In between belonging in higher education

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Abstract

This paper aims to identify, disrupt, and, to some extent, rearticulate the nature and practices of belonging in modern higher education. In doing so, it seeks to show how belonging is a metaxic concept and, thus, necessarily focused on and located within in-between spaces – epistemologically, subjectively, relationally, temporally, and spatially. The paper seeks to map different ways of belonging with a view to both generating richer understandings regarding the nature of the concept and opening up spaces wherein practices in higher education might be critiqued and proposed. To this end, it speaks to the ways in which both Amanda Hlengwa and Alison Phipps offer more reflexive imaginings of higher education, informed by diverse, and often less-heard, voices.

Before embarking on the theoretical examination of belonging, it will be useful to consider the methodological approach that sits at the foundation of this paper. Belonging indicates, at a basic level, the notion that some objects or people have a particular worth inside a particular frame of reference, for example higher education. This inside-outside dichotomy with respect to belonging is important, not least because such bounded categories are dominated and policed by certain forms of knowledge. At a theoretical level, this paper will make use of Foucauldian analyses, drawing particularly on the inextricable relationship he identifies between knowledge and power but also his epistemic method of eventalization, which seeks to pluralise and problematise understandings of events, their relations, and points of reference.

The paper will begin by outlining belonging-between-meanings and in so doing seek to identify spaces where subjugated knowledges might inform richer meaning and more equalised power relations. From here it will progress to consider belonging-between-subjects, denoting the metaxic nature of this phenomenon and recognising the affective dimensions which derive from the subjectification of individual potentialities as well as the relational dimensions of belonging together. It will then move on to analyse belonging-between-places, identifying the importance of spatial and environmental affordances. And finally, consider belonging-between-potentialities with a view to proposing how belonging in higher education may be reified in new and productive ways.

Keywords

Higher education, belonging, Foucault, eventalization, knowledge