

Student Producers Ain't No Losers! Zine-making in a sociology and criminology classroom

Introduction

Zines, as self-published booklets of original and/or appropriated texts and images which are used as a subversive form of media to challenge the dominant social systems of society (Desyllas and Sinclair 2014), are receiving growing interest in scholarship. Some have explored the usefulness of zines in giving communities 'voice' in combating contemporary social justice issues (Miewald & McCann 2014; Houh 2015), while others have focused on how zines can be used in different learning contexts to facilitate more engaged teaching and learning strategies (Piepmeier 2009; Way 2017). However, how zines can play a critical role in resisting the neoliberalisation of higher education has been largely overlooked. The central aim of this chapter is to highlight how zines can be used as a pedagogical tool to facilitate the creation of educational 'free spaces' which can work within and against the institutionalised constraints of the neoliberal university.

Drawing upon a punk pedagogical approach and using Ian MacKaye's (2008) definition of punk as a 'free space', I demonstrate how a DIY community of practice was formed between myself and students on a sociology and criminology foundation year. I elaborate on how the role of teaching and learning was not merely to acquire knowledge but to facilitate community-building, conscientisation and active participation through the enactment of an educational environment that brought teacher and students together to discuss and share sociological and/or criminological ideas and create zines based on such discussions. The concept of heterotopia (Foucault 1986) is used as an interpretive lens to explore how educational 'free spaces' can be created within the neoliberal university and work against them to enact a 'space of resistance' built on punk pedagogical practices that provide students with an alternative set of values which they can draw upon to help change the way higher education is done within these domains, as well as having a wider impact beyond the neoliberal university.

Heterotopology, 'spaces of resistance' and the 'neoliberal university'

Current higher education practice(s) is based on the concept of the *neoliberal university* - a set of processes which – though highly contextual – are global in reach (Berg and Seeber 2016). The neoliberal model of university is part of a 'contextually contingent articulation of free market governmental practices with varied and often quite illiberal forms of social and political rule' (Sparke 2006: 153). The retrenchment of state funding and the turn to a 'free market' approach towards higher education has seen heightened expectations for both staff and students. Staff are expected to juggle creative pedagogical teaching alongside the standardisation of metrics which are used to rank individuals and institutions, creating a culture of competition through which to maximise student intake and thus revenue for universities. Students, on the other hand, have been met with rising tuition fees and an increased focus on utility, students seeking to maximise returns on investment by minimising risk through relying on staff to spoon-feed them answers and explanations. This heavy

emphasis on the commodification of higher education – the McDonaldisation of the university (Dey and Steyaert 2007: 442) – based on profit margins, the homogenisation of assessments and burgeoning student numbers under the rhetorical guise of greater choice, control and freedom has led to a consumer-student subjectivity wherein knowledge is viewed as a product to be delivered (Bagelman and Bagelman, 2016).

This model, however, assumes that higher education is a homogenous space, which students come in and out of to acquire the knowledge needed to achieve an extrinsic goal. It frequently ignores that higher education (as a social space) is highly contestable. According to sociologists and geographers (see for instance, Low 2016; Lefebvre 1974; Soja 1989; Hillier and Hanson 1984), social space is relational and ordered through sets of interactions that cannot be reduced to the occurrence of one type of social relation; rather, social spaces contain multiple social relations coexisting and occurring simultaneously alongside each other. Pierre Bourdieu (1984) maintains that spaces are not just defined by the order of these coexistences but also through their mutual exclusiveness that constitute them and structure the social patterns and behaviours of other spaces. In this regard, then, higher education can be seen as a heterotopic space which affords the enactment of a space of resistance that can work within and against the constraints of the neoliberal university to inform pedagogical practices based on alternative value systems.

In his paper, ‘Of other spaces’, Foucault (1986) defined heterotopia(s) as spatial multiplicity that violates the imagined spatial coherence of utopia(s). However, this is not a violation of simplistic bifurcation but, as Liggett (2003: 44) asserts a ‘violation of mixed use that sidesteps the societal common ground while standing in it’. In other words, Foucault’s heterotopology is dedicated to seeing social space as sites in and through which several spaces intersect. Such heterotopias both relate to their surroundings but are also differential. In displaying spatial ambiguities, heterotopias simultaneously reflect, incorporate and contest other sites. Because heterotopias are connected to the social, they can take different spatial and temporal forms. Foucault provides a list of examples where these heterotopias may exist: ‘festivals, brothels, theatres, prisons, colonies, cemeteries and the *‘heterotopia par excellence, the ‘greatest reservoir of the imagination’, the ship (Foucault 1986: 27, original emphasis).*

Building upon Foucault’s (1986) list, higher education can be another example of a heterotopic space, one that is produced because of the neoliberal developments impacting higher education. Using heterotopia as a theoretical perspective allows me to reflect on how a ‘space of resistance’ was created in the delivery of a sociology and criminology module through the enactment of an ‘other space’. Drawing on the ‘spatial turn’ within sociology (Lefebvre 1974; Low 2016), I denote how human spatiality is an active force (Soja 2004) that can be used to challenge dominant representations and understanding of higher educational space. While studies in critical pedagogy have responded to Soja’s (2004: ix) call for the enactment of socio-spatial thinking to ‘ignite a radical reconfiguration of...education theory’ (see for instance, Leander and Sheehy, 2004), research on punk pedagogies has yet to pay heed to how socio-spatial thinking can promote the development of ‘punk learning spaces’ that challenge the neoliberalisation of higher education. Researching such human spatialities in relation to punk pedagogy is important because, much like how DIY music venues provided (and continue to provide) an alternative space for the development of a different set of social values to the mainstream, the enactment of alternative spaces in higher education

can help to inform and offer a different set of values to students, a set of values which are resistant to the dominant neoliberal ways of *doing higher education*.

Punk pedagogy and zines as a form of resistance

Defining punk pedagogy can be a laborious and problematic task. This is because the concept of punk itself comes with a range of different generalisations and discussions around what it actually is. A discussion that I do not wish to have as part of this chapter. Instead, for the purpose of this chapter, and in line with the above theorising regarding the neoliberal university as a heterotopia, I rather subscribe to Ian MacKaye's (2008: n.pag) understanding of punk as a free space – 'punk is the same thing as folk, jazz and rock: it's a free space. It's a moment in time where you are in an environment in which you have people as an audience (who are mostly also players) who are just interested; profit is not dictating the situation'. This definition of punk has the transformative potential to create new and diverse spaces in opposition to the dominant socio-spatial domains of mainstream society. In a pedagogical context, it is punk's ability to act as a form of social, political and individual resistance that aids student agency and empowerment through a DIY (Do-it Yourself) ethic and a perspective that challenges the normative ideas of education (e.g., education as a consumer product). In this respect, education can be the 'free space' Ian MacKaye refers to.

Under this pretext, punk pedagogy affords the opportunity for individuals to form a collective and shared learning space within the neoliberal university that accepts, protects, and often welcomes different values towards learning (Thompson 2004) while rejecting contemporary higher education's ability to strip students and staff of any sense of autonomy, agency and critical consciousness. These alternative educational spaces are about creating a culture of resistance – resistance to the neoliberal status quo of higher education. Here is where we can see Ian MacKaye's (2008) free space understanding of punk come to life in a pedagogical context; individuals creating a space where learning is taking place without economic or extrinsic (goal) motivations driving participation and engagement.

This 'punk' approach to pedagogy chimes with bell hooks' (1994) concept of *engaged pedagogy*, a process of developing skills to question knowledge. The role of education in this view is not merely to acquire knowledge but to cultivate critical consciousness. For bell hooks, this type of education is integral to actively confronting unequal power relations within the neoliberal university in which she asks, '*how can we expect people to actually critique and challenge assumptions about the social world if, in the classroom, we are taught to obey authority and accept the status quo?*' (bell hooks 1994: 2). bell hooks, however, insists that these engaged pedagogic moments are only possible when the classroom ceases to perform hierarchisation and instead became a space for mutual, embodied learning. A shared task committed to challenging the normative social and cultural praxis within and beyond the classroom itself.

These ideas of challenging the dominant neoliberal domains of the university have been widely discussed. In fact, there is now a range of academic literature that rethinks pedagogy in terms of a critical effort to destabilise the hegemonic practices of the neoliberal university (Freire 1968; Kincheloe 2008; Giroux 2011). Even within the more marginalised, punk pedagogical literature there has been calls to identify how the concept of punk can be used to

challenge the hegemony of dominant representations of higher educational space. For instance, in his article, 'Pedagogy of the Pissed', Seth Kahn-Edgar (1998) provides a conceptual foundation for how punk pedagogy can work to challenge the hegemonic practices of contemporary universities. Drawing from his own research and involvement in punk scenes and engagement with punk ideologies, Kahn-Edgar (1998: 100, emphasis added) highlights the following components that can be used to facilitate 'punk learning spaces of resistance': -

1. The Do-It-Yourself (DIY) ethic (*increased autonomy*).
2. A sense of anger and passion that finally drives a scholar to say what's really on his or her mind (*critical consciousness*).
3. A sense of destructiveness that calls for attacking institutions when those institutions are oppressive, or even dislikeable (*contributing to knowledge and developing the field*).
4. A willingness to endure or even pursue pain to make oneself heard or noticed (*Giving voice*).
5. A pursuit of the "pleasure principle" (*lifelong learning*).

Kahn-Edgar (1998), here, is advocating for a pedagogy that helps move students from being passive consumers of ideology to one where students are active participants in their own learning culture. To do this, Kahn-Edgar elucidates that teachers need to work within and against institutionalised constraints to get students to be critical of the culture and systems pervading their everyday lives. Such an approach provides a strong basis to develop pedagogies that are not just resistant for resistant sake but also incorporate community-based learning. Ian MacKaye's (2008) definition of punk as a free space alongside bell hooks' (1994) *engaged pedagogy* offers a teaching model that exposes the heterotopic spatial frame of the neoliberal university and encourages us to seek out alternative educational spaces in which to enact such pedagogical practice. However, to create an alternative educational space built around ideas of resistance, resistance tactics are needed to address the problematics of the neoliberalisation of higher education.

Zines are one pedagogical resistance tactic that can disrupt the neoliberalisation of higher education (Bagelman and Bagelman 2016). Zines have historically been used as part of the wider textuality of punk. They are used as an alternative mode of expression to make visible local punk scenes and as a subcultural product to denote the experiences and lifestyle of members of the subculture (see, for instance, Guerra and Quintela 2014; Atton 2006; Hebdige 1979). Although there is a range of DIY media - podcasting, music recording, blog posting and so on - I could have used to enact a site of resistance towards the neoliberal university I was bound by what was possible to do within the confines of the classroom. Not only that but I recognised it would be the first time most students would have created a DIY cultural artefact. Therefore, I wanted to use a medium that required less technical knowledge but still got students embracing increased agency and principles of conscientisation, community-building and active participation. Zines can be used as a form of resistance as the very purpose of zine-making is about taking ownership of voice. Taking ownership of voice can encourage students to take an active role in the knowledge acquisition process and reject the passivity informed by the neoliberal model. In the section below, I document how I used a non-credit bearing module on a Sociology and Criminology Foundation Year programme, comprised of 28 students covering a wide social and cultural mix and a range of different

learning abilities, to facilitate an educational ‘free space’, a space where students came together to discuss and share ideas, listen to music with a strong emphasis on social commentary and created zines based on sociological and/or criminological topics they were studying or the analysis of contemporary social issues through a sociological and/or criminological lens. The creation of an alternative space of resistance – which came to be known by the students as ‘zine club’ – empirically demonstrates the heterotopic nature of the neoliberal university. The ‘zine club’ contested the supposed neutrality of the topology of the university as a homogenous space of learning. A culture of resistance was created built upon punk ideas of DIY, active participation, and an alternative set of values that led to student production of knowledge, all of which served as a tool to question the neoliberal university that profits from student passivity.

Zine Club

The problem of enacting pedagogies which promote active participation and liberate students from ‘traditional’ representations of knowledge is that they put students outside of their comfort zone. After all, teacher-led pedagogies enable safe and comforting learning environments whereby knowledge is clearly defined and demarcated through student-teacher hierarchies (Steventon 2012). I knew I could not just get students into a classroom and tell them to get on with it. Providing such levels of freedom and control over the learning experience would be a daunting task for most students, making them feel anxious as though they may get something wrong or not fully understand what is expected of them. This is especially true in an era where there is an increasing importance placed on the National Students Survey (NSS) to steer curriculum delivery, and thus a demand from students and an expectation for universities to apply the path of least resistance in attaining qualifications. Neoliberalism encourages students to be seen as a ‘customer’ and education as product. The subtext of this being that if contemporary higher education is driven by market forces then the students are entitled to receive the ‘product’ they have purchased. Such logic has resulted in the disneyisation of education (Bryman 2004), where learning is based on principles of ‘plaisir’ (Hughes *et al.* 2009: 37) – fun, unchallenging tasks which ‘encourage pleasure (usually of anodyne kinds) and discourages displeasure’ – leading to learning being a mere spectacle (Debord 1973) as opposed to being directly experienced.

Because of this I made the decision to design the first session of the module around ‘traditional’ forms of teaching and learning. I knew this module was going to be organised around pedagogical ideas and approaches unfamiliar to the students, leading to possible anxiety and uncertainty. Therefore, I arranged a two-hour workshop where I was able to present the ideas and approaches to the students in a format familiar to them (e.g., didactic methods). Here, I introduced students to critiques of contemporary higher education practice, critical pedagogy, as well as punk pedagogy and ideas of DIY ethics and zine-making. In scaffolding the students’ learning to alleviate possible feelings of anxiety, I passed around the classroom a few examples of zines. Reminding myself of bell hooks’ (1994) claim that engaged pedagogy can only occur if there is a sense of relaxation as well as excitement, I made it a point to emphasise that there is no specific way of making zines. Rather, the connection between DIY creation and punk was one of doing things differently and to enact a space where new ideas and modes of creativity could emerge. To simply copy the design and

format of the zines shown would have rendered the 'zine club' not punk – a space that was not 'free' but one that reproduced the passive consumption of ideas.

Many of the students were unfamiliar with or only had some a priori knowledge of punk and DIY creation. During the first hour, and at regular intervals, I assigned students tasks to get them thinking about any preconceived assumption towards education (and punk) they may have had. Tasks included putting images on the projector screen of stereotypical punk iconography and an image with the caption: *'Education is not a product. The students are not consumers. The professors are not tools. The university is not a factor'* and getting students to discuss in groups whether they agree or not with the representations of education and punk the images were depicting. While some students expressed the Freirian (1968) notion of 'conscientisation', demonstrating an ability to see beyond their own way of thinking about punk and contemporary higher education practice, many students tended to agree with the representations depicted in the images. Within the second hour of the workshop, I arranged all the tables into 'zine stations'. Each table had a stack of paper, glue sticks, scissors, rulers, and staplers. The groups were tasked (individually or collectively) to practice making a zine. As this was a non-credit bearing module and were not bounded by module learning outcomes. Students were given complete creative control. The only caveat being that the zine needed to be sociological and/or criminological in nature. Students were encouraged to use mobile phones, computers or tablets to print off images, article clippings, poems, words and phrases to be used in their zines, as well as to come and go from the classroom space as they needed to. The goal of this first session was to begin building the foundation for an educational 'free space', a space of resistance where the neoliberalisation of higher education is challenged by the practice of zine-making.

By involving students in the production of knowledge early on I aimed to increase their levels of agency and autonomy that would develop their cognitive abilities and deepen their learning, leading to the development of Kahn-Edgar's (1998: 100) punk learning principles of *'a willingness to endure or even pursue pain to make oneself heard or noticed'* and *'a pursuit of the "pleasure principle"'*. Conceptually, this approach to learning aligns with the constructivist paradigm which encourages students to use voice and a priori experience to heighten their engagement and reflection within the learning processes, and the dialogic possibilities afforded by zine-making opens opportunities for students to begin moving from passive consumers in the classroom to producers of knowledge and learning.

With these principles embedded through the delivery of the introductory workshop, the students and I embarked on facilitating the creation of a 'space of resistance' as part of the Foundation Year in Sociology and Criminology at Birmingham City University in semester two of the 2018/2019 academic year. Our intention was to break down the hierarchical structures within 'traditional' teaching and learning strategies between teacher and student by employing a student-controlled approach. I say 'student-controlled' as opposed the more conventional 'student-centred' because semantically student-centred approaches tend to still have the academic at the centre of the organisation of the learning process and thus reproduce hierarchical distancing between students and the teacher. However, within the 'zine club', the aim was to run the workshops collaboratively with students being active participants in the teaching and learning process, defining and producing knowledge rather than being passive recipients of it. Much like how punk shows and collectively organised punk communities (e.g., the Garlic Bread Club in Manchester, UK) are based on principles of free association.

The breakdown of teacher-student hierarchies as part of the 'zine club' was commented on by a Black, female student as being one of the reasons why she consistently attended the module every week despite it being non-credit bearing: -

Making zines each week is great. You get to be as creative and you like. It feels like the teacher and students are on the same level

(Black, female student)

While the first session of the module was well attended, as the semester went on there was a gradual decrease in the number students participating in 'zine club'. Out of the twenty-eight students who attended the first session only seven maintained participation throughout. This was observed by a White, female student who, because of her enjoyment of engaging in 'zine club' and its liberating potential, was attempting to persuade others in coming along: -

I really enjoy coming to zine club. I tell all the others about it. A lot of them don't get it and so that's why they don't come. But I'm like "are you coming to zines? But no one pays any interest". I personally like it because it is very relaxed and doesn't feel like you're learning.

(White, female student)

One of the reasons for a lack of interest in participating in 'zine club' for a large proportion of students was because of its non-credit bearing status. The neoliberalisation of higher education has influenced how students perceive the purpose of learning, as a means in which to achieve an end. Because of this, students tend to adopt a more strategic approach to teaching and learning (Weinstein and Hume 1998: 10). A strategic learning approach focuses on students as active, self-determined individuals who process information and construct knowledge to achieve specified tasks (e.g., to gain a good grade on an assessment). As a result, many students on the Sociology and Criminology Foundation Year programme did not see the purpose or relevance of the 'zine club', with multiple students informally telling me that they did not attend because it does not contribute towards completion of the programme. The lack of a priori experience of punk, or more importantly, active learning may have influenced their sustained participation in 'zine club'. After all, many individuals' experiences of education are based on the logic of extraction. According to Simpson (2013: n.pag), 'extracting is taking. Actually, extracting is stealing—it is taking without consent'. Because of this many people have difficulty when presented with greater agentic control over their own learning; they are used to an extractive mindset (e.g., receiving and regurgitating information from pedagogic experts to pass an assessment). When individuals do assert agency over their own learning, then, they often employ more *strategic* methods. For the strategic learner, when given the opportunity to actively participate through independent or cooperative student-controlled learning that goes beyond the 'needs' of the classroom they are more likely refuse such opportunities because, for them, the deed of learning needs to be met with an end goal (e.g., a grade, a qualification and so on; see Stix 2004: 21). The group of students who decided to disengage from 'zine club' fit neatly into this category of learners. They were only active when the learning was geared towards a goal (e.g., passing a module).

For the seven students who maintained participation, conversely, not only were they more critically informed towards understandings of punk and the commodification of education, but they also personally benefitted from engaging in a space that enabled them to be creative

and afforded them the opportunity to learn how they wanted to learn, as is denoted in the extract below taken from a conversation I had with a student during ‘zine club’: -

I really like making zines. I've always been creative so being able to come to university and do this I have really enjoyed. It is nice because we get to know your lecturer and they are not there telling you what to do

(White, female student 2)

The zines created by students covered a range of different sociological and/or criminological topics. One student designed a series of social theory zines, with each zine focusing on a particular sociological or criminological theory. Another student explored the intersectional dimensions of her identity as a woman in different spatial domains and how this had an impact on her own experiences of belonging, community, and inclusion/exclusion. Other students addressed topics such as the social and cultural dynamics surrounding the proliferation of knife crime in disadvantaged areas of Birmingham, UK, the globalisation of organised crime, and the role of the culture industry on the reproduction of subcultural membership of metal.

In speaking with students about the connection between punk and experiences of creating their zines, all seven of them expressed how the active production of their zines embodied the attitude and ideology of punk. None of the seven students who maintained participation throughout ‘zine club’ listened to nor associated themselves with ‘punk’. However, by the end of ‘zine club’ they had come to associate ‘punk’ with a set of values, attitudes, and beliefs as opposed to a specific subcultural aesthetic. For the students, then, punk was more akin to something of a ‘floating signifier’ (Hebdige 1979; Hall 1996); an empty style devoid of any meaning beyond what individuals give to it (see also, Bennett 2020). In other words, ‘zine club’ and the act of making zines became punk because of the ideas of active participation, conscientisation, community building zine-making facilitated; that is, zine-making in and of itself was not considered punk. Instead, students saw ‘zine club’ as a space that was productive to punk attitudes and values, aligning with Ian MacKaye’s (2008) definition of punk as a ‘free space’.

This embodiment of punk attitude and values among the seven students who consistently participated in ‘zine club’ led to the same students becoming active participants in the classroom across the Foundation Year programme in which they were able to express themselves in different ways, leading to the students reappraising the ways in which they learn and drawing together a range of different cognitive abilities ranging from self-reflection to critical thinking skills. Not only that but there were notable differences within the way students presented themselves. I observed raised levels of confidence and satisfaction within the classroom, as well as intonation and self-projection where students performed (Goffman, 1969) the role of an autonomous learner. There is no doubt, therefore, that those who participated in ‘zine club’ benefitted from engaging in an alternative educational ‘free space’ - a space which was not dictated by economic and extrinsic (goal) motivation - as the skills and values they developed through participation (e.g., increased agency, self-reflection and critical thinking) were able to be sustained as the students entered into the neoliberal domains of the university and thus reshaped and rearticulated how higher education is done within these spaces.

Conclusion

Punk pedagogy can make change to the way students engage and see themselves within the neoliberal university. The ambition of 'zine club' was not simply about questioning and challenging existing power structures but to facilitate change through the enactment of a 'space of resistance'. While the activities of cutting, pasting, drawing, and writing felt as though they were wholeheartedly an act of resistance to the rejection of the educational values of the neoliberal university, zine-making only becomes a defiant act when placed within a spatialised context that facilitates the creation of an alternative value system. Reflecting on bell hooks' (1994) remarks that joy and excitement are often restrained in the classroom because they are perceived as 'disruptive feelings' - feelings that disrupt the 'traditional' way knowledge is represented, threaten the authority hierarchy and the focus of 'real learning' - the students and myself attempted to stir things up. Within the confines of the neoliberal university, we were able to create a space based on principles of community-building, conscientisation and active participation, where teaching and learning took place within the dialogic interactions between students and teacher, and among students themselves and through the process of zine-making.

Through this process of constructing zines, the seven students who maintained participation throughout the semester developed networks among themselves, often drawing on each other's own expertise and knowledges to scaffold ideas. 'Zine club' as a space of resistance, therefore, enabled the students to think critically, refuse to wait for recognition from the university by relying on their own networks and foster a sense of excitement towards learning, something which is often cut-out of the neoliberal classroom. Such display of alternative educational values demonstrates the heterotopic nature of higher education in which the students were able to take the skills and values learned during 'zine club' and apply them within the neoliberal contexts of the university, changing the way higher education is done within these spaces. Furthermore, this newly found attitude towards learning extended beyond the university. Two students mentioned that they had travelled to Leeds to participate in the *Weirdo Zine Fest*, a festival championing DIY cultural production by marginalised individuals, groups, and communities. Hearing of students joining wider community networks to challenge social inequality issues made me realise the transformative potential in creating educational 'free spaces' in which they can provide the basis for relational community networks to develop, within and outside the neoliberal university.

Certainly, if we are to resist the neoliberal university and the commodification of higher education, a system which sees the student as consumer and emphasises profit motives over that of critical thinking, then we, as punk pedagogues, need to work together with students to build sets of alternative educational values that demand a deeper commitment to teaching and learning that goes beyond the current shape of the neoliberal university. Building on Ian Mackaye's (2008) definition of punk as a free space, we need to find ways to facilitate the creation of pedagogical 'free spaces', spaces where students are taught to think critically and challenge conventional ways of knowing within a context that promotes principles of community-making, conscientisation and active participation. For me, this was achieved through zine-making. 'zine club' enacted modes of being together that are not just about taking - such as the extractive relations between producer and consumer - but rather saw education as a 'free space' in the truest sense of Ian MacKaye's definition - a pedagogic moment which was not dictated by economic or extrinsic (goal) motivations but rather a

space that brought students and teacher together to discuss ideas and create something of sociological and/or criminological importance.

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