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Title: Prosaic Sites of Multiculturalism as Educational Encounters in Neo-liberal Higher Education: sociological imagination and reflexive teaching and learning in the multicultural classroom.

Abstract:

The paper reflects on the pedagogy of a first year sociology and criminology module that was developed around the idea of 'Researching the City' in order to introduce students to the methodological and analytical processes of doing research in social science. Part of the assessment strategy centres around a weekly online diary which enables students through reflexivity to use positionality by way of reflecting on their experience of the city, of London, most specifically, due to the location of the university and the origin of the students.

Expanding on the idea of 'prosaic sites of multiculturalism' (Amin, 2002), the paper argues in favour of the transformative potential of a pedagogy that value experiential knowledge and is responsive to this form knowledge in providing the theoretical and methodological tools to make sense of personal experiences in relation to structures and structural constraints. In this the pedagogy works to develop a sociological imagination as a pedagogical route to empowering students in and out of the classroom in opposition to a neo-liberal ethos that instead values individualisation and competitiveness and is at present transforming Higher Education and society as a whole in the UK.

Introduction

An assessment of the situation depicts a rather pessimistic vision of the present and future of Higher Education in the UK. The Neo-liberalisation of education, through its marketization and its commodification, is having a detrimental impact on the development of teachers' and students' subjectivities. This is a worrying trend reflecting a more general process of neo-liberalisation which affects different structures and services of society with 'pace, intensity and moral legitimacy' unseen before (Lynch, 2006: 2). In this market-driven knowledge economy, universities are now ranked, nationally or worldwide, in multiple ways and

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different league tables according to metrics that are supposed to testify of their competitiveness. However, universities' ranking systems present bias against 'arts and humanities and most of social sciences' (Lynch, 2006: 6). They also do not value student learning experiences (ibid). Even the recently introduced Teaching Excellence Framework in the UK (Sanders-McDonagh and Davis, forthcoming) offers a very limited evaluation of a teaching and learning experience in Higher Education.

The literature demonstrates that it is difficult to resist many of the most pernicious effects of the neo-liberalisation of the education system especially as it is organised around new forms of governmentalities (Lynch, 2006; Olssen and Peters, 2005). As a political and philosophical ethos and culture, neo-liberalisation relies on individualisation beside corporatisation and marketisation and one of its effects can be observed in a reinforcing of hierarchies and normative and normativising power-relations. In the case of universities, Lynch (2006) highlights an emphasis on 'marketised individualism' producing 'commercially oriented professionals rather than public-interest professionals' (Lynch, 2006: 2). In this context, what forms of resistance can actually operate and what more specifically can be done in the multi-cultural classroom where power-relations can be exacerbated at the intersection of different social factors? What kind of pedagogical approach can be adopted to contest power-relations and instead pursue a pedagogical agenda that at its core continues to value critical engagement and social justice in contradiction to neo-liberal imperatives and modes of functioning?

In order to discuss the context of the multicultural classroom in Higher Education, the paper adopts and expands on the idea of 'prosaic sites of multiculturalism' as developed by Ash Amin (2002). By contrast with politics of a state-led multiculturalism, Amin emphasises the importance of the 'everyday urban – the daily negotiation of ethnic difference – rather than the national frame of race and ethnicity in Britain' (Amin, 2002: 959). As argued by Amin, multiculturalism in its everyday form is to be duly accounted for, notably as 'democratic everyday urbanism' (Amin, 2002: 967). Here, the prosaic sites of multiculturalism are understood as what can be broadly described as educational encounters with self and others on a core module entitled 'Researching the City: skills and methods in criminology and sociology' and taught at a post-1992[1] institution in London with a wide participation of

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students from different socio-economic as well as ethnic and religious backgrounds. The module is designed to introduce first year criminology and sociology students (c. 250) to social science research skills and methods.

In 2014, the module was redesigned in order to address a number issues as progression rates and students' engagement were deemed unsatisfactory. We decided to frame the acquisition of key skills and methods around the idea of 'Researching the City' in order to make learning and doing research methods 'more real'. This 'framework' was attractive for two more reasons as it addressed the diversity of our cohort in terms of cultural and ethnic diversity as well as its disciplinary diversity. Our student cohort is indeed particularly diverse in terms of ethno-cultural origins but a large majority are from London (75% of our recruitment). If they are not from London, they live and often work there during the course of their studies. The city (and London in particular) was therefore identified as a commonly shared experience that they could draw on albeit in different ways.

The other aspect of the diversity in our cohort pertains to the fact that the first year and second year modules on research methods are taught across the different Sociology and Criminology programmes. Students who study on these programmes often express different motivations and interests in choosing one programme rather than another. The city therefore presents the opportunity to address different topics that have the potential to appeal to both budding sociologists and criminologists who furthermore are assigned to mixed seminar groups. In order to appeal to this mixed cohort, we cover a range of themes (for instance the 2011 riots, street art, road culture, urban and suburban gentrification, the night-time economy, sex-work) using a range of quantitative and qualitative methods including visual and multi-sensory methods. In doing so, the module offers the possibility to link theory with methods in a more concrete manner that encourages the development of a sociological imagination. As this is a first-year module that deals with both study skills and research methods, it is felt essential that students at this stage are not contrived by the weight of the curriculum on research methods but start developing key analytical skills in line with a sociological imagination. The module also adopted the underlying principle that a

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The term post-1992 refers to colleges of higher education that acquired the status of university in 1992 in England and Wales. An officious hierarchy nonetheless continues to exist between modern and 'old' universities.

sociological imagination should be relevant to both sociologists and criminologists studying on the course (Young, 2011).

Indeed, besides paying attention to practical elements of research design and methods, the module incorporates reflexive practices throughout the year and uses students' experiences of living in London as a key tool in creating a meaningful engagement with the learning materials and with one another in the classroom. The more ambitious and overall intention is to provide a framework where the relationship between self and structure is explored as central to the development of a sociological imagination (Mills, 1959). The development of a sociological imagination here is reliant on the more prosaic multicultural engagement in the classroom.

The paper first describes the design of the module envisaged as a 'prosaic site of cultural exchange and transformation' (Amin, 2002). As I will show, it has been built around activities aimed to provide a reflexive and critical space for everyday encounters with the super-diversity (Vertovec, 2007) and 'thrown togetherness' (Massey, 2005) of urban living in and out of the classroom . Drawing on a thematic analysis of diary entries, the paper highlights the way positionality through reflexivity, in this case in the multicultural city, can be particularly effective in helping students from diverse backgrounds to develop their sociological imagination while beginning to engage with methods of data collection and analysis in year one. It suggests that providing an inclusive educational space by encouraging a reflexive positionality can have meaningful impacts in the multicultural classroom. This is the promise of a transformative pedagogy that grounds experiential knowledge and encounter at its heart with the aim to pursue a social justice and critical agenda that is counter to a neo-liberal ethos.

'Researching the City' – embracing prosaic sites of multiculturalism, reflexivity and sociological imagination

According to the 2011 census, London is the most diverse city in the UK (Greater London Authority, 2013), with White British now representing 45% of its population against 58% in 2001 (Office for National Statistics, 2012). It is a unique situation of 'throwntogetherness'

(Massey, 2005) where the socio-political parameters of multiculturalism are negotiated on an everyday basis. Despite the political death of state-multiculturalism[2], multiculturalism remains a sociological evidence and, as many scholars have argued, it remains an everyday occurrence (Neal et al., 2015; Neal et al., 2013; Nowicka and Vertovec, 2014; Valentine, 2008; Wise and Velayutham, 2009) and a persisting reality of 'living with difference' (Gilroy, 2004). This everyday multiculturalism consists in the '... existence of multiculture as a 'commonplace' (Wessendorf, 2014) demographic experience...' (Bennett et al., 2016). Living multiculture as Bennett et al. (2016) argue is a way to distinguish everyday multiculturalism from a '... focus on multiculturalism as a policy object, but also because the debates around multiculturalism have been distorted whether through the lens of celebratory *or* crisis talk (Nayak, 2012)' (Bennett et al, 2016: 2). Similarly, Amin (2002) interprets '(...) progressive interethnic relations as fragile and temporary settlements springing from the vibrant clash of an empowered and democratic public, rather than the product of policy fixes and community cohesion consensus' (Amin, 2002: 960).

Following the race riots that took place in the summer of 2001 in the northern mill towns of the Pennine and initiated criticisms of state-multiculturalism, Amin chose to instead emphasize the 'everyday lived experiences and local negotiations of difference, on microcultures of place through which abstract rights and obligations, together with local structures and resources, meaningfully interact with distinctive individual and interpersonal experiences' (Amin, 2002: 967). For Amin, there are a number of sites in which intercultural exchange can take place although '[h]abitual contact in itself, is no guarantor of cultural exchange' (Amin, 2002: 969). Interestingly, he takes the example of 'colleges of further education, usually located out of residential areas which dominates the lives of the young people, are a critical threshold space between the habituation of home, school, and neighbourhood on the one hand, and that of work, family, class, and cultural group, on the other hand' (Amin, 2002: 970). He argues that:

> 'For a short period in the lives of the young people, the colleges constitute a relatively
> unstable space, bringing together people from varied backgrounds engaged in a
> common venture, unsure of themselves and their own capabilities, potentially more
> receptive to new influences and new friendships. These openings do not automatically

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[2] In a speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2011, David Cameron announced that state-multiculturalism had failed and argued instead for a reaffirmation of shared national values of citizenship as a society against what he perceived as the increasingly difficult co-existence of separate communities,

lead to cultural exchange (especially when past friendships and acquaintances carry over to reinforce strong herd instincts), but joint projects across ethnic divisions and the sheer contrast of the sociality of this space with that of home and neighbourhood can help' (Amin, 2002: 970).

The post-1992 institution, in which the module discussed in this paper is taught, is a similar educational space of multiculture and it can be said that the 'super-diversity' (Vertovec, 2007) of the city is reflected in our super-diverse cohort of students who are on the majority Londoners with varied ethno-cultural and religious backgrounds. It was therefore felt essential to recognise the multiculturality of the cohort and the potential that it represented as a pedagogical strategy to foster greater students' engagement with the course (author and xxxx, 2018). But, it was also valued as a trope into a sociological imagination that does not take for granted power-relations, social divisions and inequalities.

For Mills (1959) a lack of sociological imagination is translated in the inability to '... possess the quality of mind essential to grasp the interplay of man and society, of biography and history, of self and world' and '... to cope with their personal troubles in such ways as to control the structural transformations that usually lie behind them' (Mills, 1959: 4). As such a sociological imagination allows us to see the relationship between biography and history (Mills, 1959: 6). Adopting this idea as a pedagogical imperative to teaching sociology, Stephenson, Stirling and Wray (2015; 2014), for instance, developed an original module entitled 'Working Lives' using biographical and auto-biographical methods. Their approach was centred around the importance, in the development of a sociological imagination, of being able to link personal experiences with broader societal issues and to make the connection between self and structure, agency and structure. In a similar way, in 'Researching the City' students are asked to keep a weekly online diary which encourages a reflexive and critical engagement with their experience of living in a multicultural city critically questioning their agency in relation to structural constraints. The next session elaborates on this pedagogical approach and consequently on the methodology that informed this paper.

Pedagogical and Methodological Reflections

In order to make the connection between self and structure in 'Researching the City', students are encouraged to draw on their personal experiences of the city in the diary entries which are in turn intended to provide a reflexive grounding for the discussions and activities in class. Reflexivity has been employed and has proved effective in a number of educational contexts. Smith (2011) points that, in a constructivist research approach, '(...) critical reflection is put into action through "reflexivity" (Smith, 2011: 214). For Rushe and Jason, critical self-reflection is central to the ability to think sociologically as students '... recognize themselves as actors in social life and not merely as passive students learning these concepts in the abstract' (Rushe and Jason, 2011: 339). In the module at stake here, it is pedagogically essential to link the ability to think sociologically, i.e. of connecting the personal with the collective, with the acquisition of research skills and methods. Central to a 'pedagogical culture in the research methods' (Garner, Wagner and Kawulich, 2009), Earley (2009) values the role reflexivity can play in developing a researcher identity and seizing the nature of research in social science as a developmental process. Student-centred pedagogies with reflexivity at their core are also valued by Hosein and Rao (2016) for their potential in destabilising the more traditional 'teacher-directed pedagogical approaches' (Hosein and Rao, 2016: 2) that govern the teaching of research methods in undergraduate degrees in the UK. Students in this module reflects on both their experience of the city and their experience of engaging with research. I concentrate in this paper on their experience of the city even if they come to these reflections through different analytical strategies guided by the diary assessment.

The diary indeed forms part of their assessment. As Raaper (2017; 2016) demonstrates assessment strategies as part of national or institutional policies often come to reinforce a neoliberal agenda of performance and auditing in acting as technologies governing academic practice and 'to shape academic subjectivities' (Raaper, 2017: 187). In opposition, the diary is to some extent a more creative space of expression. In an effort to create a supportive learning environment, the diary is not publicly available and only visible to the student and the seminar tutor. As such students can have greater freedom in being reflexive of personal experiences: freedom in part imparted by the fact that it is a first year module and therefore requiring less scrutiny from an institutional point of view.

The diary is an essential first step in students being able to formulate ideas while exploring different qualitative and quantitative methods. In each diary entry, they are asked to answer questions on a piece of academic reading (a journal article or a chapter from a book) using the research method covered in the lecture and then in a more applied manner in the seminar. They are also asked to do a small piece of academic research: for instance an observation, a small semi-structure interview, a questionnaire or a visual diary of their everyday surroundings, and then reflect on it in approximately 400 words. For that, students are informed about the role of ethics in social science research in the first two weeks of the module and it is a recurring topic throughout the course. Students are furthermore informed about the particularities of ethics when conducting visual research. They are also asked to reflect on ethics in relevant cases.

The argument in this paper is built around the thematic analysis of the diary entries of 73 students[3] who studied the module in its first year and who agreed for their work to be used for research purposes. Initially, the analysis was concerned with the evaluation of a particular seminar activity built around the analysis of secondary documents inviting students to critically explore the redevelopment of a neighbouring area to the university (author and xxxx, 2018). This analysis was then expanded to a wider analysis of all the diary entries. However, it can be noted that the wider analysis reinforced some of the initial themes notably around positionality and experiential knowledge by way of making sense of sociological/criminological issues. I am concentring on these aspects in this paper using extracts from some of the diaries as illustrations. Data from the 2014-15 cohort overall demonstrate that drawing on their positionality in their reflexive account of the diary, students are indeed able to display a nascent critical analysis of a number of social issues and notably of multiculturalism, or rather everyday multicultural living. However nascent, a critical approach to research is a key pillar in the formation of a sociological imagination that has a transformative potential and should not be contained in more theoretical modules.

This paper also works as a wider reflection on the module. An engaged form of pedagogy as the one advocated by hooks (1994) entails that teachers are also able 'to grow, and are empowered by the process' and implies that they are able to show vulnerability and share

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[3] The research was approved by the School's Ethics Committee. Students were contacted once they had completed the module in order for them to not feel that their participation or not could impact their grade.

their own experience and not simply expect students to take the risk to share their experiences (hooks, 1994: 21). In my own teaching, I am committed to try and include further my own narrative, even if only in an anecdotal fashion, sharing stories of my experience of the city. This demonstrates that I am also able to be reflexive of my own positionality, its privileges in some respects as white and middle-class for instance and its constraints as a woman from a different country. In turn, I ought to engage in greater reflexivity of my pedagogic strategies both as a module leader who designed the curriculum content and as lecturer/seminar tutor as well as more specifically in my role as an educator who specialises in urban sociology and visual and creative methods. Even though, I share my expertise through the taught content and more informal discussions in the classroom, students are also consulted about their knowledge of the city which in turn inform the content of future seminars and the module's reiteration in the following years. bell hooks (1994) encourages us to see students as 'whole human beings with complex lives and experiences rather than simply as seekers after compartmentalized bits of knowledge' (hooks, 1994: 15). As evident in the analysis section, there is a real intention to work in dialogue with their knowledge.

However, I also recognise the fact that the course to some degree remains hierarchical in its organisation which is in part a result of its size as a large core module with each year more than on average 200 students spread across 10 to 12 seminar groups ran by a small team of seminar tutors including myself. There are therefore some limits to this approach which aims to harmonise its teaching across the seminars but therefore remains led from the top down. Despite these limitations, the module presents scope to further develop into a problem-based approach in order to create a flipped classroom with the intention to alleviate further some of the power relations at play.

Positionality and Sociological Imagination in Inclusive Educational Spaces.

Experience of the city as knowledge
Positionality as a central theme emerging from the analysis of the data is more generally an essential component of reflexivity and as Smith (2011) argues:
> 'A corresponding social theory perspective of critical reflection is that it allows us to examine the uniqueness of our individual "positionality" within social systems (Foucault, 1982; Giddens, 1976)' (Smith, 2011: 213).

Cooks (2003) uses 'the idea of position and positionalities to discuss the ways identities are

negotiated interactionally and contextually, as opposed to subjectively or unilaterally, and with regard to social and cultural location, place and space' (Cooks, 2003: 247). This recognition of positionality as a dialogical process between agency and structure is central to the social science pedagogical ethos. Corresponding to an emphasis on reflexivity in using diaries, positionality emerges as a central theme in the analysis of the diary entries. In the students' written accounts, positionality can be seen to be generative of situated knowledge as experiential knowledge. Their experience of the city allows them to ground what they are learning and discussing in the seminars. When, for instance, asked to reflect on a seminar designed around the regeneration of suburban areas in North London, students often compare and contrast their own area to the changes taking place in a neighbouring redevelopment which provides a case study for their assessment:

> 'What I found useful about the activities is finding out about other areas and how they are changing. I live in the inner city so I am constantly seeing changes around which makes me happy because looking at my borough before it didn't look too appealing but now I view it differently (...). The inner city is more active and there are more things happening than in the suburbs. The suburbs are usually associated with rich white people and the inner city with working class individuals. However in the inner city more houses are being built in boroughs that are usually associated with poverty for example ..... I live in the borough of .... and I am constantly seeing changes around me.'(Diary 28)

> 'The suburbs are the outskirts of the centre of London, for example the area I live in ... known as the suburbs because it is not located in the centre of London, as it's considered the outer boroughs of London. The image portrayed of suburbs show the isolation one may feel in society as different societies and communities hold different views and beliefs therefore, as it differs across communities' (Diary 65)

In the majority of cases and as demonstrated by these quotes, students remain rather descriptive of the difference between suburbs and inner-city and of their 'regeneration'. The points that they made can however later be returned to by the teacher to challenge students on questions of gentrification in their area for instance. Some students however are able to use positionality to add a critical dimension:

'I learnt from the seminar in relation to the British suburbs that, living in a suburb is often referred to as dull and boring. In the suburbs, there is however difficulty of getting your child into the school of their choice as schools seem to be oversubscribed. The image of suburbia being safe goes rather beyond this. There is a crumbling infrastructure and populations have increased. There are more people living in the suburbs compared to the past of the 1930s.' (Diary 20)

This student, for instance, draws on her own experience of living in the suburbs to problematise and critically assess representations of the suburbs in the academic and non-academic literature presented during the seminar. In doing so, she is able to highlight a deeper sociological and political issue around urban social policy which again can be picked up by the teacher to be explored further in another seminar. In the diary entries, students are indeed able to find their own voice recognising their situated and experiential knowledge as a valuable source to draw on, even if more or less critically.

In grounding the teaching of skills and methods in the experience of the city, it means that we have to introduce a number of theories and concepts alongside the methods that are to be used to explore urban social phenomena. The advantage of this approach is that it makes it more relevant for students who can see the applicability of research methods to 'real-world' questions. This however constitutes an added challenge for them as they have to make sense of new methods in parallel with new concepts and new theories. As a result, positionality comes to constitute a reflexive trope through which students are engaged in sense-making. This is supported by the activities and discussions in class which form a pedagogic commitment to more particularly encourage a space of dialogue where the encounter in this case is about the 'everyday urban' (Amin, 2002: 959) as a site of analysis and where the classroom exits as a space where ' intercultural exchanges can occur (...)' (ibid: 967). For example:

'Through discussions in seminar, suburbs were known to be places that contrast inner city areas; some were seen from a positive perspective, some were not. Also depending on experience within the areas and information heard, people had differing opinions about specific places, e.g. Burnley, the area I personally originate from, is a place I see as not so polite. The atmosphere people of the community would create for others sometimes would be negative; which is why I found moving to London very

beneficial – the atmosphere and change of surroundings seem to show how the community of the area of London I have moved to is much more civil and mannerly.' (Diary 45).

Interestingly, this student came from one of the northern cities where the race riots that took place in 2001 ensued a debate on multiculturalism and community cohesion. Talking with her fellow students, she was able to begin consolidating an idea of what multiculturalism means on an everyday basis. And even though 'colleagues of [her] seminar were surprised to hear that [she] found the South more 'civil and mannerly' than the North of England as Northern areas of the country are generally known to be a lot more polite', her statement echoes other students' reflections on everyday multicultural living in London. Their contrasting experiences constitute here a form of tacit knowledge of what living multiculture in different urban contexts means and that they can mostly express through the idea of politeness and civility. It began a conversation that the teacher could pick up on in other seminars to discuss this in relation to concepts such as urban multicultural conviviality (Gilroy, 2004). The following section further explores the question of experiential knowledge in relation to sociologically making sense of urban multicultural living.

From experiences of the city to being reflexive of what it means in sociological terms.

Reflecting on the 'throwntogetherness' (Massey, 2005) of the city is overall a regular occurrence in the diaries and provide a foundation for engaging discussions in class (or vice et versa as seen with the student from Burnley) that demonstrated a 'unpanicked' form of urban multiculture (Noble, 2009; Bennett, 2016) and in some cases what Gilroy defines as '... the chaotic pleasure of the convivial postcolonial urban world' (Gilroy, 2004: 167). As such, they begin to formulate in a sociological manner the phenomena in the city that they routinely observe. It is indeed apparent from their reflections that they begin to form a sociological imagination about diversity, living multiculturalism in a city like London as evident in the following quote taken from a visual diary entry:

'What I find fascinating about .... (the area he is from) is the way in which diversity is present in all corners. There are people of different class, age, ethnicities and genders. From the amount of diversity present in my area, I can conclude that ... is a place that integrates individuals, which forms a co-existing group of people within this

particular part of society. it amazes me how, people living in ... may share different ideas, beliefs and have different values, they still all share similar experiences with one another (...). Since ... is a place with a lot of diversity; it is very multi-cultural and this is mostly evident through businesses such as restaurants and cafe's that shower the streets. (Diary 53)

Students regularly reflected on these issues using their area as a case in point and in doing so they were in some cases able to start developing a critical perspective:

'However, times when the police come around my area to do a check-up and to question the community's security, our collectiveness is fortified and it feels good as we are discussing what the majority feels concerns our community. However, on a day-to-day basis I do not see this 'community feel' because firstly, I do not interact with neighbours daily (rarely see them) and secondly, due to busy lifestyles most neighbours focus on themselves and what is happening in their lives. Although it has been stated that the community lacks collectiveness, it is not all bad because although there isn't much interaction between neighbours like other communities might have, my neighbourhood is peaceful and I believe most get along very well with each other despite the loose-knit relationships amongst locals.' (Diary 5)

In this case, the student is able to use her observations to formulate ideas around togetherness and community cohesion in the city. There is a sense however that there is a discrepancy between the public discourse of community cohesion that is carried by a state institution like the police and what she defines as 'community feel' which subtly denotes the everyday experience of living in London where the sense of togetherness is more to do with a status quo where people 'mind their own business' as she puts it than as an enforced or artificially created set of practices through state-led policies. In her diary, she regularly reflects on how public discourses and representations of the area included in the media compare with its everyday experience. Her appreciation is again to be related to the more understated forms of convivial urban multiculturalism, one that implies 'civilities of indifference to difference' (Amin, 2013).

Reflexivity and experiential knowledge alone do not suffice and it is essential for the teaching team to offer the sociological language that will frame and support their ideas with

the academic rigour required in developing a sociological imagination and in doing research. In this case, it is a question of going back on the ideas developed by students pointing to concepts such as 'urban conviviality' (Gilroy, 2004) and 'throwntogetherness'(Massey, 2005) as well as discussing the social structures that constitute this unique urban experience and how they can be researched. These are methodological as well as theoretical tools that they can use to critically make sense of the social phenomena their experiences are inscribed in.

Besides diversity and multiculturalism, students in our cohorts are also increasingly reflective of the disparities incurred by the mechanisms of neo-liberalism and gentrification in London as they often come from areas where changes in the landscape and in the demography are increasingly denoting stark socio-economic differences. Our population of students coming from less affluent social backgrounds is proportionally quite large. This is evident in other post-1992 universities which have traditionally, even though relatively, been more successful at widening participation (Reay, Grozier and Clayton, 2009). This is another aspect of the diversity of the cohort that needs to be contended with. Sensing an acute experiential understanding of social inequalities in the city, the course content has notably evolved to incorporate a growing emphasis on questions of gentrification and social disparities. Their socio-economic backgrounds indeed greatly matter in their experience of the city and its navigation. It is therefore essential to read class as underlying into their positionality as it also appears to be salient in the way students use positionality in their reflective account.

Transformative Learning in Prosaic Sites of multiculturalism against the consensual hegemony of the neo-liberal classroom

In fostering 'prosaic sites of cultural exchange' (Amin, 2002), the pedagogy, employed in the 'Researching the City' module displays, a twofold potential. It uses the urban multiculturality of the cohort as a trope to develop a sociological imagination concomitantly to introducing students to skills and methods. Students are given a space where they are able to be reflexive of multicultural urban living as well as other aspects of living in London while reflecting on how these issues can be researched. In some cases, this reflexivity is reaching a critical engagement that can be transformative as they develop a sociological imagination alongside a researcher's identity. The value of a sociological imagination is to critically address the relationship between self to the structure. Stephenson et al. argue that '... sociology can be personally transformative in a way that no other academic discipline is, or can be, which is

both the promise and purpose of sociology (Mills, 1959)' (Stephenson et al., 2015: 163). Fostering a sociological imagination in particular can be transformative in that it allows transgression and divergence from the neo-liberal consensus where problems are imbued to individuals' choices and actions. 'Emancipation through sociological enlightenment' resides in the ability to go against the hegemony of a neo-liberal refusal to engage with structural constrains (Stephenson et al. 2015: 163). Developing a sociological imagination in a prosaic site of multiculturalism, such as the multicultural classroom in this post-1992 institution, further asserts the importance of different voices, of their inclusivity and the way in which individually as well as collectively they can be transformative.

In the case of the module presented here, by using a diary as part of their assessment, one of the pedagogic emphasis is on reflexivity and this puts into focus experiential knowledge as central to 'researching the city'. In highlighting the need to embrace the 'multicultural world' in teaching, hooks (1994) encourages us to work on pedagogic strategies that value experiential knowledge as essential to a transformative pedagogy. Although she does not fully embrace the notion of "authority of experience", she feels that it is crucial to attend to different subjectivities as 'we all bring to the classroom experiential knowledge, that this knowledge can indeed enhance our learning experience' (hooks, 1994: 84). The exercise of listening to a diversity of experiences does not privilege one voice over another and therefore disrupts the 'prevailing pedagogical model' that 'is authoritarian, hierarchical (...)'(hooks, 1994: 84-85). Their experiences matter and are to be duly accounted for even if it is still the role of the teacher to then offer theoretical and methodological frameworks as sociological tropes into these experiences as ways of critically making sense of individual pathways in relation to structures. In this, the learning experience has greater potential to be fully transformative.

In the classroom, the aim is not necessarily to create a space of agonism and agonistic politics as advocated by Amin (2002) but at least a space of generative dialogue where one's own positionality is worked into a sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) that will be turned into critical engagement. Ultimately, this approach can be considered a form of conscientization in terms of a liberatory pedagogy (Freire, 1970) or, in relation to a feminist pedagogy, of consciousness-raising (Larson, 2005) as it adopts a committed and engaged form of pedagogy to raising awareness and self-awareness to processes of oppression, marginalization and social inequality and therefore aims for greater social justice. For hook, transformative

learning is possible if there is' a sense that there is a shared commitment and a common good that binds us' (hooks, 1994: 40).

As a sociology lecturer and others before me (Peterson et al., 2015; Rushe and Jason, 2011), I hope for this critical engagement to be taken beyond the classroom. The aim is to provide a space where students as citizens grow as empowered subjects (See Amin, p. 978) and where, in this case, citizenship is about the lived of experience of the city as plural and integrative of difference as well as the expression of difference working towards a more just society. This contains the idea that such a pedagogical commitment differs from the more individualising impositions of a neo-liberal agenda on teaching and learning in academia and that public good should remain a key intention of our academic practice. Higher Education should not only cater for a privileged few but should be integrative of all that have been encouraged to partake in it and not just as consumers.

Conclusion

This paper reflected on the teaching of research skills and methods to a diverse cohort of first year sociology and criminology students around the idea of 'Researching the City'. The course addresses the (super-)diversity of the cohort by designing a curriculum that aimed to embrace educational encounters as 'prosaic sites of multiculturalism' allowing for students to draw on their experience as knowledge. Using the ideas of 'prosaic sites of multiculturalism' and of 'micropublics of everyday interaction' (Amin, 2002: 960) where difference is negotiated on an everyday basis, I have argued that this negotiation can be transformative if in the case of the social science classroom, it is channelled via reflexive pedagogic strategies built around a corpus of methods and theories. Positionality through reflexivity in their diary in particular emerged as essential in the articulation of their situated and experiential knowledge. The various activities and opportunities to reflect on them in the diary encouraged students to think about everyday multiculturalism and interrelated issues of power and inequality in new and transformative ways. Their experience was further confronted in the space of the multicultural classroom to the experience of others forming a more complex picture of urban multicultural living. However nascent their formulations

might be, students begin to articulate a critical reading of multicultural living and other aspects of living in a city like London where social disparities are also on the increase.

This transformative potential is however reliant on teachers' ability to be responsive to students' experiential knowledge by giving them the theoretical and methodological tools to make sense of their experiences using a 'sociological imagination' that connects their individual biographies to hegemonic structures and structural constrains. This is also the role of teachers and/or teaching teams to be in turn reflexive of their encounter with this experiential knowledge in the design and redesign of courses. This ability to work in dialogue with our students' experiential knowledge also constitute a form of disruption to existing hierarchies and a resistance to the neo-liberal agenda that governs our work in universities. This can overall be seen as a pedagogical resistance to neo-liberal imperatives of 'marketized individualism' (Lynch, 2006) and processes of normativisation for the student as consumer pressured to succeed and become an individual prepared for the competition of the employment market. This approach instead is concerned with collectively 'coming to terms with difference'(Amin, 2002: 976) by way of introducing a social justice agenda to a curriculum valuing critical thinking. As a pedagogue, I therefore argue in favour of the liberatory potential of experiential knowledge in dialogue with a 'sociological imagination' as a pedagogical route to empowering students in and out of the classroom in opposition to a neo-liberal ethos that instead values individualisation and competitiveness and is at present transforming Higher Education and society as a whole in the UK.

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Short Bio:

Magali Peyrefitte is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Criminology and Sociology at Middlesex University. Using a range of multi-modal and multi-media methodologies, her research focuses on how identity and power relations are affected and transformed within everyday spaces, in cities as well as in the home. With a commitment for greater social justice, she has looked at identity, home and belonging in cities at the intersection of different social categories and factors. Her teaching is directly informed by her research interests with the aim to provide a critical and transformative space for her students.