "unprogrammed spaces" which do not strictly prescribe behaviour or movement (2017, 4). Tschumi argues that we should deconstruct the idea of a singular and coherent architectural area, and rather promote spaces which are "neither closed and fixed nor entirely open and variable, yet where it is disjunctive and dislocating…where unforeseen events emerge" (Wells, Jackson and Benade 2017, 11). I agree with this need for more flexible and disjunctive spaces, however, the issue which arises next (requiring further exploration) is what this flexible learning environment will look like, and how we can break away from the traditional structures.

Following on from the above question, I examine more specific approaches and examples proposed by other scholars, looking at the possibilities as well as restrictions they have discussed. One approach, mentioned in various studies, is to incorporate digital technologies into teaching and to embrace digitised learning. Specifically, education studies practitioners Leon Benade, Eva Bertelsen and Lyn Lewis note that developments in the digital sphere have inspired more learner-centred education which interrupts the conventional learner-teacher relations (2017, 38). In addition, they maintain that the internet allows for "collaborative and 'anywhere, anytime' learning", changing our conceptions of the learning environment. This means that learning does not stop with the classroom, and students are expected to engage in self-study and to constantly grapple with new knowledge (which they/we are meant to find through different spaces and means).

Accordingly, I contend that the role of the teacher is therefore not to impart information, but rather to equip students with skills for critical thinking, to suggest possible resources and to facilitate a space for sharing and disruptive debate. Digital tools can also be used within the classroom to enhance learning and to offer creative possibilities, removing the focus from an individual teacher who holds all the knowledge to multiple sources of knowledge. Additionally, as emphasised by Benade, Bertelsen and Lewis (2017, 38), digitisation encourages lifelong learning, where learning becomes an ongoing process, rather than an endpoint, and where there are possibilities to engage with people across different spaces and generations.

Considering the role of digital technologies in education, this again raises the question of how our conception of 'the university' is changing, requiring us to interrogate how we wish to see higher education in the future. However, while I highlight their potential, digital methods can similarly be isolating for those without the resources or necessary background knowledge on how to best utilise these technologies. While universities commonly offer technological support, there is still a need to further investigate whether students find technology to be a hindrance or an enhancement. It is also necessary to interrogate the global knowledge economy (in relation to digital methods of teaching and acquiring information), to ask who has power within the digital sphere, and to look at whether this enables an innovative space for engagement or simply reinforces existing inequalities in education. Likewise, we can question whether online spaces offer a means of disruption, or contrarily lead to a form of disengagement and distancing. Although my research does not delve into the influence of technology on pedagogical

practice, this remains necessary to mention and cannot be ignored when speaking about contemporary learning spaces.

Another alternative approach, which has gained much traction over the years, is integrative learning (including a focus on interdisciplinarity). Interdisciplinary studies scholar Julie Thompson Klein defines integrative learning as an umbrella term referring to "structures, strategies and activities that bridge numerous divides, such as high school and college, general education and the major, introductory and advanced levels, experiences inside and outside the classroom, theories and practice, and disciplines and fields" (2005, 8). In other words, integrative learning envisions education as a multifaceted and complex process occurring in multiple locations. This approach emphasises problem-focused schooling and calls for us to think outside of the box, seeing all learning as ongoing and interconnected.

Teaching and learning therefore take place in numerous spaces and at varying times, meaning that the classroom is something ever-changing and constantly expanding. Additionally, within integrative learning there is an emphasis on interdisciplinarity, where different disciplines interact and connect, bringing together several methods and knowledge systems. This is particularly important within Gender Studies, which is described as an interdisciplinary field, aimed at integrating multiple perspectives and traversing knowledge boundaries. However, there is once again a need to question the theory versus the practice, and to consider ways in which we can promote connections between fields (boundary crossing) while also maintaining a distinctive identity.[14] Evidently, there is space to further examine integrative learning – considering what this means for pedagogical practices, how it can be concretely implemented and the significance of this approach.

Although I focus on the potential offered by innovative education, it is evident that there are various barriers to change and that new setups run the risk of producing similar patterns of domination, which may look different but ultimately result in the same outcomes. One concern is that new classroom designs are simply responding to and supporting neoliberal discourse. More specifically, when promoting new approaches to education, there is an emphasis on the efficient use of resources and change is often motivated by a desire to remain competitive with

[14] We can, however, ask why we want to maintain an independent, separate identity, and who gets to decide what this identity will be.

other institutions (Benade, Bertelsen and Lewis 2017, 42). For instance, Benade, Bertelsen and Lewis speak about developments at the University of Copenhagen, where they tried to redesign the building spaces, making the teachers' offices closer to the student study areas (i.e. more easily accessible) and providing 24/7 access to the library and resources, with the central intention of utilising space and enabling productivity (2017, 41). While these are framed as positive changes and are focused on encouraging a modern learning environment, this 'progress' is centred on commercial success and output as opposed to student growth and skills development. In this way, the adjustments again reinforce dominant (capitalist) structures, with little attempt to challenge the underlying institutional formations.

Additionally, another barrier to transformation is teacher and student resistance, and even if alternative education models are presented, this does not mean that they will be welcomed or implemented. Returning to the study by Benade, Bertelsen and Lewis, they point out the difference between conceived, perceived and lived space, noting that while the architects and project administrators envisioned a transformed learning environment, the teachers were hesitant to adopt these changes, maintaining that the current system was most effective (2017, 43). Similarly, without students committed to new methods of teaching and learning, change will remain something conceptual rather than workable. Taking the above possibilities and limitations into account, through this research, I bring together different ideas and conceptions of alternative education models. While doing this, I remain both realistic and idealistic in my approach, despite the apparent contradiction, or instead, welcoming this contradiction.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have provided a general overview of the central topics and have raised some of the key questions which will be addressed in subsequent chapters of this thesis. This chapter therefore serves as a starting point for my discussion and offers a theoretical grounding, acknowledging the ongoing debates in this area of study and the scholarship which has informed my understandings. As the chapter title suggests, the conversation was primarily structured around possibilities, limitations and potential futures of education, and I have explained some of the key concepts and points for departure.

Notably, this chapter questioned what it means to employ a critical or engaged pedagogy, asking how we can disrupt imposed knowledge hierarchies in the classroom and challenging conventional notions of who creates and who receives knowledge. Power relations are evidently central to my analysis, and I am interested in the potential to reposition teaching and learning as something revolutionary, resisting conformity and instead focusing on excitement, open dialogue and collective construction. Recognising the possible obstacles, this chapter also interrogated the influence of neoliberalism on current academic practices, noting the growing neoliberal push in education, where universities have become increasingly focused on economic value as opposed to learning and collective wellbeing. Neoliberalism is something I refer to throughout the thesis and this remains an ongoing topic of conversation.

For this analysis, it is also important to examine the position of Gender Studies within academia, and I have stressed the need to remain critical of the field/discipline in order to enable its subversive potential. I have also concentrated on decolonial approaches to education, which is another key focus area of my thesis, and this discussion warns against appropriating decolonial narratives. Keeping this in mind, I have called for us to constantly question why we are using the term decolonial, and whether this serves the function of decolonial work (e.g. to deconstruct and disrupt). This chapter also focused on creative approaches to education, exploring the changing nature of modern learning environments and focusing on alternative models as well as possible transformations.

The main objective of this chapter was to provide a foundation for further inquiry, joining the present debates and highlighting areas for expansion. Moving onto the next chapter, I will narrow this focus, looking more closely at the role of discomfort in the classroom and relating this to the findings from my interview process. This concentration on discomfort is informed by my own experiences, and it constitutes a central part of my approach to alternative pedagogies. Consequently, the subsequent chapter opens an important space for rethinking our approach to classroom interactions.

Chapter 2

Activating Uncomfortable Emotions: The Roles of Discomfort and Ambiguity in the Classroom Space

Introduction

> A pedagogy of discomfort invites students to leave the familiar shores of learned beliefs and habits, and swim further out into the "foreign" and risky depths of the sea of ethical and moral differences.
> (Boler 1999, 180)

In academic spaces, students often perceive discomfort as a disruption to the safety of a space, treating this as an unwelcome or undesirable emotion. Viewing discomfort in this way tends to negate its importance, failing to address the roots of this feeling and the reasons it has surfaced. In order to contest this dismissal of discomfort, this chapter therefore asks what discomfort can tell us, and how we can use this to constantly question and interrogate our own complicity in educational structures which continue to establish hierarchies of difference. When I speak about these hierarchies in the Gender Studies classroom, I focus more specifically on race, language and nationality, examining how these identity factors influence the way in which students experience the classroom space, and how they privilege the voices of white, (western) European and native (or near-native) English speakers. Rather than disregarding discomfort, I envision this as an invitation for further action and an entry point for examining our habituated ideologies, thereby leaving behind "the shores of learned beliefs and habits", as highlighted in the opening quote by education studies scholar Megan Boler.

Although there are various forms and manifestations of discomfort, I focus on the uneasiness encountered by white bodies, who inhabit a privileged racial position, with whiteness affording us a certain comfort in academic spaces. Privilege, more generally, works and operates in various ways and contains multiple layers; however, for my analysis I examine the way in which race has been (and continues to be) silenced in academic spaces, and I therefore focus on white privilege more specifically. I refer to 'us' and 'our' when talking about positions of power in an attempt to interrogate my own complicity within these systems, rather than positioning myself

as disconnected from the issues being discussed. This situatedness is necessary to address and work through my own discomfort, as a means of not only theorising this but also attempting to engage with uncomfortable or unnerving emotions. However, it is not enough to simply acknowledge this implication, and recognising unequal power hierarchies should be a starting point for action rather than a means of closing the conversation.

From my experiences in academic discussions, I find it is often more comfortable to speak in the third person, separating myself from difficult topics, or to situate myself only when I am the one in a vulnerable position, as opposed to the position of power. By difficult topics, I mean those issues which challenge deep-seated and often subconscious beliefs, and which offer no simple solutions. Considering this, it is especially important to reframe myself in the research, examining my complicity and how this has been invisibilised in my own narratives of the classroom experience. Using first- and second-person pronouns, I also aim to include readers in this conversation, inviting those who assume similar positions of power to likewise interrogate their complicity in academic environments which continue to be dominated by white people. I present this as a form of calling out, unsettling the complacency which we tend to accept in academic environments, where we become accustomed to 'the way things are' without questioning why and how these conventions are both established and maintained.[15]

The presence and function of discomfort in the classroom has been increasingly discussed in literature on educational spaces and pedagogical practices (Boler 1999; Boler and Zembylas 2003; Sensoy and DiAngelo 2014; Wekker 2016). In these discussions, discomfort is reconceptualised as a pedagogical tool and something which requires us to re-examine our accepted belief systems and ways of thinking. Boler's work (1999) is especially important for my analysis, and I will use this as a starting point for understanding how we can use and work with discomfort in a potentially transformative way. I therefore apply the pedagogy of discomfort to my study of Gender Studies classrooms, asking how we can mobilise discomfort in order to challenge our complicity within power structures which enable the silencing of non-dominant voices. I also question what we mean by feminist teaching, and how we envision the feminist

[15] Notably, it is also important to critique 'calling out' culture, and I am wary of the way in which this action of bringing attention to behaviour deemed as problematic has served to ostracise people and divide groups. Keeping this in mind, I advocate for calling out which does not close the discussion or isolate people, but rather calls for reflection and highlights harmful rhetoric with the aim of working through and recognising complicity.

classroom space, focusing on our understanding of safe (or safer) spaces and the limitations of these spaces.

In this chapter, I begin by explaining my conceptualisation of discomforting emotions by discussing some of the scholarly work on discomfort and mobilising emotion. I also examine experiences of ambiguity, doubt and unproductive guilt in the classroom, positioning these supposedly negative responses as things worth interrogating and working through. Additionally, I argue for the importance of examining the roots of our discomfort so that we can learn from this and address that which makes us uneasy. I speak about activating and de-activating emotions, where activating emotions means mobilising these feelings to incite action and inspire movement, while de-activating emotions refers to a failure to act on our emotional responses.

Building on the theoretical discussion of discomforting pedagogies, I incorporate findings and observations from my interviews with students and lecturers in the GEMMA programme, reflecting on how they perceive discomfort, and what they see as the roles of uncomfortable emotions in the classroom. In the interviews I asked participants about their experience of discomfort in class, and I also raised the question of safe spaces, and what they see as the function of these spaces. Although my sample includes participants from different racial backgrounds, for this chapter, I focused more on the comments from white respondents, considering the position of power they inhabit in classes which are primarily made up of white students, and exploring how they approach the links between discomfort and internalised beliefs. However, I did not specifically mention race or particular identity factors, and rather left this as open-ended to see how discomfort would be understood. In this way, I also explore what is intentionally invisibilised or left unsaid. This intentionality is central in my discussion, as I argue that it is a conscious choice to avoid discomfort, and I contest the claims of innocence whereby we position ourselves as victims rather than collaborators within an unequal education system. Taking this into consideration, I call for us to be intentional in our approaches, paying attention to affects and effects, and openly addressing our internalised investments and intentions, even when this causes discomfort – or especially when this causes discomfort.

2.1 A Pedagogy of Discomfort

Before analysing the potentially transformative uses of discomfort in academic spaces, it is necessary to first discuss what I mean or envision by discomfort, and how this has been conceived within theoretical texts. More specifically, I will analyse the pedagogy of discomfort, as theorised by Boler (1999) and expanded upon by other scholars (Zembylas and McGlynn 2012; Sensoy and DiAngelo 2014; Boler and Zembylas 2003). As mentioned in the epigraph to this chapter, Boler explains the pedagogy of discomfort as a call to action for both students and educators, and an invitation to move away from that which is familiar or comfortable (1999, 181). She observes how our habits and beliefs have been hardened over time and are perceived as part of the very fabric of our being. Due to this internalisation, when these ways of being are challenged, this commonly produces a sense of fear, defensiveness and uncertainty linked to the assumed threat this poses to personal and cultural identities (Boler 1999, 192).

This discomfort (and its manifestations) can be perceived when whiteness is challenged in academic spaces as well as beyond this, since beliefs and conceptions of race have been ingrained into our understandings of identity (despite claims against this or of "not seeing race"). Consequently, questioning whiteness is seen as a threat to precarious white identity. However, through a pedagogy of discomfort, Boler sees the possibility of breaking rigid habits and embracing the uneasiness and uncertainty which accompanies a disruption of the self (1999, 192). Additionally, a pedagogy of discomfort requires a constant questioning of what we do not want to know or are trying to protect ourselves from seeing (Boler 1999, 199). This is a particularly challenging task as it requires that we rupture emotional investments and delve into certain aspects of ourselves we would prefer to conceal (for example, internalised racism).

Following this, Boler speaks about being attentive to the "forces raging within us" (1999, 177) and she encourages us to interrogate our emotions in the pursuit of new possibilities or alternative ways of being. In doing this, we must pay attention to our instinctual responses, and we are encouraged to listen and learn from these responses, rather than trying to defend or justify our positions without introspective analysis. As I will argue in this chapter, it is by creating disturbance and unsettling our understandings that systems of power can be steadily dismantled.

Another important aspect of Boler's pedagogy of discomfort is her focus on co-constitution, and she emphasises the importance of understanding emotions and actions as being "collaboratively co-implicated" (1999, 187). In conceptualising discomfort as something which is collectively constituted, Boler attempts to challenge Western ideas of liberal individualism (1999, 177). This is something which I critique throughout this thesis, considering how neoliberalism encourages this focus on individual capability as opposed to collective possibilities. More specifically, Boler criticises the reduction of earnest inquiry into something individual or a form of "liberal navel-gazing" (1999, 177). In this sense, a focus on the self (as distinct from one's community and surroundings) neglects collective accountability, failing to recognise the historical and material situatedness of every individual.

For example, in terms of language, it is necessary to think about colonial practices which established English as a dominant language, and to recognise the violence which accompanied this, as well as the ways in which English proficiency continues to be positioned as a measure of academic competence. Evidently, by questioning our own use of language in the classroom, but not considering the ongoing colonial implications or how we can collectively reposition our approach, this reflection acts as a cover for any real action. Boler examines these risks of superficial self-reflection, where self-critique is employed as a kind of confession, supposedly absolving us from any wrongdoing or offence, while resulting in no real changes to action or constructions of the self (1999, 178). Instead of working through the structural roots of the problem, this confessional narrative therefore diverts attention from the deeper issues and the discussion remains on a surface level.

This criticism can be linked to a further exploration and critique of the practice of self-reflection in academia. For my analysis, it is particularly relevant to question self-reflection as a method of inquiry within Gender Studies classes. As I have noted in the previous chapter, identifying one's own positionality and reflecting upon this is seen as central to Gender Studies practices. However, connecting this to Boler's critique, there are evidently risks of inaction which come with self-reflection, and this will not necessarily lead to genuine transformation or a disruption of power systems. Consequently, discomfort provides new ways of relating to self-reflection, where this can be re-envisioned as something more disruptive, political and contextual. In terms of Gender Studies classrooms, this potentially transformative role of discomfort is especially important, as these environments should (ideally) be closely connected to the aims of

disrupting and challenging power structures. This idea was expanded upon in my interview with Linda,[16] a senior lecturer with long-term experience in Gender Studies classrooms. Below is an excerpt from the interview:

> I think classes are wonderful spaces where you can try out things, you can bring your anger or your insecurity or your anxiety or your discomfort. And Gender Studies has this political edge, it offers a place for people to turn their anger and discomfort into something other than a personal problem. And to talk about it, write about it, if they feel like it.

As noted in this quote, there is space to experiment and try things, and the classroom should not prescribe one isolated way of learning or interacting. It is also important to recognise that these uncomfortable emotions, such as discomfort and anger, are not simply personal problems, but are instead structural and collective issues, which can be addressed within communal environments. Additionally, as Linda observes, we carry these emotions with us (bringing them to class), and there is therefore space to work with them rather than disregarding their existence. Working with discomfort can involve talking about it, writing about it and attending to its manifestations, and this remains an open-ended task. However, while the above quotation mentions that we should speak about discomfort "if [we] feel like it", I contend that this should also be debated and examined when we do not feel like it, and that it is at these instances of resistance that discussion is especially necessary.

Although the focus of this chapter is on discomfort, it is also useful to look at how the students' and teachers' emotional responses are discussed and positioned in general within academic spaces. This broader analysis provides a further understanding of how emotions can be mobilised within educational settings, as well as the potential limitations which accompany the activation of emotions. As noted by critical literacy and education scholars Cynthia Lewis and Jessica Dockter Tierney (2013) – whose work focuses on classroom spaces – in academic environments emotion is commonly treated as something which needs to be managed or controlled, and only certain emotions (e.g. empathy or enthusiasm) are positioned as suitable, while others (e.g. anger) are viewed as unwelcome (2013, 290). I am particularly interested in

---

[16] This is not the participant's real name, as pseudonyms have been used to keep the identities anonymous. Most of these names have been chosen by the participants themselves, and they also expressed which pronouns they wanted to be used when they are mentioned in the analysis.

looking at the unwelcome or 'uncomfortable' emotions, and I would like to further challenge the dismissal of these emotions within educational spaces.

Although Lewis and Tierney focus on the regulation of emotion in a specific school classroom, their analysis offers useful insights into how emotions can be engaged with and activated. Specifically, they argue that emotion is not something which an individual possesses, but rather something that is circulated (Lewis and Tierney 2013, 291). Lewis and Tierney also note that it is in this process of circulation that new identities are formed and moulded, and that they assume different meanings depending on the place and time (2013, 293). In this way, emotion is connected to action and is seen to be produced through interaction, linking to Boler's understanding of discomfort as being co-constituted. If this is produced through contact and negotiation, there is evidently a possibility to reform and challenge.

Similarly, Sara Ahmed discusses the movement of emotions between bodies, and she notes that emotions can both make and shape identities (2004, 4). This understanding is central to my analysis, and also highlights the possibility of using emotions to reshape our beliefs and habits. Taking this power of emotionality into account, it is possible to see discomfort as something with transformative potential. Ahmed also emphasises the connection between emotions and power, and she points out that emotions are political and have political implications in how they shape both individual and collective worlds (2004, 12). Evidently, how we approach and deal with discomfort is closely linked to relations of power, and discomfort cannot be separated from the power structures which both produce and inform it.

Considering the changing and shifting nature of emotions, discomfort is experienced in differing and sometimes contradictory ways. Consequently, I do not intend to offer a set outline or prescriptive method of engaging with emotions, but instead call for us to embrace discomfort in its various manifestations. However, I would like to make a distinction between the discomfort which is experienced when privilege is confronted (i.e. when a person's comfort is threatened) versus discomfort experienced when subjected to discrimination or violence based on belonging to a marginalised group (or groups). For this analysis, I focus on the former experience of discomfort, exploring how discomfort can be used to challenge privilege, interrogating internalised racism and systems of power. Notably, privilege works and operates in various ways (containing multiple layers), and it is important to keep these interrelations in mind, while also

resisting claims of innocence whereby we position ourselves as existing outside of racist and hierarchical structures.

When highlighting the importance of employing a pedagogy of discomfort, we can also discuss what there is to gain from this approach, emphasising both structural and personal benefits. This is not to say that we should only adopt alternative approaches for personal gain, but rather to acknowledge that confronting our internalised belief systems (and what is left unseen) will simultaneously liberate us from our own entrapment. As noted by Paulo Freire (1970, 58), "Once a situation of violence and oppression has been established, it engenders an entire way of life and behavior for those caught up in it – oppressors and oppressed alike." Evidently, by contesting our complicity in these systems, we can confront our own marks of oppression, recognising how these have also confined those (of us) in dominant positions, prescribing our actions and behaviour.

Examining what we stand to gain, Boler cites and builds on feminist writer Minnie Bruce Pratt's ideas on how we all benefit from working with discomfort and interrogating deep-seated belief systems (1999, 178). Notably, she highlights three main gains: firstly, we will acquire a more multi-layered and complex outlook on the world; secondly, this will enable us to move beyond fear (i.e. the fear of confronting our hardened beliefs, and fear of the unknown or unfamiliar); and thirdly, we can remove the distance between ourselves and others, opening up new possibilities for interacting with and learning from each other. These proposed gains emphasise interconnectedness and community, contesting the individualistic culture which is commonly promoted within (neoliberal) academic spaces, and in this way, by working with our discomfort and questioning ourselves, we can encourage more collaborative approaches to education. Evidently, holding onto hardened beliefs limits our opportunities for connecting and being with others in the world, and even if this lack of connection and openness is not recognised, it continues to affect us. Expanding on this, it is therefore useful to embrace the messiness that comes with interrogating the self, as I will discuss below.

2.2 Embracing Ambiguity

A pedagogy of discomfort also involves learning to embrace and live with ambiguity. This engagement with ambiguity is especially highlighted by Boler, who argues that in order to see things differently we need to "[learn] to inhabit a morally ambiguous self" (1999, 182). This process of learning to live with ambiguity includes working with discomfort and recognising that our identities are constantly in movement, and therefore cannot be simplified. Importantly, ambiguity resists containment and refuses to provide easy answers to complex social issues (e.g. the issue of Eurocentric knowledge systems being privileged in university spaces). This ambiguity is necessarily unsettling and produces uncertainty. However, rather than seeing this as something to be fixed or resettled, I argue that uncertainty is essential for challenging complacency in academia. Becoming comfortable or settled in a space often brings a form of acceptance, where we accept 'the way things are', losing our will for resistance or change, especially considering that this change could challenge our position of comfort by disrupting the structures which privilege white, Eurocentric knowledge systems.

Doubt is another personal response which is worth analysing, and there is a need to constantly question ourselves and the cost of our comfort, or more specifically, to ask whose voices continue to be excluded through maintenance of the status quo. Through doubt we leave space to learn from others and we remove ourselves from the position of all-knowing, rather admitting that we are a work in progress and our identities are open to being remoulded. Connecting to Freire's work on the pedagogy of the oppressed (1970), he emphasises the danger of both rightist and leftist thinking which maintains that there is only one way of seeing, and which holds onto a set truth. He therefore warns against the "circles of certainty" where we become rigid in our beliefs and react defensively at the suggestion of alternative possibilities (1970, 39). To counteract this rigidity, uncertainty and inquiry therefore become central.

Applying this to the Gender Studies classroom, there is a similar risk of leftist or feminist thinking becoming fortified and assuming that there is one 'correct' outlook and way of expressing ourselves, without leaving room to question this. According to journalist Marcio Moreira Alves (cited in Freire 1970, 39), when we refuse to see other possibilities we then "suffer from the absence of doubt". Considering this, doubt is evidently another emotional response to which we should pay attention, remaining open to new ways of seeing and refusing to simplify our beliefs into a singular or overarching experience. This potential function of

uncertainty was brought up by Janine, another interview participant who comes from a European background, and her response is recorded below:

> I usually feel quite comfortable in classes, classroom discussions. And then there was this one class where I said something, which I now see was pretty problematic, but at the time I thought this was fine. And then one of my classmates called me out on it. And I remember being upset, thinking it was not necessary, that she didn't know. But it made me question myself the next time. And I started to think more, more carefully. And this was, now I see, this was good. It was good to be less sure.

Considering Janine's experience of doubt as a tool for critical reflection, it is possible to reposition this uncertainty (or being "less sure") as something which is needed, and as a means of unsettling dominant narratives. It is also evident that coming to accept and work with doubt can be a process, and we may encounter an initial defensiveness or a wish to maintain a sense of certainty and belief in our own views as being 'correct'. This is also seen through Janine's experience, where she recalls being initially dismissive of her classmate's comment, maintaining a belief in her own certainty. However, upon further reflection, and through working with her doubt, she comes to acknowledge that what she said was "pretty problematic" and that it is necessary to rethink her own beliefs and to use doubt to induce more critical engagement.

Learning to embrace doubt and ambiguity is also a central part of decolonial work, and this can be connected to the decolonial approach of unsettling dominant narratives and dismantling hierarchical structures (which are commonly built on foundations of certainty or a belief in overall truths). Significantly, the task of decolonising the university does not offer finality or a coherent outcome, but instead opens the space to variability and change. As noted by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang (2012, 3), the process of decolonising should continue to destabilise and create discomfort, for, as they maintain, "solidarity is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict." Following this, uncertainty and ambiguity clearly play an important role in rethinking education systems, and our aim should not be to simply solve a problem, but instead to envision new possibilities which are continuously evolving.

2.3 Unproductive Guilt

Connecting to questions of innocence, guilt and distancing, I next examine the concept of unproductive guilt, exploring how a pedagogy of discomfort can offer alternatives to de-activating emotions. According to Boler, unproductive guilt can be seen when we 'accept' our positions of guilt regarding our privilege and involvement in an unequal system, and consequently stop engaging in discussion or further inquiry into this positioning (1999, 186). Boler refers specifically to the unproductive guilt expressed by white students when it comes to addressing racist histories and ongoing racial discrimination. The admission of guilt, as with individualised self-reflection, is seen as an absolution and a means of avoiding rather than undertaking accountability. In this way, unproductive guilt can be viewed as a de-activating emotion, which fails to incite action and instead enables our complacency and a lack of engagement.

In my experiences within Gender Studies classes, the issue of guilt and feeling guilty is something which is often brought up by (us) white students. This is commonly accompanied by an acknowledgement of privilege or positionality, and it is followed by the question of what to do with this guilt. Ironically, professing guilt is often used as a 'move to innocence' (as described by Tuck and Yang (2012, 3) or an insinuation of being 'less guilty', separating oneself from those who have not acknowledged their guilt. While it may be well-meaning, I have found that this conversation more often serves to close a discussion rather than to open one. Considering this, assertions of guilt remain unproductive if they are not followed by action, using our positions of privilege to unsettle and disrupt the power structures from which we benefit. Building on this conversation, I turn to an experience described by Gala, one of my student respondents, as seen below:

> We had a problem with one person in this one class. She was presenting along with two other students. So each of them had to present for maybe five minutes. And she spoke for almost twenty, only herself. And yeah, it was super problematic.
>
> And then afterwards she confessed in another class that she has this problem of talking too much, and she can feel guilty for a week about it. In this case maybe it's related to privilege, and also to other circumstances, but still in the end it is space which is taken away.

This encounter presents an example of unproductive guilt, where the student in question professed feeling guilty about speaking too much in class, but she did not follow this with action and continued to take up space. Evidently, there is a disconnect between the self-presentation (as someone who recognises their guilt and privilege) and the experience Gala had with this student. Following this, the statement of guilt acts as a form of confession, but it does not translate into a genuine commitment to change, and therefore remains as empty rhetoric. Countering this, there is a need to work with our guilt, moving toward activating our emotions and reconstituting the self. Boler also speaks about this need for genuine action, and she maintains that we cannot let ourselves "off the hook" and must take responsibility for our guilt, following this with the necessary work (1999, 187). My argument, therefore, is not that guilt should be dismissed in academic settings, but rather that it is possible to reposition our approach to feelings of discomfort, including guilt, in order to transform these from unproductive to productive emotions.

2.4 Questioning Safe Spaces

When looking at how to reposition discomfort and unease in academia, specifically within Gender Studies, it is crucial to ask whether university classes should be safe spaces, and how safety is understood in the classroom space. This is a topic which has been debated, theorised and disputed by numerous scholars (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2014; Quinan 2016; Redmond 2010; Stengel and Weems 2010; Bryson and de Castell 1993). Building on this work, and exploring the responses from my interview participants, I therefore question what constitutes a safe space, and for whom this is reserved, as well as the positives and negatives of assigning an academic space as being 'safe'. I also analyse the place and role of discomfort within this 'safe' environment. I do not claim to offer an entirely new or different approach to the concept of safe space, but rather to continue the conversation and to raise the question of how we – as students and educators – relate to these spaces, thinking about the kind of classroom space we envision and desire.

While questioning this, I not only ask what we understand by safety, or what it means to be safe, but also what we understand by a space, inquiring where this space begins and ends, or if it ends. Additionally, I contest the idea of academic spaces being restricted to a single area or

environment, and I argue that what happens inside and outside of the classroom is closely entwined and cannot be separated. Considering this, if the wider spaces (e.g. the university space in general, public spaces, community areas, residential spaces) are unsafe or continue to reinforce prejudices and to marginalise non-dominant groups, how does this translate into the individual Gender Studies classroom?

One of the main reasons for creating safe spaces in academia is that they allow for students to speak openly and honestly without fearing discrimination or harassment. Especially in a discipline such as Gender Studies, which deals with a range of complex social issues, openness and consideration are central. These spaces are also intended as places of refuge for those who are marginalised and excluded in other areas, and Gender Studies, originally Women's Studies, emerged from "a need for safe spaces in heteronormative male-centered academic institutions" (Quinan 2016, 362). For example, from its inception, Gender Studies has provided important spaces for countering the recurrent exclusion and devaluation of women's[17] voices in academic environments.[18] Additionally, through an attentiveness to the students' feelings and their wishes for the classroom space, Gender Studies holds the potential to produce alternative ways of relating to one another within these environments. Drawing on the interview response from Alice, a student with a background in activism and NGO work, it is possible to see the potential value of working toward safe spaces:

> In the class there was this moment where [the teacher] told us, okay, before we start the lesson, let's share not only who we are in terms of names or so on, but let's try to say also what we would like to find in a space which is told as a safe space. And also the way we would like to be addressed by the other people. So they were really attentive to how we feel and how we want to feel inside this space. And that's something I have found in some feminist and activist groups before, but I didn't expect this kind of care inside a school, an institution. So I was really amazed by that and happy.

Considering Alice's experience, it is evident that there is a need for more subversive spaces which break from heteronormative and patriarchal academic traditions, and which are invested

---

[17] This is only one example, and I do not mean to limit this experience to a fixed category of women (typically understood as cisgendered women), as it is evident that the voices of trans women and men, non-binary people and all those who do not fit the normative category of 'man' have been and continue to be undermined and silenced in academic spaces.

[18] For 'proof' of this exclusion, see, for instance, the Twitter account "Congrats, you have an all male panel" which records panels, seminars and other academic events featuring only men as the 'experts'.

in the creation of more inclusive and welcoming arrangements. As seen through Alice's comments, care and consideration are not generally expected within academic institutions, but when they are incorporated this can enable new possibilities and can have a notable impact (e.g. producing the joy and wonderment expressed by Alice). Following this, in an article on safe space (2016), Christine Quinan questions how we can approach the complexities which arise when we discuss the concept of safe space, considering the need for classes which are eye-opening, confrontational and critical, while also recognising the importance of spaces which offer a form of comfort and acceptance in the face of "the world 'out there' [that] is indeed violent and unsafe" (2016, 363). Consequently, I argue that it is still important to strive toward some degree of safety and comfort, while simultaneously continuing to challenge dominant narratives.

Considering the risk of safe spaces reinforcing silences and power hierarchies, despite the intended egalitarianism, it is necessary to question how issues of power and privilege are similarly enacted within this environment. Accordingly, I am interested in who feels most comfortable speaking and who remains silent, and more specifically, how whiteness continues to be dominant in classroom spaces, where the voices and opinions of (us) white students are commonly the most vociferous. Relating to Gender Studies classrooms, Gloria Wekker speaks about her own experiences in these spaces, noting that there is a frequent lack of engagement around race, where issues relating to race and ethnicity are often ignored or silenced, and whiteness therefore remains foregrounded (2016, 77). Following on from this, I question how hierarchies of power therefore determine who is able to feel safe or protected in the Gender Studies classroom, and how we each perpetuate the ongoing inequalities. As noted by Boler, it is evident that "All speech is not free or equal, for institutionalised inequities in power ensure that not all voices carry the same weight" (2004, cited in Sensoy and DiAngelo 2014, 7).

Additionally, education and critical discourse scholars Özlem Sensoy and Robin DiAngelo address these issues in their analysis of common guidelines in social justice education, and they argue that by presenting "common guidelines" for creating safe spaces, there is a risk that these will reproduce the very power relations they intend to address (2014, 2). For example, they present a scenario where a student makes a homophobic comment stating that she disagrees with the "lifestyle choice" made by queer-identifying individuals (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2014, 3). In this case, if the comment is ignored or simply recognised as someone's individual opinion, the power

structures which position heterosexuality as the norm remain unchallenged, and queer-identifying students in the class are subjected to further discrimination and silencing. In an attempt to respect all viewpoints and avoid confrontation, the dominant voices are therefore reinforced and rather than creating a safe or open environment, relations of power are further institutionalised (Sensoy and DiAngelo 2014, 4). Similarly, when discussing race, if racism is left unchecked in an attempt to "hear all sides" or to let everyone voice their opinion, whiteness is again reinforced as dominant within the classroom space.

During the interview process, I spoke to participants about safe spaces, asking for their interpretation of what it means to be safe in the classroom environment. In general, I found that there were certain common ideas about the components of a safe space. For example, that everyone should have space to talk, that we should leave space for other people, and that we should respect one another. However, I also found that most participants were uncertain about the appearance or functioning of these safe spaces, and although they generally agreed that safety is important, they remained unsure about the feasibility of this. For example, one of my student respondents, Kamryn, questioned what we mean by a 'safe space' and whether it is possible for us to feel safe while existing within academic environments which are built upon unequal power structures. More specifically, she commented that "in the end, we cannot forget this is an institution and the power differences are there". Additionally, a few of the participants referred to creating "safer spaces" as opposed to safe spaces. Similarly, Mary Bryson and Suzanne de Castell's work on queer pedagogies (1993) considers the idea of a "safer pedagogy" which provides new possibilities for students and teachers, allowing for "the construction of, and participation in, democratic, engaging, pleasurable, interesting, generative, and non-violent learning environments" (1993, 299). Bryson and de Castell note that it can be an immense and intimidating task, but this should not stop us from beginning to envision and enact it.

This question of how to create safer spaces, while continuing to unsettle and disrupt, is an important one to ask and can open a further conversation on rethinking space and reconceptualising our understandings of safety. The following response from Talia, another student I interviewed, brings together some of these issues:

> We need to think what we would like to find in a space which is safe, or safe enough. But also, we need to call out other people, and ourselves. We need to be really attentive

> to how we feel, like, to what this says, and then where we go from here. So let's think about this together.

Notably, in the above quote, Talia highlights the importance of self-critique and a deeper analysis of our own complicity, calling for further interrogation. She also urges us (those involved in educational structures) to "think about this together", connecting again to the need for collective arrangements. In this way, there is a recognition that each of us is implicated within institutional hierarchies, and we should not frame classroom exclusions and discrimination as an individual problem, but rather as something for which we are collectively responsible. I therefore contend that while respect and consideration are important in academic spaces, there is a need to call out privilege, to set boundaries, and to openly discuss issues which have been deemed as uncomfortable. This discussion of 'uncomfortable' topics is the only way in which constructed silences can be broken, and spaces can be repositioned as safe for everyone, not only a privileged few (of us). Taking this into account, it is crucial to confront dominant narratives and to highlight discomfort as central to our pedagogical approaches, searching for teaching strategies which embrace a pedagogy of discomfort, as opposed to shying away from this.

While there was limited consensus on how a safe space would look, participants did speak about certain teaching approaches which generated a feeling of comfort or safety in the classroom (although, as this chapter has argued, this is not always a good thing, and sometimes discomforting spaces can be more constructive). In addition, the lecturers I interviewed also offered valuable insights on this, considering the role of the teacher in constructing and moderating the space. Both lecturers mentioned the potential usefulness of discomfort in the class, and this is evidently a topic which has been centred in discussions on teaching practices within Gender Studies. The following quote from Eleanor, one of the lecturers I interviewed, demonstrates a further questioning of safe space, and indicates how discomfort fits into this:

> While I want to create a safe space – I really want to create that – this safe space needs for me that people…that we feel uncomfortable sometimes, and that we are sharing also what we don't know, and that we do not hide behind a certain façade. And that this means we have to expose things.

This comment makes an important reference to interrogating and questioning ourselves, allowing for discomfort in this process. It also raises the question of what we are hiding from

ourselves, or choosing not to talk about, and how we can bring this to the surface. I therefore want to highlight the need to expose our cultivated beliefs, and to undertake an ongoing process of discovery (of the self and in relation to others). As Boler notes "The first sign of the success of a pedagogy of discomfort is, quite simply, the ability to recognize what it is that one doesn't want to know" (1999, 199). Using this, a (successful) pedagogy of discomfort enables us to break down facades and to question our ambiguous and contradictory selves, without attempting to simplify or reconcile this.

Building on Eleanor's response above, the students I interviewed also spoke about ways to make classroom environments somewhat safer, and strategies for negotiating the space. Participants reflected on some of the classes they had which effectively set up a space for inquiry and more in-depth reflection. For example, Kamryn spoke about a class where there was a debriefing session at the end of the lesson, where each student had a chance to speak about some of the issues which had come up during the discussion. This reflection time, according to Kamryn, allowed for the class to not only think about their own involvement, but also to question the whole classroom environment, and to consider their collective accountability for the space. In this way, it became possible to engage with discomfort, and to address this as a group. Additionally, Kamryn stated that by asking students for their feedback, they felt like their contributions were valuable, and that they were seen as active participants. Another strategy which was viewed as effective (or necessary) was lecturer intervention or moderation of the space and time, as noted by Alex – another student respondent – in the quotation below:

> We have one teacher that is very good at moderating. She just knows how to interrupt in a very nice way. She knows how to say the things in a very assertive and empathetic way. So no-one really feels attacked. And she knows how to interrupt and ask someone else.

This issue of monitoring the space was something which was raised in several interviews, and there was an agreement that while classrooms should be open spaces for discussion, there is also a need to intervene when dominant voices start to take over. For Alex, good moderation therefore involves interruption and disruption, while remaining assertive and empathetic. While I agree with the need for intervention which does not isolate, I am also wary of moderation which is overly consolatory, as this may serve to placate rather than to disrupt. This again raises the question of how we can both open the space for discussion – bringing deep-seated

beliefs to the fore – while also contesting problematic viewpoints and restricting the space given to dominant narratives. I do not offer a simple answer to this, although I do maintain that intervention is crucial. Following this, it remains necessary to further interrogate how we can intervene and encourage the mobilisation of discomfort in a way which continues to unsettle and initiates movement.

Conclusions

Evidently, there is a need to both acknowledge and confront discomfort around race in academic spaces. Through challenging our feelings of guilt and discomfort, certain silences can be broken, and internal prejudices can be destabilised. Rather than ignoring or silencing discomfort, we should therefore use this as a means to identify and disrupt our learned habits and beliefs. In this chapter, I have analysed scholarly work on discomforting emotions and also examined some of the responses from my interview participants, exploring the potential to reposition discomfort as something productive and transformative. Building on Boler's pedagogy of discomfort (1999), I have similarly highlighted the importance of collectively accepting ambiguity and discomfort, repositioning 'uncomfortable' emotional responses as a starting point for unsettling systems of power.

Additionally, I have questioned the designation of safe spaces in academia, highlighting the need to address supposedly uncomfortable topics and for privilege (specifically whiteness) to be interrogated in these spaces. Through a focus on the ways in which discomfort functions in the field of Gender Studies, my aim has been to interrogate the workings of complicity and complacency in academic spaces. Considering this discussion, I contend that it is necessary to further question our complex, entangled histories and to embrace discomfort in order to constantly realign and challenge our habits, values and beliefs. By doing this, we can move past the rhetoric of intentionality and instead expose what has been left unseen, bringing our own fallibility into view and proceeding toward action.

Chapter 3

Creative Pedagogies: Forging Alternative Spaces

Introduction

This class is a dance.
We learn by joining the circle
even when we don't know the steps.
You should expect
to slip
to fall
to bump into each other.
That's how you learn, after all.

- Ramona Beltrán, *Teaching Philosophy (or First Day of Class)*

The question of where and how we learn and unlearn is one which runs through my research, followed by the question of how we can break from conventional structures and how to do education differently. When thinking about new ways of learning and sharing knowledge, innovation and creativity are central, and it is through experimenting and trying different approaches that we challenge existing models of education. As noted in the opening poem, we learn by slipping, falling and bumping into one another, and it is only by joining the conversation (or becoming part of the circle) that we can initiate this process. In order to do this, there is a need for interaction and collective thinking, and it is useful to draw on current innovative strategies and approaches. Notably, there is an expanding scholarship on new ways and methods of teaching, offering alternatives to traditional teacher-student hierarchies, fixed classroom spaces and the growing neoliberal structuring of education (Benade, Bertelsen and Lewis 2017; Mbembe 2016; Norlander 2014; Parker, Smith and Dennison 2017; Vergès 2019; Wells, Jackson and Benade 2017).

In this chapter, I bring the existing scholarship into conversation, examining different pedagogical approaches which have been used in various settings and locations, and simultaneously questioning the potential and limitations which accompany them. While analysing

texts on alternative pedagogies, I incorporate findings from my interviews, connecting different ideas and questioning which teaching methods and classroom settings were perceived as transformative, as well as which structures continue to stifle creativity. I also build on the theoretical framework from Chapter 1, revisiting some of the discussions which were raised, and relating these to the experiences and observations made by my research participants.

More specifically, the chapter is divided into four main sections, with each section raising new questions about how we can forge alternative spaces which enable creativity, collaboration, disruption, experimentation and movement. I begin by questioning different styles and ways of learning, asking how we can keep up with changing learning environments (considering, for example, links between theory and practice). In the following section, I explore the role of excitement in the classroom space, examining approaches to combatting conformity in educational settings. Subsequently, in the third section I discuss strategies for co-creational education, questioning ways to enable more collaborative and less hierarchical classroom relations. Lastly, I interrogate the obstacles to creative pedagogies, considering the effects of neoliberalism, and I also analyse some of the teaching strategies which have worked and not worked, according to my research participants. What connects these sections is the recurring question of how we can enact a feminist and decolonial pedagogy, and whether this is possible from within the existing institutional structures.

3.1 Spaces of Learning

When trying to understand what we mean by space, and learning spaces, it is important to question where we learn and how these spaces interact, or how we interact within and beyond these spaces. I conceptualise learning spaces as sites where we actively engage with knowledge and participate in knowledge production, encountering different ideas and employing critical thinking. I see these places as flexible, constantly shifting, and not confined to a single location, concurring with the discussion on unprogrammed spaces by Alastair Wells, Mark Jackson and Leon Benade (2017). More specifically, Wells, Jackson and Benade argue that we should deconstruct our idea of the classroom as a cohesive and coherent arrangement (2017, 5). By letting go of the current conceptions of how teaching environments should look, we also leave space for experimentation and reshaping our relationship with the classroom. Learning evidently

takes place in multiple settings, happening both in and outside of the formal educational space, and this means that our approaches to educational change should always be premised on this multiplicity. As noted by Benade, Bertelsen and Lewis (2017, 37), "The relationship between learners, teachers, various learning professionals, content, facilities and technologies, all contribute to constituting a learning environment". Despite my focus on the classroom, this conversation is therefore extended to various spaces of learning, considering how these interact and inform our thinking.

If we position learning as an ongoing, co-produced and flexible practice, this remains open to change and reshaping, and is therefore accompanied by a new set of possibilities. For example, we can contest common understandings of who produces and who receives knowledge. In this way, it is possible to disrupt binary distinctions between teacher and student, or producer and receiver, and to recognise that "Knowledge does not reside with teachers alone" (Benade, Bertelsen and Lewis 2017, 37).[19] In doing this, we are all positioned as both knowing and unknowing subjects, leaving space to teach and learn from one another.

Through interactions with different spaces and places of learning, approaches can also be personalised, and learning can be adapted for varying contexts and needs, challenging the one-size-fits-all model (Benade, Bertelsen and Lewis 2017, 37). However, this requires a certain openness, and it becomes necessary to question teaching and learning styles in order to keep up with rapidly changing learning environments, and to rediscover the potential of the classroom space. When considering these modern spaces of learning, we can also question ways of integrating these spaces, combining our learning practices with new technologies, connecting spaces and events, and bringing practice and theory into conversation.

In my research, and the interview analyses, I am particularly interested in the creation of learning communities, and more specifically, how or if this has taken form and been enabled through the GEMMA programme. In his article "Spaces and Places for School-Related Learning" (2014), Peter Norlander, an upper secondary school teacher, poses the question of where school-related learning takes place, and who or what is involved in the learning process (e.g.

---

[19] This does not mean that these distinctions are irrelevant, and I still maintain that the teacher plays an important role in the classroom, encouraging students to think more critically and referring them to different sources, arguments and understandings. However, it is also useful to contest the idea of one knowing subject, and multiple unknowing receivers, and therefore to acknowledge that learning is not a one-way or top-down process.

teachers, students, technologies, libraries, search engines). This is something I raised when conducting my interviews, asking participants which spaces they found most conducive to learning, and how they experienced different learning environments. Notably, almost all the participants mentioned the role of friendships and interpersonal connections (forged in the classroom, and then moving beyond this) as a central part of the learning process, enabling critical thinking and an exchange of ideas. For example, this was expressed in the following comments by Gala:

> I made very good friendships [in the programme], and I learnt a lot from my classmates. And that, I think, is also a teaching methodology. It's like an elective teaching methodology out of academic space, but within academia. And this was, interpersonally speaking, super healing, constructive and beautiful in many ways. We exchanged a lot of materials, I became aware of a lot of materials that I was not even, that I couldn't even imagine existed.

What is particularly notable in this reflection is the reference to friendship and interpersonal connections as a teaching methodology, which operates both inside and outside of academic space. This methodology is also referred to as something elective, which students can decide on and negotiate themselves, with no prescribed ways of approaching the space or expectations of how to engage. Additionally, Gala describes this as also being "within academia", offering a different conception of academia which is not confined to one setting, but can extend to various places of learning. Following this, they also make a distinction between academic space and academia, positioning these as separate yet interrelated. This framing enables a reshaping of what we understand as learning environments, and it also offers a form of resistance against institutional structures (and accordingly, neoliberal forces) which commonly dictate what counts as academic knowledge or spaces of knowledge production.

Considering the role of friendship and allyship in learning processes, it is also important to highlight the possibilities these relations offer for creating new ways of thinking and relating to the world around us. As noted by Hunt and Holmes (2015, 156), this methodology of allyship involves "relational knowledge production, conversation, dialogue, and personal storytelling", which can be simultaneously enriching and challenging. Allyship therefore incorporates listening, learning from each other, and being willing to engage in in-depth discussion, and I view this as an important foundation for friendship. It is therefore possible to understand allyship and friendship as being closely connected. Gala also refers to these personal

connections as both healing and constructive, enabling a valuable space for exchange and reciprocal learning. In addition, other participants spoke about "communities" and "networks" formed between students, citing these as spaces for processing thoughts and working through issues, especially those that they felt could not be brought up in class (whether this was because their ideas were not fully formed, or due to a fear of judgement).

This creation of a support network and learning community was viewed as especially important within the GEMMA programme, which consists of many international students who are adjusting not only to living in a completely new environment, but also to encountering unfamiliar education systems and different approaches to knowledge production. As noted by Dela, a student respondent coming from outside of Europe, in her home country she was not used to talking in the classroom, or to personally engaging with lecturers, and this made her more reluctant to speak out in class. For example, Dela commented that it feels strange to see students being friendly and joking with the teachers because for her "back home that is not a thing, you don't do that". She also mentioned that this made her feel as if she sometimes did not fit in the classroom space, since she did not have the same confidence and sense of ease other students had when interacting with the teachers. Considering this, conversations outside of the classroom become crucial for Dela as a means of working through issues brought up in the readings and class discussions.

Moreover, Janine highlighted how the international nature of the programme brought opportunities for incorporating different ideas and materials from a range of backgrounds, thereby engaging with perspectives which are often silenced or marginalised in academic canons. However, it was also observed that this incorporation of different materials was not always utilised in the classroom space, and while some lecturers welcomed alternative sources, others remained wary of including sources which were unknown or brought up issues with which they were unfamiliar.

The exchange of materials between students, as mentioned above, also creates an interplay between academic space and the 'outside world', as these sources, and the conversations they inspire, move beyond the classroom and can take on different functions. Considering this, while the discovery of new learning materials can stem from academic environments, their potential to transform everyday (inter)actions enables a movement beyond demarcated space. This also raises the question of connections between theory and practice, and how we can encourage a

further reciprocity between these. Some of these issues are raised in the following response from Eleanor, a lecturer with experience in various academic fields:

> One of my principles is that theory is a practice. So for me, the questions that we're asking [in class] are so much related to every single political question we are discussing at home. Things that we see on the street. Or things that we have experienced because we all come from different places. I want to create a space here in which you really can think through what has happened, or what is happening to you. Because we don't do that anymore in our lives. We kind of run through many different activities and run through everything that we feel like we have to solve. But actually…that practice is not very well practised. And that's what I think theory does. I think thought is a very exhausting practice, and it is not standing still.

This conceptualisation of theory and practice – and how they inform each other – offers a connection between different learning environments, highlighting how learning is ongoing, fluid and occurs in multiple spaces. Additionally, as noted by Eleanor, theory can be both political and transformative if we take the time to properly engage and work with the arguments at hand. This call to slow down and think through our experiences, in a way which enables critical self-reflection, is one which requires attention and a rethinking of how we understand and draw upon theory. However, this process of slowing down and taking time to engage with theory comes into contention with neoliberal tendencies in education, which highlight productivity and output over all else (Weber 2010, 128).

In light of this, literary scholars Maggie Berg and Barbara K. Seeber advocate for a Slow approach to learning and teaching, where we focus on fostering deeper thought and rediscovering the radical potential of theory (2013, 3).[20] They emphasise that Slow movement does not mean stopping or neglecting responsibilities, but rather encourages deliberation and reflection, and moves away from demanding immediate solutions. This approach can be incorporated in the classroom environments I speak of, where it is possible to use the space and time for a closer engagement with theory, thinking through how this relates to our everyday practices, and focusing on how or why we are there (here). Berg and Seeber's understanding of Slow movement evidently links to Eleanor's observations, where she notes

[20] When talking about this approach, Berg and Seeber capitalise the 'S' in Slow, distinguishing this as a movement (linked to a set of ideas), rather than just slowing down in a more general sense. I have therefore chosen to include the same capitalisation when talking about their theorisation.

that we are constantly "[running] through everything" and that we need to think more closely and carefully about what we want to achieve. Focusing on this, I maintain that by slowing down and becoming more attentive to what we are doing, we can also rediscover the pleasure and excitement in learning and in theory.

3.2 Inspiring Excitement in the Classroom

Excitement plays a central role in the learning process, inviting further engagement and motivating us to get involved in conversations both inside and outside of the classroom. This function of excitement or pleasure in the learning space is commonly overlooked, although it remains central to encouraging class participation and more animated engagement. It is through generating excitement that students become motivated to learn and to push this learning further, taking their knowledge beyond the classroom and continuing to work with this. Before delving into strategies for inspiring excitement, it is useful to question the barriers to classroom enthusiasm (in order to work against this) and to look at excitement's inverse – the "atmosphere of seriousness" which is commonly promoted in conventional learning environments (hooks 1994, 7). It is this heaviness which can leave students feeling demotivated and can create a sense of confinement in the classroom, as opposed to making this the liberatory and inspiring space envisioned by hooks (1994, 12).

Additionally, through routine and repetitiveness, the classroom can begin to feel constricting or inhibiting, where classroom activities remain the same and there is limited room for change or excitement. Without movement or variation in the class, the learning environment therefore becomes a place of restriction. This concern around academic routine and limitations was raised by Talia, one of my interview participants, who spoke about the restlessness experienced in classroom spaces:

> Another thing is the factor of the everyday routine. People are getting tired of the routine and all this stuff…so that's a problem as well. The students are getting bored. The teachers are getting bored. So, if you are getting bored, you're not going to learn well. So that's another thing. I would not like to have a class on my own, I would like to have it with people.

The above response indicates the need for change and activity in the classroom, or something which enables action and reaction. As Talia notes, the lack of variation has created a feeling of

dormancy as well as isolation, where it feels like each person is having a class on their own, rather than together. Following this, there is evidently a need to disrupt the seclusion and routine, and to forge new engagements. Accordingly, it is important for students and teachers to claim responsibility for creating an atmosphere of excitement in the classroom, acknowledging that group dynamics influence how we experience the space. In order to challenge the apathy encountered in class, hooks calls for pedagogical strategies which intervene and disrupt the current routine, thereby combatting monotony in the classroom (1994, 7). Furthermore, she suggests that this intervention can be "generated through collective effort" (hooks 1994, 8), and in this way, excitement – as the antithesis of boredom – is viewed as being co-created.

In another interview, Linda spoke about methods she uses to encourage excitement among the students. Specifically, she noted that the teacher's own excitement can inspire the same feeling in others, and that if they are enjoying the lessons, it is likely that their students will find further enjoyment as well. Additionally, she mentioned that if one or two of the students begin showing interest or become more animatedly involved, this can change the entire mood of the classroom, moving from an atmosphere of seriousness to one of excitement and engagement.

Excitement is therefore positioned as something potentially contagious which can be exchanged, shared and incited in others. Linking back to hooks' writing on pedagogy, this means that we are each capable of creating and sustaining this excitement, and this can be done by showing genuine interest in one another's contributions and motivating classmates to continue questioning (1994, 8). Accordingly, co-creation is a central part of rethinking approaches to the classroom and breaking away from established routines. Additionally, in the interviews I conducted, the times students expressed feeling most excited were when they were involved in the conversation, and when there was an exchange of ideas and a mutual constitution of the space. I will revisit this aspect in the next section, discussing the (enlivening) possibilities provided by collaborative education.

When considering strategies for inspiring excitement, it is also necessary to think about the different needs in the classroom space, and the alternative ways in which we learn. Evidently, students learn and engage through various methods, and what works for one individual or group may not work for another. For example, some students may favour more close readings of the texts, while others may prefer interacting with visual stimuli such as photographs,

artwork or videos. As discussed by hooks, learning approaches should therefore be flexible and should allow for changes in direction depending on the group's particularities (1994, 7). Although it is impossible to cater for each student's needs, especially considering the heterogeneous nature of student bodies, it is possible to employ varied pedagogical approaches which can activate different learning styles and speak to a range of students. This also relates to my earlier point on disrupting routines and challenging restlessness by encouraging variation. Expanding on these alternative ways of learning, especially considering their potential to inspire excitement, Janine offered an alternative method for engagement:

> I would prefer a class where we are doing something different, building on the theory, but in an exciting way. So, like, let's work with objects. Bring something on this, anything you would like. For example, newspapers, bring something from the internet, an item from home, or bring something from your everyday life that we can explore. It could be something you are emotionally engaged with, or even a memory. Employ nostalgia, but in a constructive way, not just romanticizing the past. Let's engage with this through everyday materials…for me that would be exciting.

This approach of engaging with material objects in class raises new possibilities for learning, where information and knowledge is not only extracted from set texts but can also be produced through interactions with everyday objects, and through different sensory engagements. Additionally, the students are positioned as responsible for producing knowledge, and they have the chance to share this with the class, becoming both learners and educators. As noted by Janine, this can be an exciting prospect, and it therefore holds potential for challenging routine classroom processes. Although this analysis of the ornamental is something which is often done in primary education, and is therefore not a particularly new approach, it is commonly neglected in higher education in favour of more text-based studies. Following this, I call for us to revisit our childhood fascination with objects and to re-examine seemingly ordinary and everyday items, rediscovering the excitement and interest in the world around us.

Considering this invocation of the object in classroom spaces, it is also useful to refer to José Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), and more specifically, his discussion on the coke bottle, as it is conceptualised by the

artist Andy Warhol and poet Frank O'Hara.[21] Muñoz notes that in their work, both Warhol and O'Hara position the coke bottle as more than a simple, inanimate object, and that it is instead understood through interactions and relationality, taking on a new meaning which moves beyond production and consumerism (2009, 7). In this way, Muñoz states that he can "see the past and the potentiality imbued within an object" (2009, 9).

Relating this to Janine's comment above, we can view everyday objects as resources for discussion on both past processes as well as future possibilities, and there are evidently different and exciting methods for engaging with these objects, which do not follow conventional teaching practices. I will return to this discussion on future potentiality in Chapter 4, however, for now it is important to recognise that there are multiple techniques which can be used to invoke and produce knowledge, challenging classroom conformity and inciting excitement. Building on this, in the next section I explore additional ways to confront complacency, especially through collective and collaborative means.

3.3 Strategies for Collaborative Education

Collaborative learning is something I have evoked and encouraged at various stages in this thesis. However, I have not yet delved into what I understand by co-creational education, and how this can be or has been implemented in classroom spaces, and particularly in Gender Studies classrooms. Primarily, I envision collaborative learning as a reciprocal and shared process, where top-down approaches are challenged and where multiple people (including both lecturers and students) can provide input and be collectively responsible for what is taught and how the classroom is structured (e.g. do we sit in rows or circles, does the teacher sit in front or among the students, is the classroom structured around a single lecture, a large group conversation, smaller group discussions or otherwise).

Another central part of collaborative education is careful and active listening, and more specifically, listening which is accompanied by thought and critical reflection, with the aim of

---

[21] In Chapter 4 I provide a more in-depth analysis of Muñoz's work, especially his conceptualisation of hope and futurity. However, for the purposes of this chapter, I will not delve into this here.

learning from one another. This approach to listening involves concerted effort as well as a commitment to the conversation, and it is crucial for collective and critical engagements (Bettez 2011, 12). In addition, collective processes require flexibility, accepting ongoing feedback and always searching for new modes of interaction. While this remains a somewhat abstract description of collaborative education, in the following section I will outline more concrete examples and provide a further explanation of how I envision the functioning and structure of co-creational spaces, as well as the potential barriers and limitations to this collaboration.

One of the key characteristics of co-creational learning is that it disrupts conventional power structures, acknowledging that students as well as lecturers can make valuable contributions to learning practices. This brings into question the role of the teacher, asking how we can accommodate changing power relations while still acknowledging the experience of the teacher and the important part they play in facilitating conversation, encouraging critical reflection and monitoring dominant voices so these do not take over the conversation. On this point, Benade, Bertelsen and Lewis contend that the idealised modern-learning teacher is rather described as "a 'facilitator', 'coach' or 'learning advisor'", and that they are characterised by their ability to function as reflective practitioners who continue to question their own teaching practices (2017, 50). However, I maintain that the lecturer does not need to forgo their role as someone who shares information and offers important insights, but they can instead combine this practice with the act of facilitating, incorporating different teaching strategies which give students a say in how the classroom functions and whose perspectives are included.

Exploring the role of facilitation as a teaching strategy, we can further examine how power operates and passes between people. More specifically, referring to the work of Manuel Callahan, who writes about community-based research methodologies, facilitation is essentially concerned with the impact of power and "how power works in and through a space and the relations defined by it" (2018, 101). Facilitation is therefore positioned as a means of co-constructing knowledge and avoiding the presumption that an individual 'expert' holds more knowledge than the group combined. According to Callahan, the function of facilitation is to forge a path toward shared learning, which is always unpredictable and emerging (2018, 102). It is through this discovery or construction of an alternative path (e.g. one where classroom power dynamics are not pre-determined) that new relations can be created. However, while I speak about new relations being formed, I do not see this as bringing an end to power structures completely – as these form the basis of all our interactions – but I do envision this

process as helping to unsettle the current divides. It is therefore important to re-emphasise the practice of collective learning as ongoing and the task of facilitation as enabling continuous and disruptive learning.

Building on the above discussion, the responses from my interviews shed light on different strategies of co-education, considering some of the teaching methods which enabled collaboration or were seen to break down student-teacher and student-student barriers. Firstly, several participants spoke about the significance of being treated as a knowing subject by their professors, and how having their input valued encouraged them to participate more in the discussions. This is evident in the following response by Talia:

> I like challenging spaces. And my best classroom experience…there was this lecturer who treated me as a colleague, they challenged me, but still they treated me as a very knowledgeable person. And it gives me confidence to talk more and to read more. So I like these kind of challenging spaces.

By breaking down this divide between those who impart and those who receive information, it is thus possible to open the space for more nuanced engagement and less reserved conversation. This can also challenge experiences of 'imposter syndrome' which many students mentioned, where they felt that they did not belong in the class or that they did not have enough knowledge (or the 'right' knowledge) to contribute to classroom discussions. This imposter syndrome refers to the feeling of being 'out of place' or lacking confidence in one's own capabilities, and it is commonly experienced in academic environments (Chapman 2017, 112).

For example, Alex, another student I interviewed, spoke about how she was embarrassed to speak in classes because she did not know the theorists and theories that professors and classmates were mentioning, as she came from a different background where these names were unfamiliar, and she had also been involved with activist circles rather than academic ones.[22] More specifically, this is seen in Alex's recounting of her classroom engagement, where she mentioned that she was constantly "trying to fight against the imposter syndrome, to remove negative thoughts from [her] mind" and to convince herself that she deserves to be there. These feelings of inadequacy, as described by Alex, commonly arise as a result of academic

---

[22] I do not wish to create a binary distinction between academia and activism, as these can be intertwined, but rather to note the feelings of the participant, and how she experienced this division between activist and academic knowledge.

conventions which position a particular subject, and set of identities, as being characteristic of the 'knower' (for example, being white, European and 'well-spoken'), and also due to teaching strategies which perceive students as lacking or unqualified if they do not possess the expected knowledge foundation.

In order to counter this, hooks maintains that there should be "an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes" (1994, 8) and she refers to these classroom contributions as resources. This conception of academic resources enables new possibilities for engagement, as knowledge sources are then positioned as something moving and accessible to everyone. For example, Kamryn talked about a guest lecture where the professor treated the student responses as resources, and she observed the effect this had on classroom dynamics:

> [This professor] has this ability, where everybody could say anything, any comment, and he was very open to receive comments in the class or to be interrupted. And everything that people said in class, he had the ability of using it, using this comment to say something or to add something interesting or important to know. Even if it was something incorrect or not useful…he was able to make you feel like it was not wrong, like you can think differently and turn it into something, into some kind of knowledge. So you had the feeling that you could say things and it's not going to be criticised or judged, but maybe corrected, you know. I loved that class, it was amazing.

This experience demonstrates the importance of feeling valued or heard in class, and how this can inspire greater engagement and can also change the way students relate to the lesson. Due to the lecturer's attentiveness and recognition of student responses – where they not only mentioned but also used the students' contributions as resources – there was evidently a shift in the classroom atmosphere. As a result, Kamryn felt encouraged to participate and she noted that everyone became responsible for shaping the content and learning space. This feeling of being recognised was also encouraged in other ways, and Gala spoke about their experience in a different class, where the teacher sat amongst the students and made notes as they spoke. Although this action (of taking notes) is something simple and seemingly unimportant, it had a significant impact on Gala, who said that it made them feel like they could add something valuable to the conversation. Additionally, Gala stated that note-taking and sitting next to the students contested the usual divide between student and lecturer, as the professor was not

taking centre stage or claiming to know everything, but instead listened and learnt along with the students.

Returning to the discussion on co-education (i.e. teaching practices which enable the co-production of knowledge), I am interested in how these strategies can be employed and what they are aiming to address. In an article on decolonising the classroom (2017), Patricia Parker, Sara Smith and Jean Dennison explore potential approaches to practising collaborative knowledge production, looking at how these spaces can be both created and sustained. More specifically, they speak about their experiences of facilitating a graduate course on decolonising methodologies, where they sought to disrupt colonial structures of power and to question the individualism and elitism entrenched within academic environments (Parker, Smith and Dennison 2017, 233).

In this article, the authors discuss certain strategies that they used; namely, positioning themselves as facilitators rather than experts and inviting students, in small groups, to lead the first two-thirds of the class conversation. They emphasise that professors still play an active role in these classes, offering final summaries or thoughts, raising questions and encouraging the students to take the conversation further. However, at the same time, students are made similarly responsible for these sessions, and are asked to provide the discussion questions (around which the class is formed), as well as to decide on the activities and structure of the class (Parker, Smith and Dennison 2017, 243). In addition, the teachers also invited people from local community organisations to speak about their work and connections with academic institutions, looking at both rewarding and frustrating encounters, and how they have addressed some of the obstacles. Through this exchange, the teachers sought to disrupt distinctions between an inside and outside of academia, and to also encourage engagement with different forms and ways of approaching knowledge construction.

Reflecting on this teaching approach, Parker, Smith and Dennison note that by allowing students and teachers to decide on the format and content of the classes, they created a more open space, where students could make mistakes, learn from each other and explore new topics (2017, 243). In other words, they opened a space for experimentation, for uncertainty and for creativity, where students were able to share ideas on how to address the problems raised in the class. This resonates with the responses from my interviews since some of the students spoke about a similar class they experienced, where they had the opportunity to decide part of

the content for the class and to present this to their classmates. Below are Gala's reflections on this class:

> [In this course] we were given the space to develop the lectures every week. We presented a different topic each week, and [the lecturer] gave us the opportunity to offer additional material to the main syllabus. She gave hints, she helped a lot, she facilitated the discussion, but she also let us go. That was super nice. Each of us, from our own backgrounds, could add a different source to read. And to offer for the rest of the class. So I offered something completely different that was…well, in theory it wasn't related to the first theme, but eventually yes because we made connections. So I felt like, wow, nice, it says something different but also related. I got the feeling that people were feeling super excited about [the class].

From this response, it is evident that the collaborative approach incited greater engagement in the classroom space, and it encouraged students to personally invest in the production of knowledge. Notably, Gala observes how the ability to be a co-producer of knowledge inspired excitement among the students. Connecting this to section 3.2. above, this provides a practical example of how excitement is generated through collective processes, and how disrupting classroom routines can combat the apathy encountered in learning environments. It is also notable that the excitement of others was felt and experienced as atmospheric, and in this way, it is not only connected to individual bodies, but to the space as a whole. Additionally, the above example demonstrates the potential to do "something different but also related", and how this can offer an alternative to the privileging of one set of canonical sources or voices. Co-creational structures can therefore help students to forge their own spaces within academia, and these classroom formations can be a means of resisting from within, where both students and lecturers contest the institutional pressure to conform to individualistic systems of knowledge production (as linked to the neoliberal university). However, there are still several barriers to this transformation.

3.4 Obstacles to Alternative Pedagogies

Within academic institutions in Europe, and more specifically, through my own experiences in the GEMMA programme, there has been an increased focus and discussion on the influence of neoliberalism in academic spaces. Neoliberalism features as a topic of importance in nearly

every talk or lecture which addresses pedagogical practices or futures of education, and it becomes impossible to deny its influence on our classroom practices and the functioning of academic institutions in Europe. It is therefore necessary to question how neoliberalism affects (and impedes) our possibilities for constructing alternative pedagogies, and to think about different ways to work against this.

As discussed in Chapter 1, when I refer to the neoliberalisation of the university, I am talking about the various shifts in the way that universities are run, the increased demands placed on lecturers and students, and the move from universities as public institutions to more privatised enterprises focused on results and increased output (Mbembe 2016, 40). In addition, neoliberalism encourages a greater focus on competition and individualism, where those in academia are pitted against each other, vying for limited funding, teaching positions, and places within competitive academic programmes. There is also a heightened emphasis on speed and success, with this becoming a primary focus as opposed to the learning process and acquisition of knowledge (Vergès 2019, 94). According to Françoise Vergès' work on decolonial feminist teaching and learning, success is by no means a neutral term, and within academia "success [measures] one's conformity to capitalist principles framed in terms like 'outcomes,' 'pragmatism,' 'freedom' and 'entrepreneurship'" (2019, 94). This question of success, and what it means to succeed, was also raised by Keyla, one of the students I interviewed:

> Here it actually feels like the neoliberal institution is super strong and it's, it's so bad. And it's stressful because it's like, you work so hard, and then you just get this mark. So what does that mean? It's frustrating because most of us are studying because we really want to work with this, we really want to learn this. But at some point it's just like we don't have the time and we're not doing well enough, and you wonder why. And what's doing 'well enough'?

In the above example, there is a clear frustration with the focus on outcome and results, where students are pushed to constantly produce papers with little time to reflect or regroup. As Keyla points out, there is also the question of success, and whether you are doing "well enough". In this sense, doing well enough is judged by one's ability to keep up and to conform to expectations set by the institution. Due to this process, education becomes centred on what we can achieve rather than what we can learn, and there is an increased push to conform and become uniform. Moreover, returning to Vergès' critique, neoliberal institutions create a

disjuncture between oneself and the world, teaching us to take our surroundings for granted and to accept one way of doing education (2019, 98).

When we criticise the neoliberalisation of universities, the next question which comes up is how or if we can resist from within these structures, considering the extent of our complicity within the systems we seek to disrupt. As noted by Sara Ahmed (2017, 123) the challenge is how to remain in the university while remaking it, rather than becoming part of its furniture. Vergès asks a similar question, referencing Audre Lorde and asking if it is possible to avoid the master's tools, and subsequently "what tools are appropriate when capitalism has shown its capacity to colonize even the radical field" (2019, 91). This is an issue which reoccurs in my research, and was raised by several of my respondents, where students probed whether we can bridge divides between spaces inside and outside of academia. The following comments from Eleanor offer another perspective on how to survive and work within the current system:

> I would find it absolutely a silly strategy to say that because of the neoliberal university Gender Studies should not be part of it and should do something else. No, we have to play the game. And that's also why I slow down. Me, myself and my students. I feel like we have to slow down, because if we are invited, we are also implicated. And we cannot be powerless against this. We have to find good ways of, you know, arguing against this. And to find negotiations…it's all about negotiations. Negotiation does not mean just giving in. Negotiations, the right kind of diplomacy, can be quite radical.

In this way, it is possible to continue resisting from within, although this requires active engagement and constant negotiations. There are also risks accompanying this negotiation, such as the threat of selling out or becoming complacent; however, there is still a possibility of forging new spaces, finding cracks in the system and continuing to pick away at the foundations. In *Pedagogy, Otherwise: the Reader* (2018, 27), Dina Bataineh, co-founder of the community learning experience Taghmees (or Social Kitchen), speaks about becoming "that thorn that continues to prick" with the purpose of agitating and destabilising. She notes that these thorns are necessary to remind us that we need to do better and become better. Therefore, if we are to fight back against the neoliberal system from within, we cannot become settled, but must keep creating disruption and making our presence(s) felt.

One means of doing this is by finding strategies which go against the moves to individualism and a culture of competition, and instead promoting creative approaches where collective

solutions can be devised. According to Bataineh, we can also build resistance by "sharing song, dance, and laughter, walking barefoot on the earth, rolling our bodies, caressing poles, disrupting with a single word or many, connecting, feeling, trusting, crying, celebrating, jazzing, being, becoming" (2018, 29). By doing this we therefore position the 'extracurricular' as a primary concern and we move between spaces rather than accepting one set way of teaching or learning.

In Eleanor's response, it is also worth noting the invocation of slowing down, and the possibility of using this as a means of contesting neoliberalism. This can be linked to Berg and Seeber's notion of Slow approaches to teaching and learning (2013), as discussed earlier in this chapter. Berg and Seeber maintain that the corporatisation of academia has "sped up the clock", causing increased stress levels and a sense of urgency which can leave professors and students feeling overwhelmed and powerless against what they call "the culture of speed" (2013, 2). In order to counter this, Berg and Seeber advocate for us to start approaching everyday life with care and attention, taking time to reflect and deliberate, and rediscovering the simple pleasure of intellectual discovery (2013, 6). Moreover, they argue that slowing down can help to not only reenergise but also to repoliticise everyday life by "[taking] back the intellectual life of the university" (Berg and Seeber 2013, 6). The Slow approach to learning evidently offers new possibilities for withstanding the growing corporatisation of academic institutions, and also highlights everyday acts of resistance, demonstrating the ways in which we can think differently about education. By doing this, we can continue to oppose the push toward conformity and to instead find new ways of being within academia.

Conclusions

In this chapter I have examined a variety of different approaches to teaching and learning, asking how we can envision more collaborative pedagogies, and how to break down barriers between teachers and learners, theory and practice as well as spaces inside and outside of the academy. Considering where and how we learn, I have highlighted the role of learning communities, noting how personal interactions between classmates (i.e. interpersonal connections) can act as an elective teaching methodology, where learning materials and ideas are exchanged. I also raised the question of how we can practise theory and theorise practice,

debating the interconnections between these, and stressing the need to slow down and to pay greater attention to our classroom engagements. Following this, I look at the role of excitement in the classroom, and how restlessness is experienced in learning spaces. As a means of combatting routine, I explored the possibility of collectively rediscovering excitement in learning and employing active listening as a means of encouraging greater participation.

I also introduced the topic of co-creational education as a strategy for challenging top-down approaches to education, contesting the divisions between knowers and receivers of knowledge. By interrogating the role of both students and teachers in collectively producing knowledge, I have asked how we can share responsibility for learning spaces, thereby resisting the pressures of conforming to a one-size-fits-all classroom structure. Although I focus on the potential offered by alternative pedagogies, this analysis does not dismiss the obstacles to creative engagement, and it is evident that neoliberalism presents an ongoing barrier to transformation, as universities are increasingly being run as businesses where profit and success are the primary goals, with learning as a by-product. However, there are still possibilities for resistance, and I maintain that we can challenge power hierarchies in the university by continuing to cause disruption and by picking away at the institutional foundations.

Ultimately, this chapter highlights the need for classroom spaces which welcome experimentation, reformation and more collective forms of engagement. The question of how this can be achieved remains open-ended and requires further (collective) brainstorming, as well as an ongoing assessment of both the triumphs and failures of current approaches. As stated in the opening poem, "We learn by joining the circle, even when we don't know the steps". I envision this circle as collaborative learning, which is often accompanied by uncertainty and offers new opportunities for creativity. In the next chapter, I will build on this idea of the unknown, exploring ways of imagining alternative spaces and looking toward the future while interacting with the present structures.

Chapter 4

Horizon Thinking: What Next?

Introduction

> We must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being
> in the world, and ultimately new worlds.
> (Muñoz 2009, 1)

When addressing current problems and obstacles in higher education, it is crucial to envision new ways forward, thinking about the spaces we would like to build and the futures we would like to see. We cannot call for something different without an idea of what this difference could be, even if what we imagine remains blurry or undefined. I speak about multiple futures and various paths, highlighting that there is not only one solution, and that this undertaking should be plural rather than singular. The role of imagination is central in the process of building and dreaming "new worlds", as mentioned by José Esteban Muñoz in the opening quotation.

In this chapter, I therefore deal with practices of unmaking, remaking, imagining, re-imagining, evolving and envisioning new futures. I also emphasise the roles of pleasure, hope and (decolonial) joy, which are often obscured or overlooked in our discussions on educational practices, but remain the life force behind any real change. These possibilities for joy and pleasure can also be forged together, and it is through collective processes that visions of (or hopes for) the future can be maintained. Consequently, when we think about different approaches to education, and ways to change and challenge the current systems, it is evidently important to find spaces of hope and to hold onto a sense of potentiality. Considering this, I begin my final chapter with a discussion on the purpose of hope within academic spaces, building on the responses from my interview participants, and asking what inspires us (as students and teachers) to keep going. Following this, I look at more practical recommendations for changes to the GEMMA programme, reshaping current designs, and I end with a discussion on how we can create something new, underlining the need for an alternative language of engagement.

Although I speak about futures and hope in a somewhat abstract manner, I also wish to ground this in a discussion of the material realities and to consider some of the more practical recommendations and suggestions for ways forward. Additionally, the interplay of past, present and future is something that I question in this chapter, exploring how we can deconstruct past and present education systems in order to create blueprints for future structures. While this discussion centres new approaches and new ways of doing education, it is also necessary to acknowledge that there have been and continue to be people working to disrupt hierarchies of power within higher education (Pomarico 2018; Vergès 2019; Icaza and de Jong 2019; Giroux 2018) and that there are already initiatives and programmes aimed at forging alternative spaces for teaching and learning. This chapter is therefore in conversation with other work on alternative pedagogies, and I do not see these as competing narratives, but rather as interacting and co-creating. Through this approach, it is possible to challenge institutional pressures toward conformity and uniformity, and to instead highlight the points of departure and spaces for resistance.

4.1 What Brings Us Hope

Hope is a word which is commonly thrown around and used in various contexts (as a wish, an expectation, a dream, an aspiration, a yearning), although it is less common to stop and properly consider what we mean by hope, and the work or function of hope in our everyday lives. In this section, I therefore question how we understand the workings of hope, and how we can cultivate this or move hope toward action. In other words, I ask how to make hope into something performative and potentially transformative. For my conceptualisation of hope, I draw largely on the work of José Esteban Muñoz (2009), whose writings focused on topics such as queer politics, visual culture and performance studies, and I am especially interested in his discussion on feeling utopia and feeling hope.

In the introduction to *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), he explains his understanding of hope in relation to visions of queer utopianism. More specifically, hope is seen as an affective structure which centres on the "not-yet-conscious" (Muñoz 2009, 3). Hope is therefore fundamentally anticipatory and raises the open-ended questions of where we are headed or where we would like to go. Muñoz also connects the concept of hope to past,

present and future functions, and he describes hope's methodology as "a backward glance that enacts a future vision" (2009, 4). By this, hope is not only connected to an unknowable future, but it is also informed by what we know of the past and our experiences in the present. Put differently, we know what we want based on what we have seen to both work and not work, or through what we have learned and continue to learn.

Building subversive practices on hope has been criticised for being naïve or impractical (Muñoz 2009, 10); however, Muñoz refutes this view and argues that hope is based on "a critical investment in utopia" and should not be perceived as naivety, but rather as an act of resistance against a repressive logic which frames the present as unchangeable (2009, 12). In addition, hope is seen as crucial for resisting political pessimism, which threatens to render us inactive. Following this view, hope is something critical, active and subversive, and it should be given attention and repositioned as a resource, rather than something to be dismissed. At the same time, while it is necessary to maintain our confidence in hope, we must also recognise that hopes can be disappointed, and that our expectations may remain unfulfilled (Muñoz 2009, 9). Nonetheless, this risk is necessary if we are to make any moves toward envisioned utopias.

We can also make connections between hope and collectivity, recognising the potential for hope to be created and shaped through group interactions. Hope can therefore be inspired through collective action, and it can be nurtured and supported through interpersonal relations. In this way, hope is something which we can learn and cultivate, both individually and communally. According to Alessandra Pomarico, to remain hopeful as a collective is to be "in a state of 'vulnerable confidence'" (2018, 157). Understanding collective hopefulness as vulnerable confidence highlights another component of hope – having hope requires or enables vulnerability. By opening ourselves up to different possibilities and outlooks, we also become more susceptible to the disappointment mentioned earlier, and by sharing these hopes collectively, we expose those parts of our identities built on dreams and desires.

While vulnerability and confidence appear to be in contention, I view these as mutually constituted, as to be vulnerable with each other requires a form of boldness and trust, and in holding onto hope we must remain both confident and vulnerable. Building on this, Pomarico argues that it is through the collective process of hope that "a radical tenderness can appear, that commitment and support develop, friendships blossom, alliances form, people fall in love, heal, build, and weave their paths together" (2018, 157-158). Consequently, sharing hope can

be a form of community building, opening us up to more meaningful and (radically) tender connections, where we accept the risks in pursuit of alternative ways of being.

Returning to my focus on pedagogy and education, I maintain that it is necessary to preserve a feeling of hope in order to exist and resist within academic institutions. This need for cultivating hope in classroom spaces was similarly emphasised in the article by Parker, Smith and Dennison (2017, 243), where they argue for the need to hold onto "a stubborn sense of hope" in the possibility of changing education systems. This stubbornness is essential for sustaining hope, acknowledging that remaining hopeful requires work and will not always be an easy task. Maintaining a sense of purpose and motivation is also crucial for moving forward, and I therefore question how we can encourage these aspirations.

In the interviews I conducted, I asked participants about their experiences of hope or inspiration in academic settings. Through this discussion of what brings hope – in spite of demanding workloads, high pressure environments and exclusionary practices in academia – we can identify spaces of possibility and potentially build collective alignments based on different as well as shared hopes. During the interviews, I found that the question of what inspires participants to keep going was one which was eagerly discussed, and this topic tended to receive the most animated responses. From this, it became evident that speaking about hope itself can invite a sense of hopefulness, offering a space to imagine and to reflect on potentiality. This also made me realise the silences which exist on the topic of hope, and how hopefulness can be overshadowed by an overarching focus on that which is distressing or disheartening.[23]

One of the main responses I received, on the question of what gives us hope within academia, was that participants were encouraged to keep studying and learning due to their conviction that things could change, and that they could play a role in bringing about this change. In these responses, thinking about different futures inspired hope, and this hope was based on future potentiality and horizon thinking. By horizon thinking, I refer to the act of looking forward and focusing on a recognised objective or goal, which remains in sight but often out of reach. This thinking also inspires movement, and it encourages us to work toward a common ambition (or

---

[23] This is not to say that we should always be optimistic, or that there is not a space for frustration, anger and distress, but rather that these do not need to exist in isolation, and that it is possible to remain both wary and hopeful, doubtful and confident.

ambitions). For example, Kamryn spoke about finding hope through discussions and by creating networks with like-minded individuals:

> What keeps my hope is that I know what I can do to make changes. Since I am aware of these things happening around me, I can do things about them. And it's very nice to me having this support network. Knowing my peers in class, making friends and having discussions with my classmates, my teachers, and having these friendships…with people that think like me. Making me feel like I am not the only one, like we can build things together. And that we can change things. So I am very hopeful and motivated by this.

This relates to the discussion on interpersonal relations as a source of inspiration, and also the role of friendship in these processes, since it was through these connections that Kamryn discovered the potential for building new structures together, in collaboration with other scholars. Kamryn's response therefore challenges ideas of hope as being individual or focused on personal gain, and instead highlights the interconnectivity and relationality of hope. In my interviews with lecturers, they also spoke about finding hope through interactions with others, referring to connections with students as well as colleagues, and noting that this reminded them why they had entered academia and where this could lead. This perspective is seen in the following response from Eleanor:

> I think my students, the students definitely give me hope. I really want to say this, not just because of the interview. I find this is one of the best things in the job description of an academic. To see young people. To know that there is always hope. I'm also, in the same way, I'm also hopeful because of those people who are long enough in the game. Because they can, you know, they'll teach me and then I can slowly teach someone else. So we can be who we are. We can actually be quite happy. So that also gives me hope, you know, what we learn being longer in. It's not totally impossible, that you can say what you want to say, that you can learn to have your voice.

The above quote raises a number of points about the foundations of hope, and what it means to be hopeful. For Eleanor, hope is linked to finding a voice, to self-acceptance and a feeling of possibility. Hope is also symbolised by the students, who are seen to represent the future, which is also linked to youth and having time to develop both inside and outside of academia.[24]

---

[24] By 'develop', I mean both individual and collective development, as well as developing ideas, knowledge and ways of thinking.

However, at the same time, hope is derived from seeing how other staff members, who have been there for longer, have managed to persist, to continue learning and teaching and to find their own spaces within the university. In this way, hope is an affirmation that a positive future is possible (represented by older colleagues) as well as faith in an emerging future which holds new potential (represented by the students).

Another experience of hope was one which came from letting go and abandoning a "pretence of perfection" (as termed by Parker, Smith and Dennison 2017, 243). In doing this, there was a certain release of expectations, where hope took over from fear, which Muñoz describes as the 'other' of hope (2009, 3). Although expectation is often thought of as a synonym for hope, the above understanding contradicts the common view, and instead complicates it, positioning hope as coming from a form of self-acceptance and embracing imperfection. This also relates to the response by Eleanor above, where she explains how she found hope from learning and accepting that "we can be who we are". Additionally, Alex expressed a similar viewpoint, as seen below:

> So once I assumed that I will never master everything, even if I have a master's degree and a PhD degree, I will never master everything. I can intervene somehow. I can do something specific in a specific moment or place in history, but that's it. So once I assumed this, it gave me hope to actually keep learning, to keep going.

Evidently, Alex found hope through accepting that she would never know everything, and that this ideal of the all-knowing academic is a fallacy. The previous obstacle to hope was therefore the fear of failing to meet the expectations of what an academic should be, and the pressure to achieve a certain 'higher' standard, which can leave students feeling despondent or hopeless. For this reason, it is important to challenge the falsehoods of perfection in academia, leaving space for hope and for a vision of the future which offers alternative possibilities, and is not based on achieving unrealistic ideals.

Hope is clearly envisioned and experienced in varying ways, and what these responses demonstrate is both the complexity of hope, as well as the need to maintain hope so that we can (collectively) work toward different futures. Hope is something which remains central to our academic practices and plays an important role in how we relate to the work we do in and beyond university classrooms. It is through holding onto hope that we can persevere, remain motivated and find new forms of self-acceptance. I also maintain that hope is necessary for us

to develop and improve current pedagogical structures, as well as to deconstruct and build new ones, remaining focused on our common goals and continuing to actively pursue them.

4.2 Moving Forward: Changes and Recommendations

While the above section focuses on a more conceptual envisioning of hope and the future, I would also like to examine some of the practical suggestions for change, both to pedagogical structures in general and to the GEMMA programme more specifically. I view these recommendations as closely connected to hope – a hope in alternative possibilities – and as opening the space to further suggestions, rather than airing grievances. Notably, throughout this thesis I have highlighted possibilities for change, and in this section I bring together some of these ideas while also offering new ones.

Regarding the GEMMA programme, one of the main suggestions which came up in my interviews was the need for further collaboration between partner universities, and the possibility of sharing ideas on teaching approaches. Notably, for second-year GEMMA students, many expressed that there was a disconnect between the two universities they attended, with diverging expectations and approaches to learning. Although it can be beneficial to experience different modes of teaching and learning, participants noted that the problem was not variability, but rather that seeing the possibilities in certain classes enabled them to realise the limitations in others. For example, Janine described her experience of being in one classroom where she was treated as a co-creator of knowledge and given space to experiment, and then moving to another institution and classroom space where she was positioned as a recipient of knowledge, rather than an active participant. This experience is reflected below:

> [In the second year] I was expecting to have less lecturing from the teacher, and more conversation and interaction between us, which we had last year. And I think that this year we have a lot of listening [while] the teachers [are] talking and instructing about things, and not having this interaction between us. So I think that…there shouldn't be such a big difference between [the universities]. And they could really learn from each other. Because things working in one space could work in another.

From Janine's comment, it is evident that there is much to gain from interactions not only among student networks, but also between universities, and this provides an opening to "learn

from each other". Accordingly, it is important to build on the opportunity for cross-context learning which is offered by a programme such as GEMMA. In doing this, it is also possible to create learning communities which reach beyond a single university, and which can connect students and lecturers in different spaces. At the same time, I recognise that the wider context and setting of the university can pose limitations (for example, institutional pressures to teach a certain way or having teachers coming from different educational backgrounds). Nonetheless, it is possible to resist these constraints and to incorporate less hierarchical and more collaborative learning in all classrooms. However, this will require critical reflection on current pedagogies, accompanied by a commitment to change, interrupt and disrupt long-held beliefs of what it means to teach and how the classroom space should be structured. Expanding on the above assertion, Alice provided a similar recommendation for forging further links between universities, and she connected this to putting feminist thinking into practice (i.e. practising what we preach), as seen below:

> So yes, I recommend a stronger connection between the universities, first of all. Because yes, I have found these huge differences between one and another, and I have just seen two, so. I think this is part of the way we can look at feminism. Because I think if we talk about feminism but then we perpetuate the same type of hierarchical relationship, this doesn't mean anything to me. So I think that's trying to put into practice, again, what we are studying is the starting point to trying to do something else. So yes, I think we have to ask for a reflection on the practices of what we study.

I have addressed this connection between theory and practice throughout my thesis, although it still requires further exploration and a constant questioning. As argued by Alice, it is necessary to reflect on how we enact (or fail to enact) the feminist principles that we teach, and to focus on constantly shifting our methods and approaches to the classroom space, ensuring that the classroom does not become an inflexible environment or "a place of punishment and confinement", as warned by hooks (1994, 4). In order to contest the solidification of teaching methods, I therefore return to my recommendation for more decolonial approaches to classroom pedagogies. Specifically, for methods which seek to deconstruct, to unsettle and to push us outside of our comfort zones. In this way, decolonial feminist teaching remains out of reach and yet in sight (relating back to horizon thinking), and it is therefore something we can continue to work towards. Put differently, in the words of Françoise Vergès, decolonial feminist

education is "*a theory in practice*, a process of learning and unlearning, a pedagogy from below, of *education* as a method to work collectively" (2019, 91; emphasis in original).

Another recommendation which came up in the interviews was the need for greater communication and interaction with societal partners outside of the university, in other words, to collaborate and work with people in other spheres, combining knowledge bases and experience. It was also suggested that this be done by inviting talks from people who are not in academia or Gender Studies but are working in related fields. As noted by Linda, this collaboration would help us to "see the practice-orientation in the theory that we do" and could also inspire further involvement in community projects and networking beyond the academic space. This recommendation was similarly raised by Parker, Smith and Dennison (2017) in their article on creating and sustaining revolutionary spaces inside of the academy. More specifically, the authors contend that we can further encourage radical openness in the classroom by highlighting "the ways that knowledge travels outside of the university context" (Parker, Smith and Dennison 2017, 241). This is also seen as an important educational practice for those who do not plan to continue in the academy, demonstrating the alternative possibilities that can be opened by a master's degree in Gender Studies, and not limiting us to one particular path (for example, pursuing further education or doing a PhD).

When asked about suggestions for changing approaches to Gender Studies education, Janine stated the need for us to reclaim spaces within the institution and to remain dedicated to disrupting institutional norms (e.g. expectations about what we should study, how this should be done and what we consider 'legitimate' knowledge). This reclaiming can take various forms, from calling for visibility to constructing hidden spaces of refuge within. In the interviews, Eleanor also stressed the idea of reclaiming spaces, especially as a means of countering institutional constraints and reshaping the structures which implicate us. This response is recorded below:

> It is about what we do within this space. And I think there we have to, in the next decade, we who all work in the university and for all levels – be there professors, teachers, administrators – we have a big job to do to keep that, because that's something that the structures try to drain from us. So we have to really think about what I want to give to here and where I want to do it. It is reclaiming this idea that we are bodies in this institution and saying that the institution is a body that we can shape.

Several relevant issues are raised in Eleanor's comment, and this recommendation acts as a call to continue resisting from within, highlighting that "we have a big job to do". This job is evidently accompanied by pressures and "structures [that] try to drain [our resistant potential]". As noted by Eleanor, it is therefore necessary to interrogate our position within the academy, to ask how we are constitutive of the whole and to remain committed to the subversive potentiality of Gender Studies.

This reclamation of the university can come through asserting ourselves as being both within but also separate from the institution, contesting the need to belong and moving beyond belonging. In this way, unbelonging is also a means of resistance. As highlighted by education and cultural studies scholar Silvia Cristina Bettez (2011, 15), striving for belonging can often lead to assimilation and can cause us to hide aspects of our own identities. In opposition to this, Bettez argues that we should instead build critical communities which remain fluid and flexible, welcoming dialogue and difference (2011, 9). This reconceptualisation of belonging was underlined in the interview with Gala, as they remarked that "maybe in trying to belong, or making people belong, we organise belonging in a way that's impossible". For example, in focusing on building a sense of belonging, we often create other forms of stratification, fixing people into set groups or boxes. To counter this, Gala recommended that we open a space for unbelonging, embracing contradiction and messiness in the process.

What the above suggestions and recommendations offer is a means of looking to the future, while also remaining conscious of where we have been and where we are now. Although I have only discussed a few recommendations, from the interviews it became evident that students and lecturers in the GEMMA programme have a wealth of ideas on how to improve the programme, and that there is a great deal to be gained from bringing together these perspectives and using them to inform our future classroom engagements. I therefore view these suggestions as valuable resources for mapping alternative futures of education, offering a sense of hope in the possibility of transformation.

4.3 Constructing Something New

Imagination, and our ability to envision futures which exist outside of the current institutional confines, remain central to my project of reconceptualising feminist teaching and learning. Without imagination, we remain trapped in the present moment, bound to an endless cycle of repetition. As Muñoz states, "the here and now is a prison house" (2009, 1) and we must therefore strive to escape or move beyond this toward a "then and there" which offers alternative ways of doing and seeing. In doing this, it is possible to dream and envision new worlds, and to subsequently work toward constructing these worlds. Following this, I position imagination as both a starting point and a destination, and as an underlying force behind all initiatives to deconstruct and reconstruct. The poem below, by Alessandra Pomerico (2018, 160), highlights several key points in my approach to reimagining educational structures:

> Re-imagining is necessary, and when done collectively it is lovable.
> To re-imagine we need
> a new language,
> the old one is not enough and
> is maybe the reason why we cannot yet re-imagine.
> Our imagination is
> in a moment of crisis,
> or maybe just in between.

In this poem, re-imagining is centred as a needed intervention to counter the "moment of crisis", whereby we have reached a standstill and are unable to imagine or construct something new. Regarding education, this crisis refers to an inability to move away from conventional understandings of how the classroom should look and function (for example, the idea that a class should only have one teacher, or that there should be desks and chairs). However, as the poem suggests, there are ways to overcome this deadlock, and what is required is a renewed imagination. There is therefore a possibility of countering the crisis, although this involves new language and alternative terms of engagement. The idea of old and new language can be seen in relation to institutional structures, where "the old one" refers to traditional academic practices and entrenched inequalities, and a new one can be linked to reclaiming space or creating entirely different spaces where we can decide on our own arrangements and ways of associating (e.g. more collective or creative spaces).

The poem also raises the idea of reimagining as something loveable, when done collectively. This emphasis on collectivity underlines the possibilities which accompany collective work, and more specifically, how friendships, networks and interpersonal relations remain fundamental in our processes of reimagining. Linking this to the idea of being loveable, it is also clear that thinking differently can bring new ways of cultivating love, as well as joy and hope. In light of this, while it can be both challenging and intimidating to think beyond what we know or are accustomed to, this remains a worthwhile task with transformative potential.

Additionally, we can connect this undertaking to decolonial joy, as conceptualised by Frances Negrón-Muntaner. In an interview with Negrón-Muntaner (2019), she describes decolonial joy as "an emotion of varying duration that results when people can glimpse and feel the possibility of a different future where neither colonialism and coloniality dominate their lives." This feeling of decolonial joy is therefore linked to hope or the belief in a different future, where the current confines and power disparities (linked to ongoing and inherited colonial practices) no longer dominate our lives. Considering this, when imagining different futures of education, we must also question how we can work toward decolonial joy, whereby our envisioned futures do not repeat the old inequalities, but rather make space for completely new worlds. Admittedly, this can be a seemingly impossible endeavour, as our everyday structures have been shaped and built upon racist, colonial and patriarchal histories and practices. However, through constant acts of resistance and efforts to both deconstruct and dismantle, decolonial joy remains tangible and realisable.

On the topic of deconstructing and reconstructing, I position this dismantling as a key component of our future visions, highlighting our role as 'militant dreamers', as described by Henry Giroux in *Pedagogy, Otherwise: the Reader* (2018). This militancy refers to a willingness to cause disruption, to confront power structures and to remain committed to subversive action which does not seek to appease or settle. In connection to dreaming, this also means maintaining a focus on future potentiality while working to unsettle and disrupt.

Along the same lines, I link this to Jack Halberstam's call for us to focus on bringing down or dismantling the master's house, which he discusses in the article "Unbuilding Gender" (2018). This call makes specific reference to a quote by Audre Lorde (1984), namely, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house". In response to this, considering how the quote has been widely drawn upon within activist circles and in academic spaces, Halberstam argues that

rather than focusing on the master's tools (as is the tendency in critical interactions on this topic), we should instead place our attention on taking down the master's house, collectively working toward this objective. According to Halberstam, to dismantle we must therefore "turn to the language of unmaking, unbuilding, undoing" (Halberstam 2018, 26). This can be understood as the new language called for in Pomarico's poem (2018), which I discussed earlier in this section, as it promotes re-imagining and forging new arrangements which do not simply rely on the previous formations. Although I mention these crucial points on dismantling and becoming militant dreamers at the end of this chapter, this does not imply that they are less important, but rather that I want to leave you with these ideas, providing the space for lingering reflection and further action. Evidently, it is through interaction with ruin and deconstruction that we can learn to create something new, breaking down the old structures and focusing on constructing a different means of engagement.

Conclusions

This chapter has focused on the possibilities for imagining new and better futures of education, where collectivity is a central concern and hope remains a driving force. Consequently, my intention has been to emphasise the importance of forward thinking, looking toward the horizons of education and envisioning futures which break with old traditions and disrupt hierarchical structures. Building on the content from my interviews, I have discussed the different functions of hope in the project of rethinking pedagogical practices; namely, hope as a belief in the possibility of improving things, hope which is inspired by those around us (and what they could achieve or have achieved), hope as a release of expectations, and hope as a form of self-affirmation. Hope is clearly understood and cultivated in various ways, and through examining what makes us hopeful we can also think about where we want to go and the future(s) we would like to create.

Following on from this, I have explored some of the hopes and suggestions for change that students and lecturers have for the GEMMA programme. Specifically, there is a call for greater collaboration between universities in the programme, learning from each other and combining different approaches to feminist teaching. Another recommendation was for the courses to develop stronger links between the 'inside' and 'outside' of academia, considering contributions from societal partners and offering further support for those who do not wish to continue within

academia. Lastly, I examined the suggestion that we should create new spaces (of unbelonging) within the university, and to reclaim our position as subversive bodies acting both in and out of the institution.

What connects these different sections is a focus on envisioning new futures, and a consensus that imagination remains a crucial component for constructing alternative pedagogies. On the topic of reimagining educational space, I have also engaged with the 'crisis of imagination', considering ways to overcome this through creating a new language of engagement. I argue that this language is one of deconstruction, disruption and dismantling, and that it requires a subsequent focus on new formations. Ultimately, this chapter has highlighted horizon thinking and a belief in the possibility of doing things differently, despite the challenges we may face, and this encompasses one of the main objectives of my research project – to offer alternative approaches to feminist education.

Final Conclusions

Bringing together the different strands, ideas, concepts and chapter conclusions, I finish this thesis with some final reflections on the research project as well as a summary of the main points which have been discussed. While I have examined and analysed a wide range of topics, there remain central through-lines and underlying interests in this thesis. Primarily, my focus has been on approaches to feminist teaching and learning, interrogating different pedagogical practices and questioning what we understand and envision as a feminist pedagogy. My analysis is also centred on the experiences of students and lecturers in the GEMMA Master's Degree in Gender and Women's Studies, and I have located myself both within and outside of the research, as both an insider and student in the programme, as well as a researcher working with perspectives and encounters that are not my own.

The topic of teaching strategies and alternative pedagogies is not something new, and this research area has been addressed by various scholars and influential thinkers (hooks 1994; Freire 1970; Mbembe 2016; Vergès 2019; Boler 1999; Pomarico 2018) whose work I have drawn from and built upon in this thesis.[25] However, despite this varied engagement, there remains a need for further discussion and new ways of thinking. My research has therefore aimed to connect and contrast the current literature, bringing together occasionally opposing views by placing these in conversation, while also adding new insights and opening a space for alternative visions of educational futures.

Throughout the research, I have remained both critical as well as hopeful, and I maintain that through collective work and a commitment to the subversive potential of feminist education, we can continue to reform the current institutions, while also creating new and different spaces for learning. In my writing, I have continuously used the pronouns 'we', 'us' and 'our', envisioning this project as something collective, and using the shared grouping as a call to action, involving (you) the readers in the process of rethinking the university.

Each chapter of this thesis has dealt with a specific set of issues, although interconnected, and they raise different questions around the possibilities as well as the limitations which we are faced with when questioning education systems. In Chapter 1, I provided a theoretical analysis of some of the key concepts, situating my thesis within a wider body of literature, and

[25] Among numerous others. See the Bibliography for a list of further contributors.

highlighting key areas for consideration. More specifically, in this chapter I engaged with the work of Freire (1970) and hooks (1994) on critical pedagogies, I explored the critiques of neoliberalism, and its influence on the current structuring of academic practices, and I analysed the position of Gender Studies within the university. Additionally, I questioned what it means to decolonise the university, considering some of the key components of decolonial education, as well as the risk of decolonisation losing its disruptive potential by becoming a comfortable topic, rather than something which interrupts and destabilises. Notably, decolonial theory has largely informed my analysis and approach to alternative classroom arrangements, and throughout the thesis I have maintained a focus on deconstruction, messiness, uneasiness and ongoing intervention.

Building on some of the concepts raised in the opening chapter, in Chapter 2 I analysed the functions of discomfort in the classroom space, focusing on the need to confront and question the sources of our discomfort, and asking what this tells us about ourselves. In particular, I highlighted the importance of critical and in-depth collective and self-critique, considering our complicity within hierarchical and racist institutional structures. I therefore positioned discomfort as a means of bringing awareness to that which we are hiding from ourselves, positioning this as a tool for confronting established belief systems. Drawing on the interviews I conducted, I also addressed issues of unproductive guilt, collective accountability and what it means to construct a safe space in the classroom, or whether these spaces should be safe. Through the analysis in this chapter, I reconceptualised discomfort as a starting point for discussion, rather than something which should be dismissed.

Following this, in Chapter 3, I centred the analysis on creative pedagogies and ways of enlivening classroom participation, while also considering the barriers to innovative engagement, and how we can resist moves toward conformity. To start the chapter, I questioned what constitutes a learning environment, noting the significance of support networks and learning communities, as highlighted by my interview participants. Following this, I discussed ways of renewing excitement in the classroom, and how this enthusiasm can be collectively created. Focusing on alternative pedagogies, I spoke about breaking down divisions between students and teachers through co-creation strategies, where students are positioned as co-producers of knowledge, and both lecturers and students are responsible for shaping the class conversations. Another focus area in this chapter was the influence of neoliberalism on the way in which we relate to feminist teaching, and the opportunities for building collective resistance. Considering

this, what the chapter demonstrated was the potential to do education differently, and the possibility of changing our approaches to pedagogical practices.

Finally, in the last chapter I consolidated the discussion with a focus on constructing different futures for education, considering the roles of hope, decolonial joy and horizon thinking. In doing this, I examined the question of what brings us hope and how we can collectively maintain a sense of hopefulness. I also discussed suggested changes and areas for improvement in the GEMMA programme, considering the potential for new means of engagement. Central to this chapter was the emphasis on imagination and thinking beyond the confines of existing educational structures. Here, I stressed the need to deconstruct, disrupt and reclaim spaces, working toward alternative conceptions of the future.

Across the different chapters and sections of this research project, there have been some ideas which I have continuously revisited, and which form the core of my approach to alternative pedagogies. Namely, I have foregrounded the need for collaborative work, the centrality of imagination and creativity for rethinking learning spaces, and the importance of decolonial approaches which challenge dominant power structures, offering a means of disruption and forcing us to reconsider how we teach and learn. While examining these different approaches, I have aimed to raise difficult questions and to invite further engagement on the topics.

Accordingly, I call for us to continue with this undertaking to rethink pedagogical practices, bringing in additional voices and different perspectives as well as expanding on the points I have raised. While I have engaged with numerous issues in this thesis, there remains a need for further exploration and for these ideas to be put into action. This call for action is reiterated in the concluding poem (found on the next page), where I invite us to keep questioning and working toward different futures. Going forward, I intend for the conversation to be constantly changing, and I do not see this work as remaining stagnant or sitting on a page, but rather as something fluid and part of the continuous project to reimagine academic spaces. This discussion is therefore open-ended, and while I do offer conclusions and suggestions, ultimately, these remain open to interrogation and imagination.

A Poem: An Invitation

And so
I invite you to shift
To move
To shiver
To itch
To realise that there is not one way
Has never been
One way
That learning is movement
Which requires a push
And another
And again
Ongoing
That listening requires presence
And focus
A desire to learn
To receive
To work with
To question
That questioning –
genuine
inquisitive
uncomfortable
relentless
questioning –
Is the centre
And what you do with this
The offshoots
The growths
The spin-offs
Are a start
But never an end
A call to start again
Over
And over
A circular motion
A movement

- *Robyn Ausmeier*

Bibliography

Ahmed, Sara. 2004. "Introduction: Feel your Way." In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 1–20.

———. 2017. "Being in Question." In *Living a Feminist Life*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Agboka, Godwin. 2014. "Decolonial Methodologies: Social Justice Perspectives in Intercultural Technical Communication Research." *Technical Writing and Communication* 44 (3): 297–327.

Autar, Louise. 2017. "Decolonising the classroom: Credibility-based strategies for inclusive classrooms." *Tijdschrift voor Genderstudies* 20 (3): 305–320.

Bataineh, Dina. 2018. "Dear Eco-versities friends." In *Pedagogy, Otherwise: the Reader*, edited by Alessandra Pomarico. http://ecoversities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Pedagogy-Otherwise-Reader.pdf.

Benade, Leon, Eva Bertelsen, and Lyn Lewis. 2017. "Reimagining and reshaping spaces of learning: constituting innovative and creative lifelong learners." In *Transforming education: Design and governance in global context,* edited by Leon Benade and Mark Jackson. Singapore: Springer.

Bettez, Silvia Cristina. 2011. "Critical Community Building: Beyond Belonging." *Educational Foundations* 25 (3-4): 3–19.

Berg, Maggie, and Barbara K. Seeber. 2013. "The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy." *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching & Learning Journal* 6 (3): 1–7.

Boler, Megan. 1999. "A Pedagogy of Discomfort: Witnessing and the Politics of Anger and Fear." In *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education*. New York/London: Routledge.

Bryson, Mary, and Suzanne de Castell. 1993. "Queer pedagogy: Praxis makes im/perfect." *Canadian Journal of Education/Revue canadienne de l'éducation* 18 (3): 285–305.

Carey, Shelley Johnson. 2005. “Integrative Learning.” *Peer Review* 7 (4). Washington: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Chapman, Amanda. 2017. “Using the assessment process to overcome Imposter Syndrome in mature students.” *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 41 (2): 112–119.

Fanon, Frantz. 1963. *The Wretched of the Earth*. New York: Grove Press.

Freire, Paulo. (1968) 1970. *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Bloomsbury.

Giroux, Henry. 2018. “Educated Hope in Dark Times: The Challenge of the Educator/Artist As a Public Intellectual.” In *Pedagogy, Otherwise: the Reader*, edited by Alessandra Pomarico. http://ecoversities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Pedagogy-Otherwise-Reader.pdf.

Hames, Mary. 2012. “Embodying the Learning Space: Is it okay if I bring my sexuality to class?” *Feminist Africa* 17: 62–81.

Halberstam, Jack. 2018. “Unbuilding Gender: Trans*Anarchitectures In and Beyond the Work of Gordon Matta-Clark.” *Places Journal*. https://doi.org/10.22269/181003.

hooks, bell. 1994. “Engaged Pedagogy.” In *Teaching to Transgress*. New York: Routledge.

Hesse-Biber, Sharlene. 2011. “Feminist Research: Exploring, Interrogating, and Transforming the Interconnections of Epistemology, Methodology, and Method.” In *Handbook of Feminist Research: Theory and Praxis*, edited by Sharlene Hesse-Biber. Thousand Oaks: SAGE. 2–26.

Hunt, Sarah, and Cindy Holmes. 2015. “Everyday Decolonization: Living a Decolonizing Queer Politics.” *Journal of Lesbian Studies* 19: 154–172.

Icaza, Rosalba, and Sara de Jong. 2019. “Introduction: Decolonization and feminisms in global teaching and learning – a radical space of possibility.” In *Decolonization and Feminisms in Global Teaching and Learning*, edited by Sara de Jong, Rosalba Icaza and Olivia U. Rutazibwa. London and New York: Routledge.

Iseke-Barnes, Judy. 2008. "Pedagogies for Decolonizing." *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 31 (1): 123–148.

Lewis, Cynthia, and Jessica Dockter Tierney. 2013. "Mobilizing Emotion in an Urban English Classroom." *Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education 18* (3): 319–329.

Lorde, Audre. 1984. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." In *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*. 110- 114. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press.

Lugones, María. 2010. "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." *Hypatia*, 25 (4): 742–759.

Mohanty, Chandra. 1990. "On Race and Voice: Challenges for Liberal Education in the 1990s." *Cultural Critique* 14: 179–208. University of Minnesota Press.

Mbembe, Achille. 2016. "Decolonising the university: New directions." *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 15 (1): 29–45.

Muñoz, José. 2009. "Introduction: Feeling Utopia." In *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.

Negrón-Muntaner, Frances. 2019. "The Art and Politics of "Valor y Cambio": An Interview with Frances Negrón-Muntaner." Interview by Ivette Romero. *Repeating Islands*, April 29, 2019. https://repeatingislands.com/2019/04/29/the-art-and-politics-of-valor-y-cambio-an-interview-with-frances-negron-muntaner/.

Norlander, Peter. 2014. "Spaces and Places for School-Related Learning: Challenges to the Classroom." In *Engaging with Educational Space: Visualizing Spaces of Teaching and Learning,* edited by Catherine Burke, Ian Grosvenor and Björn Norlin. Umeå: Umeå University.

Nye, Malory. 2018. "Decolonising the Study of Religion: where to start?" *Religion Bites*, June 22, 2018. https://medium.com/religion-bites/decolonizing-the-study-of-religion-where-to-start-f8af41b3d34c.

Parker, Patricia, Sara Smith, and Jean Dennison. 2017. "Decolonising the classroom: creating and sustaining revolutionary spaces inside the academy." *TVGN* 20 (3): 233–247.

Pomarico, Alessandra. 2018. "10 Points On What We Learned." In *Pedagogy, Otherwise: the Reader*, edited by Alessandra Pomarico. http://ecoversities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Pedagogy-Otherwise-Reader.pdf.

———. 2018. "In The Cracks of Learning (Situating Us)." In *Pedagogy, Otherwise: the Reader*, edited by Alessandra Pomarico. http://ecoversities.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Pedagogy-Otherwise-Reader.pdf.

Quinan, Christine. 2016. "Safe Space." In *Critical Concepts in Queer Studies and Education: An International Guide for the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Nelson M. Rodriguez, Wayne J. Martino, Jennifer C. Ingrey and Edward Brockenbrough. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Redden, Elizabeth. 2018. "Global Attack on Gender Studies." *Inside Higher Ed*, December 5, 2018. https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/12/05/gender-studies-scholars-say-field-coming-under-attack-many-countries-around-globe.

Redmond, Melissa. 2010. "Safe Space Oddity: Revisiting Critical Pedagogy." *Journal of Teaching In Social Work*, 30 (1): 1–14.

Robinson, Victoria, and Diane Richardson. 2015. *Introducing Women's and Gender Studies*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sensoy, Özlem, and Robin DiAngelo. 2014. "Respect differences? Challenging the Common Guidelines in Social Justice Education." *Democracy & Education* 22 (2): 1–10.

Stengel, Barbara S. and Lisa Weems. 2010. "Questioning Safe Space: An Introduction." *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 29 (6): 505–507.

Tuck, Eve, and K. Wayne Yang. 2012. "Decolonization is not a metaphor." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1 (1): 1–40.

Vergès, Françoise. 2019. "Decolonial feminist teaching and learning: what is the space of decolonial feminist teaching?" In *Decolonization and Feminisms in Global Teaching and Learning*, edited by Sara de Jong, Rosalba Icaza and Olivia U. Rutazibwa. London and New York: Routledge.

Weber, Brenda. 2010. "Teaching Popular Culture through Gender Studies: Feminist Pedagogy in a Postfeminist and Neoliberal Academy?" *Feminist Teacher* 20 (2): 124–138.

Wekker, Gloria. 2016. *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Wells, Alastair, Mark Jackson, and Leon Benade. 2017. "Modern Learning Environments: Embodiment of a Disjunctive Encounter." In *Transforming education: Design and governance in global context*, edited by Leon Benade and Mark Jackson. Singapore: Springer.

Yep, Gust. 2007. "Pedagogy of the Opaque: The Subject of Whiteness in Communication and Diversity Courses." In *Whiteness, Pedagogy, Performance: Dis/placing Race*, edited by L.M. Cooks and J.S. Simpson. Plymouth, UK: Lexington Books. 87–110.

Zembylas, Michalinos, and Claire McGlynn. 2012. "Discomforting pedagogies: emotional tensions, ethical dilemmas and transformative possibilities." *British Educational Research Journal* 38 (1): 41–59.