Embodiment, Places and Relationships: Re-imagining creativity and innovation in the university

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Abstract:

This paper engages with building knowledge cultures through the politics and embodiment of educational spaces and places in the university. It examines complex conceptions of embodiment, situated and localised place, and relationships of these phenomena to learner subjectivities, through diverse engagements with the governed, ostensibly democratic space of the university. Set in times when goal-rationality, linear progression, employability and profit are prominent in the public discourse, it responds to conflicting demands on higher education, and students’ and teachers’ abilities to act and become.

Higher education historically and still now aims to educate democratic citizens with high-level academic knowledge and skills. This paper focuses on the university’s intentions, as mediated and materialised in buildings and its wider place, through diverse pedagogical currents, ideological changes and economic priorities. These intentions are in turn mediated through legislation, policy documents, educational administration, teachers’ professional goals and students’ individual motives as learners. As a place, the university can create expectations and opportunities, invite creativity, innovation and inspiration, or the opposite, limiting openness and opportunities. Subjects and place mutually affect each other. We examine these subject/place entanglements as a choreography and place of creative, innovative learning.

This philosophical analysis is based on the work of Merleau-Ponty (1945/2002), Deleuze (2004) and Kristeva (1998). Merleau-Ponty’s life-world approach supports a re-imagination of university places and spatiality through an ontological discussion of what a ‘classroom’ is and can be. This supports a Deleuzian philosophy of process and becoming, appreciating otherness, the unpredictable, and what has not yet come into being – expressed by Deleuze as human-becoming-child – offering an alternative conception of a specific space-time signified by intensity, affection, transformation and
movement. The university is examined alongside the student/academic subjects, as a space that is in fluid and constant construction, an unwitting occurrence with thinker and thought, within the space. Kristeva’s work on the semiotic offers a reconceptualization of spaces/places of thinking, as spaces of life and relationships, arising between its various subjects, objects, matter, feelings and thought.

This paper re-imagines the concept of the university and university education beyond contemporary, outcomes-focused ideologies. It theorises affective, constantly shifting embodied possibilities of relationships, modes of existence, and senses ruminating within the university. Creativity and innovation are demanding on universities. This paper suggests alternative conceptions of university actors becoming-multiple-others: becoming-children, becoming-curriculum and becoming-agents-of-change. We argue that these conceptions of inevitable shifts and intrinsic/extrinsic affects offer innovative insights into the demands of and on the creative university.

References:


Bios:

**Eva Alerby** is Professor of Education and holds a chair at the Department of Arts, Communication and Education, Luleå University of Technology, Sweden, and a Visiting Professor of Education at the University of Tromsö, the Arctic University of Norway. Alerby’s research interests are relations, identity and diversity in education, as well as philosophical and existential dimensions of education. Her works are mainly based on Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of the life-world.

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