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Towards an ‘ordinary’ cosmopolitanism in everyday academic practice in higher education

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Towards an ‘ordinary’ cosmopolitanism in everyday academic practice in higher education

In this article, we explore what cosmopolitanism looks like in particular institutional contexts in higher education and the sorts of conditions and pedagogic practices which nurture and sustain this within the overall running and administration of the institution. Cosmopolitanism is sometimes popularly assumed to refer to the global and the culturally diverse, rather as if encounters with different cultures and ethnicities from different geographical locations could add up to a cosmopolitan perspective. Our view of cosmopolitanism and our concern start from local and everyday occurrences or ‘ordinary cosmopolitanism’ in the context of higher education. We develop an understanding of cosmopolitanism as embedded practice in the particularities of local institutional contexts and administration and what cosmopolitanism means in the ‘local’. Small illustrative sketches are drawn on to exemplify aspects of ‘ordinary cosmopolitanism’ – what it is, why it is important and its enactment in everyday academic practice in higher education.

Keywords: ordinary cosmopolitanism, academic practice, higher education

Introduction

This article is a ‘think piece’ that has grown out of our writing on cosmopolitanism (Su and Wood, 2017). It is primarily conceptual in nature but also with an empirical element through the inclusion of illustrative sketches drawn from our individual experiences and findings from a research study we carried out in higher education settings. The article makes a contribution to the field by situating the concept of cosmopolitanism in the specifics of institutional conditions and administration thus aiming to enable readers to relate to the cosmopolitan agenda more readily. We are concerned with what cosmopolitanism may look like and what it may mean when contextualised in the ‘local’ setting and the overall running of the institution which in this article we refer to as its administration, and the expression of cosmopolitanism in the routine and

everydayness of ordinary lives. In doing so our frame of reference is primarily with ‘hidden’ contexts rather than with absolutist principles. Nixon (2011:51) differentiates between “on the one hand, a dominant ‘neoliberal’ or ‘corporate’ version of market-led globalization and, on the other, an emergent and still fragile democratically inflected cosmopolitanism.” We refocus the discussion from the ‘corporate’ version referred to here by Nixon, towards a ‘democratically inflected cosmopolitanism’. We argue that this version is ‘emergent’ and shifts the debate from a historically located dominant universalist form to a more personal interpretation in the institutional setting.

We recognise that there are different ways in which cosmopolitanism can be understood. Cosmopolitanism can be thought about in different senses and with different meanings. As Holton (2009, p. 2) has noted:

Cosmopolitanism at its simplest joins together two ideas, that of the *cosmos* or the world as a whole with *polis*, or political community. Put together, the two refer to ideas of a global politics involving citizens of the world. However the terms cosmopolitan and cosmopolitanism have come to take on far broader meanings, to do with being at home in a world of mobility and travel, involving contact between peoples and cultures. In this way, cosmopolitanism has recently become seen as a way of life as much as a sense of political or ethical obligation to the world as a whole.

Our interest is cosmopolitanism in the situated and ‘ordinary’ sense. We define this using Skrbis and Woodward’s (2013, p. 102) conceptualisation of ordinariness as cosmopolitan acts embedded in everyday routines of life. Appiah (2007, p. xiii) identifies two aspects that combine in the idea of cosmopolitanism:

One is the idea that we have obligations to others, obligations that stretch beyond those to whom we are related by the ties of kith and kind, or even the more formal ties of shared citizenship. The other is that we take seriously the value not just of human life but of particular human lives, which means taking an interest in the

practices and beliefs that lend them significance. People are different, the cosmopolitan knows, and there is much to learn from our differences.

Our concern is with the relationship between the idea of the wider ‘global’ ties and obligations to others as ‘citizens of the world’ in ‘local’ everyday, lived experiences which are contextualised, specific and illustrated by way of the inclusion of small sketches. The sketches serve to bring out the ‘hidden’ aspects of cosmopolitanism and how it can be encountered in the ordinariness of everyday experiences. The concept of ordinary cosmopolitanism offers a ‘window’ through which to view some of the ways in which community can be built across differences. Seeing and understanding ourselves better may be one such window through which to see and understand others more clearly. The small sketches are no more than illustrations which help to uncover aspects of ordinary cosmopolitanism in everyday occurrences. A thread through each is collaboration, and this requires a learning environment that nurtures it.

In addition, in this article, we make connections between the configuration of conceptual and physical space for more open and equal relationships and the enactment of ordinary cosmopolitanism. We argue that particular conditions are necessary for ordinary cosmopolitanism to take hold. In considering the design of space and the purposes for which it is to be used, Kelley (2012, p. 5) notes how space can impact on behaviour and can convey clear messages: ‘When you walk into most offices, the space tells you that it’s meant for a group of people to work alone’. He considers the design of collaborative space for participation and sharing and growing ideas (p. 5). These are spaces which signal more equal relationships between teacher and learner:

When you walk into one of our classes, it’s almost impossible to tell who’s teaching and who’s learning. Innovation thrives on this kind of equality. With a boss or a professor standing at the head of a room, it feels like a ‘sage on the stage’ – people are reluctant to share their ideas (‘What if the boss doesn’t like it?’).

Reconfiguring the physical relationship is a powerful signal that participation is truly welcome. (Kelley 2012, p. 5)

Morrone et al. (2014) report on the design of a university classroom as a flexible learning space with 'café-style characteristics' in the lighting, the seating arrangements and technology, for example, to enable active collaborative learning to develop. The study suggested that the 'non-traditional "café" atmosphere had benefits as an environment for learning. Some of these themes of atmosphere, the design of space and the ways it is used for collaboration resonate with one of the illustrative sketches explored later in which we examine the variety of spaces and places in the university more generally for academics to collaborate and connect.

The idea of cosmopolitanism

The term 'cosmopolitanism' as 'citizen of the cosmos' can be traced to the Cynics of the fourth century BC (Appiah, 2007, p. xii). Cosmopolitanism is discussed in the literatures today in various terms, which include values, predispositions, dimensions, 'outlook' and 'modalities', and Held (2010, pp. 14-15) suggests that 'there is not one unified or monolithic understanding of cosmopolitanism'. Held views cosmopolitanism as 'the ethical and political space which sets out the terms of reference for the recognition of people's equal moral worth, their active agency and what is required for their autonomy and development' (p. 49). Cosmopolitanism is based on eight principles: (i) equal worth and dignity; (ii) active agency; (iii) personal responsibility and accountability; (iv) consent; (v) collective decision-making about public matters through voting procedures; (vi) inclusiveness and subsidiarity; (vii) avoidance of serious harm; and (viii) sustainability (Held 2010, p. 69).

We are aware of tensions between the positive aspects of cosmopolitanism which this article focuses on and the negative impacts of neo-liberalism on universities and believe that this bears further brief discussion here. The pernicious and disturbing influence of neo-liberalism on higher education has been discussed by Giroux (2014), who argues that this poses challenges for the meaning of higher education as ‘a public arena where ideas can be debated, critical knowledge produced, and learning linked to important social issues’ (p. 18). We believe that ordinary cosmopolitanism can contribute to reshaping the discourse by refocusing it on the transformative aspects of academic practice contextualised in the everyday. Giroux (2014, pp. 39-40) asserts that

rather than being forced to participate in a pedagogy designed to raise test scores and undermine forms of critical thinking, students must be involved pedagogically in critically discussing, administrating, shaping the material relations of power and ideological forces that structure their everyday lives.

Examples of this more transformative pedagogy can be seen in our small illustrative sketches, which exemplify the pedagogic approaches and conditions necessary to nurture and sustain it. Rather than a pedagogy designed to raise test scores or to slavishly comply with pre-determined outcomes for learning, we draw on Mezirow’s perspective that ‘[h]elping adults construe experience in a way in which they may more clearly understand the reasons for their problems and understand the options open to them so that they may assume responsibility for decision making is the essence of education’ (Mezirow 1981, p. 20).

Conceptualising an ‘ordinary’ cosmopolitanism

Ordinary cosmopolitanism takes place in people's everyday interactions with others from different backgrounds. This might include, for instance, when people engage in a conversation at children's birthday parties, or people interact at a music or food festival,

or when parents meet and exchange childcare and cooking advice, or when people have a conversation with their neighbours on their driveways, or when they meet and exercise with others in a gym. In all of these everyday examples, people's differences are accepted as normal and unremarkable. Like Skrbis and Woodward (2013), we prefer the term 'ordinary' to 'banal', a term which is also encountered in the literature. Cosmopolitanism and 'globalisation' should perhaps be briefly considered here. The concept of globalization of course cannot be adequately dealt with here but as Skrbis and Woodward (2007) suggest that 'much of the current thinking about cosmopolitanism has developed from globalisation literatures' (pp. 733-734) it is important to refer to this. Just as we have noted that there is no single understanding of cosmopolitanism, Held (2010, p. 28) has noted that the term 'globalisation' lacks precise definition. Held suggests that 'Globalization can best be understood if it is conceived as a spatial phenomenon, lying on a continuum with 'the local' at one end and 'the global' at the other.' (p. 28). Whilst cosmopolitanism may be associated in some people's minds with the global, the distant, the exotic and 'in a number of respects, a worldview and way of life suited to the more powerful and wealthy' (Holton 2009, p. 9), we argue for the importance of recognising cosmopolitanism in the local and in ordinary everyday events. Cosmopolitanism in the 'ordinary' sense is situated in principles, such as those which comprise the framework formulated by Held (2010) and embodied and interpreted in the specifics of our everyday experience. As Held (p. 79) notes, 'while cosmopolitanism affirms principles which are universal in their scope, it recognizes, in addition, that the precise meaning of these is always fleshed out in situated discussions', and it is the situated nature of cosmopolitanism that is our concern.

Ordinary cosmopolitanism is expressed through the interconnections and

relationships located in everyday situations in the context of higher education. By ‘ordinary cosmopolitanism’, we refer to the normal, everyday and routine interactions of individuals from different backgrounds. These may be seen as unremarkable by those engaging in such interactions, who may not necessarily recognise that they embody the idea of ordinary cosmopolitanism. However, these interactions might create a starting point for a conversation which leads to a better understanding of each other, and even the formation of ongoing or formalised friendship networks. We are attracted to the idea of ‘ordinary cosmopolitanism’ exactly because it is rooted in that which is familiar and ‘embedded in everyday routines of life’ (Skrbis and Woodward 2013, p. 102) and as such it may be recognisable to the reader. We draw on this idea to refer to the spaces, both physical and conceptual, where people may discover and share things they hold in common. This may begin by engaging in conversation with others.

Appiah presents a model of cosmopolitanism on which is supposed that ‘all cultures have enough overlap in their vocabulary of values to begin a conversation’ (2007, p. 57). He uses the word ‘conversation’ not only to refer in the literal sense to talk, ‘but also as a metaphor for engagement with the experience and the ideas of others’ (p. 85). For Appiah, the starting point for a cross-cultural conversation does not have to be something universal; it just needs to be something the people in the conversation have in common. The conversation then can become the starting point for understanding things which are not shared. A mark of the cosmopolitan is that they ‘enjoy’ discovering differences and use this ‘cosmopolitan curiosity’ to explore differences and learn from others or to ‘simply be intrigued by alternative ways of thinking, feeling and acting’ (p. 97). They also have the intelligence to look beyond the immediate differences or problem to try to take a broader perspective, seeing that features of their own context may be related to the creation of difference or to the

problems of others (p. 168). Some physical places and social spaces are particularly conducive to this kind of conversation. We need to identify places and spaces to enable these ordinary human encounters and conversations.

Some people may be critical about this ordinary cosmopolitanism approach and may view the above examples simply as ‘superficial’ interactions. We recognise that not all everyday encounters can necessarily translate beyond the specifics of the individual moments into the transformation of a cosmopolitan outlook or lead to consensus about something. However, whilst we recognise that not all such encounters can be interpreted in this way, in our view it should be recognised that these everyday and casual encounters and conversations are ‘valuable in themselves’ (Appiah 2007, p. 85) in offering possibilities and opportunities to get to know and understand one another. They therefore can help to develop understandings and to open up the possibility for a genuine ordinary cosmopolitanism, or at the very least, ‘it’s enough that it helps people get used to one another’, as argued by Appiah (2007, p. 85).

Holton (2009, p. 114) reminds us that openness to others is often said to be a defining feature of cosmopolitanism. He notes that the idea of ‘openness’ is somewhat vague and raises some important questions: ‘How open, for example, does a cosmopolitan have to be? Open to all others in all their rich diversity or only some? And if openness is qualified, are we not shifting back into non-cosmopolitan closure?’ On this question of openness, Skrbis and Woodward (2013, p. 115-116) suggested that

researchers must look not to absolute expressions of openness, but to its performance, effervescence and manifestation across a diversity of settings by a diversity of people. While there is good reason to think that types of openness based upon the educated contemplation of people, music or objects is associated more with particular privileged classes, it should not be overlooked that qualities of openness can be displayed within working classes, migrant and marginal communities.

Situating the ‘ordinary’ cosmopolitanism in everyday academic practice

As explained earlier, our view of cosmopolitanism and our concerns are rooted in the local and everyday occurrences or ‘ordinary cosmopolitanism’ in the context of higher education. We aim to develop an understanding of cosmopolitanism as embedded practice in the particularities of local institutional contexts and what cosmopolitanism means in the ‘local’ and therefore small illustrative sketches are drawn on to situate the discussion in lived experiences to which the reader may relate. Let us take the example of blended learning, as an example of what cosmopolitanism may mean in the ‘local’.

By ‘blended learning’ we refer to blending face-to-face and online learning, as a small illustrative sketch drawn from the individual experiences of the authors. This sketch concerns a collaborative degree course delivered by a blended learning approach which mixes traditional face-to-face teaching and internet-based learning through the university’s virtual learning environment (VLE). The latter can be synchronous, whereby the lecturer and students are in the VLE at the same time, or asynchronous, where the students carry out online tasks independently. In this particular example, face-to-face teaching sessions usually took place on one evening every week in off-campus centres (sixth form colleges), and students then completed online learning tasks independently during the rest of the week. The use of the blended learning approach was a response to the fact that most of these students were either in full-time employment or had family commitments during the daytime. It was therefore important to recognise the diversity of the student body and also to seek ways to respond to this in flexible curriculum delivery. The blended learning approach was implemented as a result of this thinking and an ‘openness to others’ was shown in the sense of being receptive and open to students’ needs and circumstances.

Blended learning utilises both traditional face-to-face teaching and online teaching methods to enhance and extend the learning opportunities of students. It has the potential to create a learning community outside the traditional classroom that allows increased independent learning whilst engendering an interdependence of learners. The challenge for the tutor in this scenario was to encourage students to develop a sense of belonging to a learning community. Trust among students was the key in achieving this. As part of the face-to-face teaching sessions at the beginning of this particular course, a number of ice-breaker activities were used to allow students get to know each other and share their views on contemporary education issues in a safe classroom space. In addition, students were asked to play a central role in the blended learning process. For instance, each week a different student was asked to chair the optional face-to-face study group which enabled them to meet and discuss the online learning tasks together. A shared understanding of etiquette for online engagement was agreed and established at the beginning, e.g. etiquette in contributing to online discussions. With these initiatives, students started to develop relationships in the learning community and through observation of the agreed etiquette protocols, to respect each other's differences in their engagement of learning.

In this small illustration drawn from one particular context, it can be seen that embedding a cosmopolitan outlook into the ordinary everyday practice of teaching an increasingly diverse student body requires an openness to students' learning needs. Supporting ordinary cosmopolitanism requires academics to operate in a deliberate and sustained way to attempt continually to shape teaching and learning environments into democratic spaces of knowledge exchange (Brookfield 1995). The blended learning model was one effort to create such a learning environment, which encouraged student-

led learning, valued dialogues in learning, and promoted reflexivity through reflecting on one's own learning and education trajectories.

Our argument that cosmopolitan perspectives are situated in the specificity of pedagogic practices is further illustrated through the next short sketch, illustrating critically reflective learning experiences. Seminar discussions are a common feature of teaching and learning strategies in many higher education courses. Let us take the example of a Master's programme for part-time postgraduate students who are also practitioners working in education settings and, as part of their study on the course, design and plan practice-based research.

The option for students to engage in pedagogic research as part of their studies on this course is 'locally-informed' by the students' needs in their workplace settings. They are encouraged to consider unquestioned assumptions and beliefs behind their routine practices, the aim being to develop critical skills such as questioning and reflection on practice. The learning and teaching strategy on the course also encourages students to 'think together in dialogue' (Nixon 2015). Critical reflection is an expectation of study at Master's level and seminar discussions aim to engage students in this through talking and thinking together with other students. To further explain the rationale for this learning strategy, we can draw on the work of theorists such as Mezirow, who 'focuses on the reflective processes that occur when adults change their "meaning schemes"' (Jordan et al. 2008, p. 202). For Mezirow, transformative learning involves self-reflection and new perspectives on experience (Jarvis et al. 2003). Seminar discussion offers a space for students to critically interrogate their everyday professional experiences and practices and to participate in shared critical reflection. For example, it could be participation in a discussion which raises challenging issues concerning the exercise of power, agency and the purposes of education or about the rhetoric of policy

discourse, prompted perhaps by an initial input (in the form of a reading or a lecture input). Held's cosmopolitan principles affirm the importance of active agency, understood as 'a capacity both to make and pursue claims and to have such claims made and pursued in relation to oneself' (Held 2010, p. 70). Mezirow maintained that:

In order to be free we must be able to 'name' our reality, to know it divorced from what has been taken for granted, to speak with our own voice. Thus it becomes crucial that the individual learn to negotiate meanings, purposes, and values critically, reflectively, and rationally instead of passively accepting the social realities defined by others. (Mezirow 1991, p. 3)

The course includes opportunities for practice-based research, on the basis of which claims to knowledge in relation to the practice-context are made and defended.

'Researchers should "ask difficult questions" and "speak up for what we believe is right"' (Mortimore 2000, p. 22, cited Wellington 2000, pp. 182-183) and thus it could be argued that this builds active agency.

This form of ordinary cosmopolitan encounter can be transformative as students begin to see things differently. This encounter engages the student in looking both within and beyond their own situation:

All researchers need to develop the capacity to see their topic with *new and different lenses*, in order to look beyond and transform their own current knowledge. Topics present themselves for research in different ways, and for all sorts of different reasons. What distinguishes research from everyday interest or curiosity, however, is the *opening up of familiar things to alternative ways of seeing*. (Clough and Nutbrown 2002, p. 45)

The cosmopolitan perspective can be embedded in everyday pedagogic encounters as in this example, and others may recognise the opportunities to nurture this in their own practices. Race and Pickford (2007) drew attention to changes evident in post-

compulsory education, including ‘less focus on what is taught and more on how learning is fostered’ (pp. 1-2) and ‘extensive replacement of mass lectures with workshops and problem-based learning classes’ (p. 2), and assert that:

A changing context in post-compulsory education means that traditional roles are shifting and blurring, with academics, learning technologists, learning support staff and information retrieval specialists coming together to work in learning teams who can develop learning environments and materials’ (Race and Pickford 2007, pp. 2-3).

This small sketch is illustrative of a movement towards student-centred, constructivist pedagogy which prioritises dialogue and collaborative learning. In terms of the idea of ‘traditional roles shifting’, to which Race and Pickford referred, the sketch illustrates a pedagogic approach which shifts roles of tutor and student and positions both as ‘knowers’. This contrasts to a view of the tutor as sole source of expert knowledge, as referred to in the ‘sage on the stage’ analogy (Kelley 2012) above, and the student as knowledgereceiver. The predominant idea which characterises this pedagogy is perhaps best described in Light et al.’s terms as a ‘learning focused conception’, where ‘[t]eaching is not simply regarded as aiding students’ accumulation of knowledge presented to them, but rather the process of facilitating a student’s construction of knowledge for herself’ (Light et al. 2009, p. 30). This suggests that conceptions of learning and teaching have changed, as Race and Pickford noted, but it is the roles of tutor and student that have shifted – towards a conversational encounter as in the seminar illustration and student as knowledge creator through the practitioner researcher example, rather than a one-way ‘delivery’ of content from instructor to student as the recipient.

Ordinary human encounters and conversations can offer opportunities to share meanings and develop a better understanding of experiences. Mezirow (1991, p. 11)

saw making meaning as central to the process of learning and said that by participating in dialogue with others we give meaning to experience (p. 58).

The first author's experience of teaching on a collaborative undergraduate degree provision of a social science degree between a university and higher education centres in sixth form colleges located in the Northwest of England is drawn on to provide a further contextualisation for ordinary cosmopolitanism. The course, delivered by the degree awarding university at the two partner colleges, was aimed at students who could not attend full-time traditional university degree courses due to work or family commitments. The collaborative degree provision is part of the university's widening participation initiative. The student body on the degree course was very diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, religion and age. Many students were the first generation in their family to study in higher education. Students faced many challenges to their learning and it was crucial for their success that academics recognised these and helped to find ways to lessen them, and support students to develop their confidence as learners. The teaching became a journey of getting to know the students and their different needs, helping them to gain confidence in themselves as undergraduate students, encouraging them to apply the wealth of their life experience to the degree subjects they studied, and, hopefully, to encourage them through their studies to participate more actively in society. These tasks required academics to recognise and appreciate the different learning needs between learners in the shared learning community and to adjust the learning and practice to meet the needs of this diverse student body. For example, one of the courses explored the challenging issues facing the English education system in achieving the 'education for all' agenda, regardless of the learner's socio-economic background, race and gender. As part of the coursework, students were invited to write a reflective autobiographical piece on their own learning

journeys and to ask themselves questions about their own education trajectories, such as: What factors had influenced their education at different stages? What had motivated them to stay in education? Why had they chosen to study for a university degree? Through writing and sharing their autobiographical narratives, they started to see how social factors have an impact on their education, and how similar and yet also different these were when they compared their learning journeys with their peers in the class. Whilst sometimes challenging to reflect on their own education experience in wider socio-political contexts, it was also empowering for some of the students to understand themselves better through writing about their own education experiences. Giroux (2014, p. 40) has suggested that:

‘In order to connect teaching with the larger world so as to make pedagogy meaningful, critical, and transformative, educators will have to focus their work on important social issues that connect what is learned in the classroom to the larger society and the lives of their students.

Sometimes there can be unpredicted outcomes as illustrated in the following student’s email to the first author who taught her and which, we believe, illustrates aspects of Giroux’s idea of connection:

I just wanted to let you know for the first time I really feel like I have made an informed decision when I voted this morning [the UK general election in 2015] and this is because of your education for all lectures. I took on board what you said and I contacted each of our local candidates, told them what was important to me and asked what their proposals were. I had replies and conversations with two of them and have read their local manifestos, I would never have done that both prior to your lectures and starting the course. I also stood as a parent governor for my son's school, again something I wouldn't have done, I didn't get elected but enjoyed having the opportunity.

Locating space and place for the ‘ordinary’ cosmopolitanism

Space can impact on the nature of learning, as Oblinger (2006, p. 1) reminds us:

Space – whether physical or virtual – can have an impact on learning. It can bring people together; it can encourage exploration, collaboration, and discussion. Or, space can carry an unspoken message of silence and disconnectedness. More and more we see the power of *built pedagogy* (the ability of space to define how one teaches) in colleges and universities.

The importance of spaces for dialogue is shown through the following illustrative sketch which draws on the authors’ recent study of space and place in professional learning. Ordinary cosmopolitanism is not only realised in our learning and teaching practices but also in our interactions and relationships with peers in the university. Bickford and Wright (2006) affirm the power of community as a context for learning and suggest that ‘fostering community is critical to learning regardless of whether an institution is primarily online, commuter or residential.’ (p. 1). Our study involved interviews with eleven academics from five English faith-based universities who were at various stages in their careers across different faculties and disciplines. In the interviews, participants were asked to reflect on their experiences of places and spaces in their university setting for their intellectual development and opportunities for dialogue with ‘others’ through community. We understand the notion of space as an opportunity to promote community and engage in dialogue and reflection. Place denotes a physical locale, which becomes a ‘space’ through purposeful activities that take place there. Our data revealed the importance of physical locale (place) in developing a collegial dialogical space. ‘Space is how you use place and interactions within it,’ suggested one respondent (Male professor D), and other respondents also recognised an interconnectivity between places and spaces:

I think of places more as geographically bounded. The nature of what that place is makes you feel and behave in certain ways. It also applies to spaces. Physicality matters and places have that. It defines the spaces and how people behave. (Male senior lecturer I)

Echoing this point, another respondent also expressed the view that the nature of the physical places impacts on the behaviours of people. Open plan offices, for example, can be challenging for colleagues seeking quiet thinking time, and so people may wear headphones to cancel out office noises, in effect isolating them within a shared space. The design of the campus in terms of architecture and landscape also appeared to have an influence on dialogic spaces. To some participants, an aesthetically designed campus and open plan buildings afforded social spaces where community with others developed through dialogue.

I think the campus here in terms of its architecture and surroundings makes you feel nice to be here rather than be stuck in a concrete building somewhere. It allows you to have that dialogue. There are social spaces, there is a conscious effort to have places where people can meet and talk to each other. (Female lecturer F).

The 'break out spaces' were also important social spaces where 'you can find people and sit somewhere which is not your office and which is not a classroom. This facilitates a very different sort of conversation.' (Female senior lecturer E) These places for dialogue are spaces with a particular texture and quality. The question of place, said one respondent, cannot be separated from what goes on there. This was connected in different ways with opportunities for 'safe spaces in which academics can thrive'. It appeared that certain physical places on campus represented these safe, open and welcoming spaces which were considered necessary in order for the academic community to develop. Places to meet colleagues when going about the campus where 'you get that "hello" as you move around' signalled something of the importance of

incidental human encounters and brief conversational exchanges in the life of the academic community: 'For instance, just walking over here 200 metres I met an old colleague and stopped and had a chat, and then a chat with another colleague from the Department and then a senior member of the Estates staff, 'said one respondent. He further noted the importance of 'smiling day to day contact, dialogues, verbal and nonverbal, smiles, waves, hellos. The pattern of how people move about the place.'

(Male senior lecturer C)

Whilst recognising the conversations and community which virtual spaces have opened up, for example through the use of Skype, webinars and so on, the spaces for personal contacts were also much valued by respondents:

This institution encourages face to face dialogue, there is a drive to staff being in the university and being part of the community and being physically here. There is a push towards face-to-face rather than a virtual community and for engaging with the life of the university in general (Female lecturer F).

Another respondent suggested that 'all technologies are instruments to facilitate relationships and give access to space' (Male professor D, and those technologies have extended the dialogic spaces. Another respondent felt that whilst 'technologies have opened the possibilities and have added a dimension to the space ... At the same time technologies will never replace human contact' (Male senior lecturer I). Another respondent lamented the ways in which emails at times replaced the face-to-face encounter:

Emails are not helpful for dialogues. Sometimes we send email to colleagues next door to us rather than speaking to the person face to face. I wish we could have more face to face encountering rather than locking ourselves in the office and firing off email all the time. (Male principal lecturer H)

As such, technologies appear to have offered possibilities to extend dialogic spaces whilst at the same time posing new challenges to maintaining human and social contact.

Our study revealed the importance of physical place in creating conversational space to enable social contact and talk with others and also with the self. Oldenburg (1999, p. 26) argues for the importance of ‘the great good places’ in public life and views them as places for conversation and ‘the joys of association’. Oldenburg’s concept of ‘the great good places’ has relevance for our discussion of places and spaces as conditions to nurture conversations. Our respondents told us that these most usually take place on campus in the staff common room, the refectory, the coffee bar, the staff lounge, one another’s offices or in the gardens and grounds. Oldenburg’s use of the term ‘third place’ (the ‘first’ place being the home, the ‘second’ the work setting) refers to generic ‘public places that host the regular, voluntary, informal and happily anticipated gatherings of individuals beyond the realms of home and work’ (p. 16). This maps onto our conception of places and spaces but also differs in some respects too. It differs, for example, in that we are referring to places and spaces which are in the professional work setting but which embrace some elements of third space characteristics and activity. The ‘cardinal and sustaining activity’ of the third places is conversation (Oldenburg 1999, p. 26). This talk has a particular quality which is informal and ‘more spirited than elsewhere, less inhibited and more eagerly pursued’ (p. 29).

Imagining the possibilities of the ‘ordinary’ cosmopolitanism

Whilst cosmopolitanism has its derivation in the idea of ‘citizen of the world’, our concern has been with the expression of ordinary cosmopolitanism contextualised in the institutional administration and specific everyday practices in higher education. We

have therefore situated ordinary cosmopolitanism and applied it to pedagogy in relation to the learning conditions of the university setting. The small sketches served to provide specific illustrative contexts, each contributing particular examples which we now relate to the broader themes embedded in our understanding of ‘ordinary’ cosmopolitanism.

Through the sketches, we illustrated how students gained a sense of agency and awareness of their own possibilities and of belonging to a learning community with their fellow students. The role of the tutor was seen as playing an important part in nurturing confidence for some students. The tutor attempted to create the conditions (both in face to face and in virtual learning environments) for the development of positive learning relationships. Our sketches also illustrate ordinary cosmopolitanism as seen through students’ encounters with their fellow students from diverse socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds, each with different aspirations and biographies. In this scenario, ordinary cosmopolitanism was apparent through the curriculum and the inclusive approaches to teaching and learning, through appreciation of the possibilities inherent in each student, and the concern of tutors to create a learning climate which affirmed students’ hopes and respects their experiences.

We illustrated the importance of tutors in nurturing the learning conditions that promote dialogue, critically reflective questioning and the re-examination of beliefs and assumptions, and the seminar was conceptualised as a learning space where everyday professional practices could be reconsidered and reinterpreted. Students examined critically the immediate situation and also looked beyond it to evaluate the impact of wider policy issues.

Our final sketch was drawn on to illustrate the importance of relational spaces and places in the university where everyday conversations take place and community

with colleagues grows. These are typically the informal and spontaneous conversations which occur when colleagues encounter one another on campus, for example in the social setting of the refectory, the cafe or other social space. In these spaces colleagues network with one another, socialise and deliberate. We interpret this as resonant with elements of cosmopolitanism in the everyday association with colleagues from different disciplines. Too often subject specialisation encourages separation rather than interdisciplinary community in higher education. Bickford and Wright (2006, p. 1), for example, have suggested that although specialisation in individual areas has 'led to some innovations, we have fallen short of the full power and potential of aligning our efforts in pursuit of learning'. We are reminded of Appiah's expression 'conversations across boundaries' (2007, p. xix) when considering this scenario and the implications for the development of participation in a community of educators. Dialogue transcends geographically bounded spaces and crosses disciplinary, virtual and physical boundaries. These 'conversations across boundaries' are opportunities to share ideas which may be a spur to new thinking, creative ideas and practices. They are places for personal contact and reciprocal learning in community with others. Understandings are developed together with a 'cosmopolitan mindset'. McNiff (2013, p. 502) has suggested that a cosmopolitan mindset is

not simply taking the insights out of the suitcase when one is a guest in the other's place but actually carrying the insights into one's life, regardless of time and place. It means becoming a different person in the world, becoming comfortable with trying to see things through other people's eyes, while maintaining one's own sense of judgement around what it means to be a person who shares the world with others.

We have conceptualised these social spaces as resonant with 'great good places' for community networking and bonding, and as places where cosmopolitan values such as

inclusiveness and openness to others frame the nature of the encounters there. Our sketches serve to illustrate and situate the idea that ‘cosmopolitanism shouldn’t be seen as some exalted attainment: it begins with the simple idea that in the human community, as in national communities, we need to develop habits of coexistence: conversation in its older meaning, of living together, association’ (Appiah 2007, pp. xvi-xvii).

We have probed what ordinary cosmopolitanism means in the ‘local’, the everyday and commonplace and through inclusion of our illustrative contexts, those engaged in pedagogic practice in higher education may find something they may recognise and to which they may also relate.

We link our specific and situated everyday examples to wider principles. As discussed previously, for Held (2010, p. 49) cosmopolitanism suggests an ‘ethical and political space which sets out the terms of reference for the recognition of people’s equal moral worth, their active agency and what is required for their autonomy and development’. We have attempted to capture the expression of a cosmopolitan perspective in its ‘ordinary’ context, with ‘openness to others’ being central to this and to illustrate cosmopolitanism as the ethical and political space, as described by Held (2010, p. 49), where there is appreciation of difference and where pedagogic approaches develop capability for critical thought. We argue that this is a requirement for development as autonomous beings and central to the mission and purpose of higher education.

Conclusion

We have explored the idea of cosmopolitanism as embedded practice through the concept of ‘ordinary’ cosmopolitanism and have illustrated ways in which higher education institutions can relate to and nurture ‘ordinary’ cosmopolitanism in everyday

practice. It begins with 'local' everyday practices and experiences in the world. Community, openness to others, learner interaction, reflection, inclusive practices and the knowledge and personal experiences each learner brings with them inform the pedagogic approaches as illustrated in our sketches. In our view this conceptualisation of 'ordinary cosmopolitanism' may also support our professional learning (Wood and Su 2014) and our endeavours in achieving 'teaching excellence' in our practice (Su and Wood 2012).

The spaces and conditions for shared experiences, dialogue, deliberation and critical thought are important. Spaces and places which have a 'nice feel' and a sense that it is good to be there with others can nurture ordinary cosmopolitanism. Institutions can nurture these conditions through the pedagogic approaches used, the connections and networks developed and the opportunities for shared social learning. As Nixon (2008, p. 27) has argued, '[a]gainst the prevailing neo-liberal market ideology, it is important to affirm that universities are a symbol of a particular kind of civic association: one grounded, that is, in argumentation and reason and the recognition of difference.' We argue for the importance of nurturing the conditions for ordinary cosmopolitanism in the life of the university, in curriculum development, the mode of the delivery, and creation of physical places and spaces (as conditions), particularly at a time when, as Giroux (2014) maintains, higher education is threatened by the forces of neoliberalism.

The 'ordinary' cosmopolitanism in everyday academic practice is nurtured through conversation and critical reflection; this was illustrated through teaching and learning strategies and also through the importance of conversational spaces for colleagues to engage in critical reflection – 'safe spaces in which academics can thrive'. According to Brookfield (1995, p. 246):

Educational institutions typically think of themselves as learning places for students rather than for teachers (Fraser and Conley, 1994). Critical conversation is tolerated, unless it starts to interfere with classroom teaching time. Few colleges honor and reward critical reflection as a crucial component of what it means to be a good teacher or scholar. And in the absence of this kind of cultural support, teachers who want to challenge organizational assumptions or to explore alternative pedagogic practices will think twice before doing so.

We have argued for the importance of creating the organisational conditions within the administration to nurture agency, critical reflection, inclusive practices and opportunities for enjoyable association which are so central to the ‘ordinary’ cosmopolitanism.

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