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TEACHING MUSIC  
PERFORMANCE IN  
HIGHER EDUCATION

EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF  
ARTISTIC RESEARCH

EDITED BY  
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# 6. Working Together Well: Amplifying Group Agency and Motivation in Higher Music Education

*Jacob Thompson-Bell*

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## Introduction

It is fair to say that student-centred learning environments (SCLs) are firmly on the agenda for higher music education (HME), at least within the United Kingdom. Calls for curricula to be responsive to the values and motivations of individual learners come not only from students themselves but also from the institutions running and promoting higher music programmes of study. In this chapter, I would like to propose that, whilst there are manifest benefits of working from a student-centred perspective, there are also blind spots or, perhaps more accurately, under-explored 'grey areas' in the ways in which SCLs and related approaches are understood in the HME context.<sup>1</sup> The challenge for educators working in group teaching environments is to balance their pedagogical attention towards the learning experience of each student, whilst also attending to the needs of the overall class. This means balancing demands for both individual forms of agency, driven by 'intrinsic' motivation, and 'distributive'<sup>2</sup> forms of agency, which are collectively held within interdependent, yet diverse, groups of learners. As an educator with a background in both conservatoire and university settings in the United Kingdom, I am interested in how my colleagues and I can foster

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1 For useful reviews of SCLs, see: Susan Land and David Jonassen 'Student-centered Learning Environments: Foundations, Assumptions and Design', in *Theoretical Foundations of Learning Environments*, ed. by Susan Land and David Jonassen, 2nd edn. (New York: Routledge, 2012), pp. 3–26, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203813799>; *Shaping Higher Education with Students*, ed. By Vincent C. H. Tong, Alex Standen, and Mina Sotiriou (London: UCL Press, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt21c4tcm>; Crina Damşa, Monika Nerland, and Zacharias E. Andreiadakis, 'An Ecological Perspective on Learner-constructed Learning Spaces', *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 50 (2019), 2075–89, <https://doi.org/10.1111/bjet.12855>

2 Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv111jh6w>; Jane Bennett, *Influx and Efflux: Writing Up with Walt Whitman* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478009290>

a more collegiate, collective sense of agency in our students, to encourage them to recognise how their individual study goals and motivations are modulated by the co-presence of their peers, and vice versa. This is also a matter of equity, meaning, in this case, the ability of all learners not only to participate but to thrive in a study environment. Such objectives align closely with those of the REACT project, as outlined in the Introduction to this volume. Both initiatives aim to strengthen learner criticality and autonomy in HME and, thus, to reevaluate the role of teachers as transmitters of knowledge, instead understanding HME as a more complexly distributed process of shared exploration and reflection.

I will investigate these issues, firstly, by critiquing the notion of learner autonomy, which undergirds SCLEs. I will try to show how, rather than acting independently, learners can become connected in a 'distributive agential network'<sup>3</sup> in which the motivations and agencies of one learner cannot be fully separated from those of another, or, indeed, from those of their teacher. Next, I will offer an impressionistic vignette, inviting readers to imagine themselves as participants in a group performance workshop in a performance-class setting in order to reflect on how distributive agential networks play out in a classroom environment. The workshop will be conducted using the Critical Response Process feedback framework,<sup>4</sup> which I have found to be a useful model for attending both to the individual and collective agency of learners in group settings. I will try to show how this example scenario can be understood in terms of a classroom 'assemblage'<sup>5</sup>—a collective of networked, interleaved subjectivities making up the group teaching environment. Finally, I will consider how these ideas might have implications for equity and freedom of expression in a HME environment. Ultimately, I would like to propose that the pursuit of creative and expressive freedoms requires that careful attention is paid to the ways in which individual students and teachers can be assembled to form a learner collective.

## Constructing Student-Centred Learning Environments

Before I try to deconstruct SCLEs, I should first explain what I mean by these. SCLEs are based around a Vygotskian constructivist model of perception, in which individuals build their perceptual world based on the specifics of their social and cultural position.<sup>6</sup> Correspondingly, the role of the teacher is not to impose their own

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3 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*.

4 Liz Lerman and John Borstel, *Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process: A Method for Getting Useful Feedback on Anything You Make, from Dance to Dessert* (Takoma Park, MD: Liz Lerman Dance Exchange, 2003).

5 Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv12101zq>; Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; Manuel DeLanda, *Assemblage Theory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781474413640>

6 Monika Nerland, 'Beyond Policy: Conceptualising Student-centred Environments in Higher (Music) Education', in *Becoming Musicians: Student Involvement and Teacher Collaboration in Higher Music Education*, ed. By Stefan Gies, and Jon Helge Sætre ([n.p.]: NMH Publications, 2019), pp. 53–66

worldview on the student, since this is only one of many possible outlooks. Instead, teachers must uphold the conditions necessary for a student to undertake learning on their own terms. For HME, the designing of curricula around the study motivations and values of learners reveals a shifting sense of what we mean by ‘creativity’—away from a canonical model exemplified by great ‘masters’ and towards a more relativistic, action-oriented approach. There is also an equity dimension to SCLEs insofar as the intention of moving away from a ‘one-size-fits-all’ curriculum is that a more diverse community of musicians can be represented and a more fluid understanding of music can be fostered.

SCLEs call for educators to remain open to the intentions of their students, so as to build their ‘intrinsic’ motivation.<sup>7</sup> The idea is to help students understand not only what they are studying but also why this might be important for them. Nevertheless, the openness demanded by SCLEs should not be confused with emptiness, since, in order to uphold the conditions under which students can find their own way, some pretty significant checks and balances need to be in place, likely facilitated or led by the teachers themselves. In this sense, SCLEs in HME are a process of construction in their own right, a demand to create and maintain pedagogical systems within which creativity is possible. However, individual learners do not operate in a vacuum—the identity of one person is not isolated from the identities of others but, instead, formed collectively. This is especially apparent in an institutional setting in which students and teachers work and study together, collaborating on the development of their creative practices. I have seen firsthand how the ideas and aptitudes of multiple students can mutually shape one another, so that all learners leave the class in some way changed. I think that the demand to uphold individual creativity requires a collective mindset from educators, who must hold together the multiple identities of groups of students so that points of tension and disagreement can be negotiated, if not always fully resolved.

## A Question of Agency

Although de-centring teachers as the sole or even primary locus of authority can help to place more focus on student needs, there is also a risk that, as higher education becomes ever more defined through metrics of evaluation<sup>8</sup> (e.g. the Teaching Excellence Framework, and National Student Survey, to name two examples in the United Kingdom), the student experience becomes reduced to a simple question of individual customer satisfaction. It is, therefore, important to keep in mind the

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7 Peter Miksza, ‘A Review of Research on Practicing: Summary and Synthesis of the Extant Research with Implications for a New Theoretical Orientation’, *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education*, 190 (2011), 51–92, <https://doi.org/10.5406/bulcoursmusedu.190.0051>

8 Annouchka Bayley, ‘Trans-forming Higher Education’, *Performance Research*, 21 (2016), 44–49, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2016.1240930>

performative, collective, dimensions of SCLs, i.e., those aspects which keep the learning experience open and fluid, and prevent it from hardening into a commodity. As Monika Nerland reflects, teacher and student responsibilities in SCLs are 'related and co-produced',<sup>9</sup> meaning that both parties share responsibility and agency for shaping, or performing, the overall learning experience.<sup>10</sup> This ethical and agential bond between teachers and students becomes even more apparent in group learning environments, where the learning experience is not only co-produced between teacher and student but also between fellow students, who, intentionally or unintentionally, modulate one another's motivations and capabilities. Indeed, although SCLs are typically considered to be dialectical spaces oscillating between learner and learning environment,<sup>11</sup> they might be better characterised as collective ones, shaped via a collective performance of agency working towards a common sense of well-being or fulfilment, which is itself collectively and non-linearly defined in relation to the people and things assembled in a particular environment.

Thinking about learner agency as a fundamentally collective pursuit calls into question, or at least differently nuances, the dominant understanding of SCLs as a means of strengthening learner autonomy<sup>12</sup> and self-efficacy,<sup>13</sup> since autonomy would seem to undermine the collective bonds implied by a distributive model of learner agency. Perhaps, rather than seeking to drive learner *autonomy*, SCLs might find an alternative paradigm in the concept of 'ontonomy', a term derived from Buddhist theory to denote the interconnectedness of all beings.<sup>14</sup> Ontonomy means that the self exists within the other, and vice versa, so that individual actions must be understood as ontologically and ethically entangled with the others with whom, on whom, the self acts. From the perspective of SCLs, this would mean recognising how all teachers and learners are already and always embedded within one another's unfolding educational experience. Not an 'experience' in the sense of an already defined, marketable commodity that can be given a satisfaction rating but 'experience' as a constantly shifting network of

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9 Monika Nerland, 'Exploring Student Participation Challenges in Student-Centred Learning Environments', in *Quality Work in Higher Education*, ed. by Mari Elken, Peter Maassen, Monika Nerland, Tine S. Prøitz, Bjørn Stensaker, and Agnete Vabø ([n. p.]: Springer, 2020), pp. 97–113 (p. 99), [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41757-4\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-41757-4_6)

10 The 'performative' dimension of SCLs is also open to critique by some commentators who consider the notion of placing obligations on students to attend classes and demonstrate engagement as a form 'presenteeism', e.g., Bruce Macfarlane, 'Student Performativity in Higher Education: Converting Learning as a Private Space into a Public Performance', *Higher Education Research and Development*, 34 (2015), 338–50, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2014.956697>

11 Damşa, Nerland, and Andreadakis.

12 Tong, Standen, and Sotiriou.

13 Laura Ritchie, 'Music, Research and Self-efficacy in Higher Education', in *What Is Research-led Teaching? Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives*, ed. by Alisa Miller, John Sharp, and Jeremy Strong ([n.p.]: CREST, 2012), pp. 38–45.

14 Heesoon Bai, 'Decentering the Ego-self and Releasing the Care-consciousness', *Paideusis: Journal of the Canadian Philosophy of Education Society*, 12 (1999), 5–18, <https://doi.org/10.7202/1073086ar>

'intra-actions' between learners, teachers, and wider ecological factors,<sup>15</sup> which, since it is collectively constituted, resists appropriation by any one individual. Annouchka Bayley observes that "'we" are constituted by multiple, entangled Othernesses',<sup>16</sup> "we" are, thus, distributive beings and the educative act is necessarily distributive, rather than bi-directional between teacher and student. It follows that one learner's agency in a group setting must be conceived of as interconnected with the agencies of other learners, rather than being autonomously held. Consequently, instead of thinking of SCLEs as based around a series of linear, dialectical exchanges between individual and separate actors (teacher and student, extrinsic and intrinsic motivation), we could understand such pedagogies as predicated on an 'ethic of care', which binds together teachers and students in a collective act.

In discussing care ethics in teaching, Dave Chang and Heesoon Bai argue against a virtue ethics theory of care (in which caring only morally improves the carer) and in favour of a relational model in which *receiving* care and *giving* care are understood as being ontologically and ethically inseparable. They propose that the virtue of care acts, such as teaching, must be understood as a continuity between multiple actors, rather than a singular, virtuous act coming from an autonomous individual.<sup>17</sup> In other words, approaching teaching from an ethic of care means seeking to cultivate *ontonomic* awareness in both carer and cared-for, enabling teachers and students to recognise how their learning experience binds them together, as an ethical-agential learner collective. In practical terms, this demands that learning environments are cultivated in ways that make it possible for students and teachers to collectively set educational goals and lines of communication. Therefore, whilst the learning objectives underpinning a particular SCLE might signify and specify the virtues to which such learner collectives will aspire, the agential shaping of these could be understood more like a collective reaching *towards* ideals in flux, rather than a linear process of goal-setting and self-directed learning to meet fixed objectives.

## Distributing Motivation

Conventional accounts of SCLEs do not always capture this sense of agential interdependency, since they are typically constructed around the goal-directed intentions of an autonomous learner who seeks to 'appropri[ate] the world',<sup>18</sup> i.e., a learner who aims to take and shape resources and knowledge to their own ends. Certainly, it is quite reasonable to suppose that, from their differing subject positions,

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15 Annouchka Bayley, 'Posthumanism, Decoloniality and Re-imagining Pedagogy', *Parallax*, 24 (2018), 243–53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13534645.2018.1496576>

16 *Ibid.*, p. 244.

17 Dave Chang and Heesoon Bai, 'Self-with-other in Teacher Practice: A Case Study through Care, Aristotelian Virtue, and Buddhist Ethics', in *Ethics in Professional Education*, ed. by Christopher Martin and Claudia W. Ruitenberg (Routledge, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315121352>

18 Damşa, Nerland, and Andreadakis, p. 2079.

individuals can find inspiration and drive for themselves (intrinsic motivation) and teachers are able to validate this through sensitive critique (extrinsic motivation). However, we also need to account for the *distributive* motivation students (hopefully) build with their peers and teachers on the programme; that is, their collective ontology. I have argued elsewhere that this can be expressed as a kind of ‘intratransic’ motivation, based on the ‘mutually impactful dynamic between individuals within a class’.<sup>19</sup> This means that the collective development of motivation for students happens in some sense within one another, simultaneously, rather than one student’s input leading to the other in a simple causal relationship.

From a pedagogical perspective, an agential network can be expressed in a multi-dimensional model of student motivation, based around intrinsic (student), extrinsic (teacher-to-student), and intratransic (student-to-student-to-teacher-to-teacher) dimensions.<sup>20</sup> For educators, cultivating intratransic motivation is a case of shaping learning not only inter-personally but also *intra*-personally. This means to become aware of the ways in which agency is distributed across the classroom but also to consider how whole-group agency interacts with the relationships being built in smaller settings, with other tutors and students, or through more direct relationships with individual students in the educational environment. For example, a momentary dialogue with one student in a classroom requires teachers to blend consideration of the individual student’s perspective (intrinsic motivation) with an assessment of how their response as a teacher will help to shape the student’s developing agency (extrinsic motivation) as well as how the exchange will drive the overall collective capacity of the class (intratransic motivation).

This is similar to Jane Bennett’s idea of ‘impersonal affect’, a collective feeling or desire, which ‘requires that one is caught up in it’ rather than fully in control of one’s own actions.<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere, Bennett characterises this in terms of ‘influx/efflux’, by which she means the tendency of bodies to take in and send out influences<sup>22</sup> and, thus, to partake in one another’s intentions and actions. Bennett makes the related point that ‘If we think we already know what is out there, we will almost surely miss much of it’.<sup>23</sup> She draws on Walt Whitman’s belief that poets must develop a ‘sensitive cuticle’,<sup>24</sup> that is, be open to influence and responsive to the constantly shifting field of agencies with which, with whom, one’s own subjectivity is entangled. Design for learning could be thought of as a similar effort on the part of teachers to develop a sensitive cuticle, thereby to remain open to the ways in which distributive learner agencies are manifest

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19 Jacob Thompson-Bell, ‘Student-centred Strategies for Higher Music Education: Using Peer-to-peer Critique and Practice as Research Methodologies to Train Conservatoire Musicians’, *British Journal of Music Education*, 2022, 1–14 (p. 3), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0265051722000080>

20 Ibid.

21 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p. xv.

22 Bennett, *Influx and Efflux*.

23 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, p. xv.

24 Bennett, *Influx and Efflux*, p. 39.



between multiple students and other teachers within SCLEs. Our job, as educators, is not only to help students develop skills they have identified but to help them create futures for themselves that they may not yet have considered. Furthermore, given the ethical and agential bonds being woven in SCLEs, we have a responsibility to look beyond purely teacher-centred or student-centred learning trajectories to collectively imagine new creative possibilities.

### A Vignette: Critical Response Process

In order to illustrate how distributive agential networks play out in practice, I would like to offer a pedagogical example, conveyed in the form of an impressionistic vignette<sup>25</sup> adapted from sessions I have led for MA students. The vignette is based on my experience over a period of eight years facilitating peer-to-peer feedback sessions with students across musical performance, composition, and production practices. It describes a peer-to-peer feedback class, conducted using the Critical Response Process (CRP). This is a pedagogy designed by choreographers Liz Lerman and John Borstel to allow for constructive feedback on creative work in group settings.<sup>26</sup> The shape of the session and the attitudes expressed by the characters in the vignette are based on existing data on student perceptions of Critical Response Process, which I have explored elsewhere.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, although what follows is but one example, it is an example which synthesises many similar instances. For this CRP session, the learners are working in a multidisciplinary group, bringing together musicians from many different genres, traditions, and disciplines. Some of the students in this group might identify most with classical music, or perhaps with jazz or popular music styles. They might be concerned with how to develop their understanding and performance of traditional music or to innovate new experimental approaches to sound design or multimedia practice.

I invite you now, as a reader, to imagine yourself as a student within this learning environment, a peer-to-peer feedback session in which you and your fellow students will share work with and provide feedback to one another. Looking around the room, you see musicians inhabiting different identities, equipped with differing levels of professional experience and, perhaps, divergent values, assumptions, and beliefs driving their practice. Dotted amongst the class are teachers—with similarly diverse backgrounds and musical cultures. One of these teachers stands or sits at the front of the room; beside them, an empty chair, and an array of uninhabited instruments: a drum kit and piano on standby, cables snaking from microphones raised on stands.

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25 John Van Maanen, *Tales of the Field: On Writing Ethnography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

26 Lerman and Borstel.

27 Thompson-Bell.

The room itself is a performance space, used for public recitals and lectures when not occupied by this class. On one wall, a projector screen hangs, blank, awaiting input.

The teacher at the front speaks up: 'Welcome everyone, let's get started...'. They invite the first presenter to come forward, causing one of your fellow students to rise and tread, a little nervously, down the aisle between the chairs, before sitting down at the piano.

You review the steps of the Critical Response Process in your head whilst you wait.

- Step One: statements of meaning. The presenting student will showcase their work in progress, and the facilitator will then ask the 'responders' (that's you and the others seated here and waiting to hear the work in progress) to comment on the aspects of it that they found noticeable or memorable, in order to gauge the first impressions elicited by the work.
- Step Two: artist as questioner. The presenting student will need to pose their creative challenges as questions for the group, hopefully keeping them open, so as to draw on the range of expertise and experience in the room.
- Step Three: neutral questions from responders. You'll be expected to find open-ended, neutral ways of asking questions about what you've just heard. The challenge is to avoid being too opinionated and, instead, to help the artist find their own creative solutions.
- Step Four: permissioned opinions. This is exactly what it sounds like: asking the artist if they want to hear your opinion. They can say no, and you won't be offended. After all, it might not be right time, or the same themes and issues could already have come up earlier in the process.

It is useful to have a structure, but remembering the specific steps can be difficult, and holding unsolicited opinions back until the end can be challenging, especially if you really like the work. Or don't like it...

'Is there anything you'd like to tell the group before you play?', the teacher asks.

Actually, it would better to call this teacher a 'facilitator', since they are not exactly instructing students on what to do or what to think. They might not even say much at all. They might leave feedback up to the students in the class. Sometimes the facilitator steps in to steer things a little, to bring conversation back into the feedback structure. Other times, they offer more specific feedback to students presenting their work in progress. But they are not a teacher in the traditional sense.

'Not really...this is a new composition...actually, it's a song about what it feels like to get stood up at the cinema. My ex did that to me once. So, I wrote this song about it...Hope you like it.'

Lights down. Piano stool pulled up. Everyone quiet. The music begins.

As you listen, you think about how they use their voice, the way they play the piano. Loose, simple chords, placed around a natural vocal. No microphone. Some

grit. Perhaps a wry sense of humour coming across. This is pretty good, you think. I wonder if I'm that good. But I also wonder how much more they can do with this song.

Applause. Lights up. The presenter stands and moves to sit next to the facilitating teacher. It looks like an interview, but the student seems to be asking the questions. They have a notebook in front of them with topics for discussion.

The facilitator invites statements of meaning from you and the other responders. People offer general observations. One person recalls an evocative chord, another the lyrical play of words. Another person says, 'I noticed how you kept the chords really simple and how that complemented the voice.' A few more observations, then the group waits.

'What questions do you have?', the facilitator asks, turning to the presenting student. Leafing through their notebook, the presenter picks out a first question to ask their responders: 'How well do you think the arrangement supported the lyrical narrative?'

Amongst the responders, a few hands tentatively go up. The facilitator nods encouragingly to one person who has their hand raised. They say,

I liked the simplicity of the harmony, and I thought the use of root position chords to support the immediacy of the lyric worked really well...but I did think there was, maybe, some scope to develop the chords a little more. You could think about whether the lyrical narrative grows or resolves somehow...or maybe...it might work well to use some different chord voicings after the first verse and chorus, just to expand the dramatic scope a bit and keep things moving.

Even though this is an opinion, it is coming directly in response to the artist's question, so they are ready to receive it. It is important not to add extra opinions onto these answers—the artist does not suddenly want to hear what anyone thinks about their voice or piano playing. At least, not yet.

The presenter nods, noting down the comments in their notebook. 'Yeah, I did wonder if that might be a good idea. But I wanted it to sound like someone just feeling their way through...not too contrived.'

More responses. More questions from the presenter.

Next, discussion moves onto neutral questions from the responders. Since the presenter is not leading these questions, any responder opinions will need to be neutralised within broader and more open-ended questions so that the presenter can make their own judgments. The challenge, at least for now, is to help the artist do what they do best, and by identifying their own solutions, not just to tell them what you would do.

'Do you plan to expand the instrumentation for this song, or to keep things as they are?'

'I'm not too sure actually...do you have any ideas? I usually add some strings, maybe a little backing-vocals on a studio version. What do you think?'

More questions. More responses from the presenter.

Finally, the facilitator asks, 'Who would like to offer an opinion?'. They gesture towards a raised hand.

'I have an opinion about instrumentation', one person says. 'Would you like to hear it?'

This is Step Four—a hallmark of CRP. Responders have to be prepared to offer an opinion, and presenters get to say no if they would prefer not to have more feedback on a particular topic. Hardly anyone ever refuses, though...

The presenter agrees to hear the opinion. 'I think additional instrumentation would change the context in which the music is heard', the responder says. 'I think any further instrumentation needs to match the introspective character of the song. Adding full strings might make things less intimate.'

More opinions. In each case, the opinions link back to discussion the presenter has already had, so the topics do not come as a surprise, even if they had not anticipated the specific ideas. The presenter accepts them all. They will have to choose which ones to follow up, though, since some are contrasting, contradictory even.

The facilitator thanks everyone and calls the session to a close. The presenter closes their notebook, now filled with different views, proposals, observations, and ideas. People slowly leave the room, impromptu breakout conversations, here and there, continue the discussion more informally.

You reflect on some of the topics raised. How do they relate to *your* practice? How would *you* meet the creative challenges discussed? You leave the room without having played a note. But you have a lot more questions. Questions about your own practice, questions about the music of your peers, curiosity about how it will change and develop in response to feedback.

## Classroom Assemblages

What is going on here? One answer is that we are observing a classroom assemblage at play. An assemblage can be defined as a network of non/human phenomena which mutually modify the behaviour and possible associations of one another, and thereby work beyond the sum of their parts.<sup>28</sup> Any system, from organisms to weather, can be thought of as an assemblage, enacted across agential networks linking constituent phenomena in mutually impactful, 'intra-active' relationships.<sup>29</sup> Taken as an assemblage, a classroom is not simply a meeting of teachers and students but a

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28 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. by Brian Massumi (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1987); Bruno Latour, *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*; DeLanda.

29 Karen Barad, 'Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter', *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 28 (2003), 801–31, <https://doi.org/10.1086/345321>

site of 'distributive agency',<sup>30</sup> implicating the learning resources, musical instruments, room acoustics, degree programme learning objectives, institutional strategy, political concepts, and the bodies and accumulated beliefs of the people assembled. Moreover, the constituent elements work differently and move towards different goals when they act together. The concept of the assemblage might help educators to make sense of their students' identities as emergent, interlinked, processes, because it provides a model for understanding the ways in which different people and things in a classroom situation can become agentially distributed, entangled, and thereby mutually enable or obstruct one another in unpredictable ways. In other words, assemblages help to show how subjective 'ontology' (i.e., self-with-other bonds) can emerge amongst groups of learners.

Returning to the vignette of CRP sketched above, we can observe precisely this kind of distributive agential network in which the questions asked by responders are modulated by the comments and queries of their peers. This engenders a pedagogical environment focused both on the individual voice of the presenting student and the collective identity of the wider student group. By withholding unsolicited responder opinions on the work until the end, and then allowing the presenting artist to decline to hear them, CRP establishes a collective mindset through which students seek to negotiate a range of creative approaches with their peers. It is not necessarily that the group collaboratively defines a way forward but that they work to sustain differences of opinion and to capture the range of possible outcomes for the work in progress afforded by the dynamic flow of subjectivities within the group. This could be understood as a form of 'reflection-in-practice' (a principle explored in greater depth by Richard Fay, Daniel Mawson, and Nahielly Palacios in Chapter 8 of this volume), challenging students and teachers to play with their own established ideas and viewpoints by refracting them through the agential network, which is to say, exploring them in relation to the different people assembled in the classroom setting. This is a clear case of intratransic motivation building through mutually impactful dialogue within a group teaching situation. Not only is the presenting student extrinsically motivated through teacher and peer commentary on their work, but all members of the classroom assemblage (including teachers) are afforded the opportunity to develop intra-actively with one another. In doing so, they render new, further opportunities for intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to grow. To the notion of *embodied* cognition, explored by Robert Sholl in Chapter 5 of this volume, CRP highlights the sense in which learning is also *embedded*, meaning that thinking happens not only through our bodies but also between them. The hope is that students will take forward this mindset beyond their studies, adopting a similarly open comportment towards their

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30 Emily Jean Hood and Amelia M. Kraehe, 'Creative Matter: New Materialism in Art Education Research, Teaching, and Learning', *Art Education*, 70 (2017), 32–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2017.1274196>

collaborators and colleagues, in order to allow unexpected ideas and solutions to emerge in response to collectively defined problems.

It is important to add that, although the theory of assemblages characterises agency in a distributive sense, as being enacted between people and things, this does not entirely efface the force of individual agency within a class. Agency will not be evenly or stably distributed at all times; it might be volatile, temporarily concentrated around some actors more than others, such as in the constantly shifting dynamic between a teacher and student. Within any assemblage it is quite possible, perhaps even probable, that smaller, more localised, networks will emerge, much like eddies and whirlpools can form within the flow of a river. In this sense, educators should not overlook how individual students might experience their learning, especially where there might be differences in these experiences from an equity perspective. In practice, this requires the adoption of transparent, collaborative pedagogical frameworks, so that everyone, teacher and students included, understands how they are being called upon to engage with, and perhaps alter, the classroom situation. For example, within a CRP framework, individuals have their respective roles to play (as facilitators, presenters, or responders), and individual students must be sensitive to the ways in which their questions and responses could offer encouragement to their peers. I am reminded of Mariam Kharatyan's account in Chapter 7 of this volume of how her students learned about their performance practice through gaining 'access to their own vulnerability'. Adapting Kharatyan's phrase, we could say that CRP gives learner groups access to a form of collective vulnerability and, thus, to an openness to the possibilities of the classroom assemblage. The point is that intrinsic, extrinsic, and intratransic motivations are linked, braided together in an agential network with both individual and collective capacities.

CRP helps the teacher and presenter not only to prepare the ground for intratransic forms of motivation to emerge but also helps the responders to offer moments of extrinsic motivational support for their fellow students. The point is that intrinsic, extrinsic, and intratransic motivations are linked, braided together in an agential network with both individual and collective capacities.

Correspondingly, educators should make efforts to remain sensitive to the character of individual students in terms of their capacity to resonate both with and against other actors within the classroom assemblage. This has implications for the ethical responsibilities of students and teachers towards one another as well as of students towards their fellow learners. Education cannot simply be a case of pursuing individual goals, perhaps in search of employability, but must instead be a matter of recognising how to instigate relationships which are mutually agencifying, i.e., which amplify the capacities of distributive networks linking them with their colleagues within and beyond their institution. In other words, educators must support their

learners to partake fully in the influx and efflux<sup>31</sup> between their sense of subjectivity and the people and resources with whom, with which, they are assembled.

## A Matter of Equity

Recently, I have spoken informally with one or two students who have questioned whether their freedom of expression is being limited by tools such as neutral questioning in CRP. These students felt that learners should simply be allowed to say whatever they liked about one another's work, since to place checks and balances on this would be a restriction on free speech. I see this as a matter of equity, concerning the relative balance between competing views, values, and agencies within a student group. Whilst the number of dissenting students has been very small, with most reflecting positively on their experiences through CRP,<sup>32</sup> I think that, given the times we live in, and the attack, at least in the United Kingdom, on 'woke' culture and the very principle of 'equity', it makes sense to briefly discuss these issues by way of a conclusion. This is, not least, because academic institutions are traditionally regarded as being bulwarks against incursions on freedom of expression.

The kind of distributive agency fostered through CRP and similar pedagogies is, in my view, a means of working towards equitable systems of learning and teaching in which marginalised voices can be better heard. This is because CRP helps to maximise the possible fluidity of intra-actions between individuals, and across traditions and disciplines, assembled within a classroom group. We could think of the student group as being a temporary assemblage, operational for the duration of a session or programme of study. To work equitably within such a classroom assemblage requires that individuals recognise and acknowledge their interdependence (i.e. their ontonomy) and demands individual expression be understood in relation to the expressive capabilities of other members of the group. Therefore, distributive approaches to learning and teaching must clearly outline for students how they are being asked to behave, and how incursions on the freedom of one person by another might be defined and negotiated.

Furthermore, there can be no presumption of neutrality in any pedagogical space, since there is always some form of structure or agency through which the space is sustained. Nor can there be any assumption about how individuals will want to work and how they will engage with their peers and teachers. Students do not enter educative spaces as neutral, impersonal actors but as opinionated people with values, assumptions, and very likely prejudices, about one another. As Bayley argues, 'Intra-action means that "I" am always-already marking bodies, producing the world and thus responsible for the choices that matter through knowledge-making'.<sup>33</sup> SCLEs thus

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31 Bennett, *Influx and Efflux*.

32 See Thompson-Bell.

33 Bayley, 'Trans-forming Higher Education', p. 47.

need to move beyond purely individualistic models so as not to overlook the inevitable imbalances of power found both in teacher-student relationships and within classroom groups.<sup>34</sup> What is required of both teachers and students is really a form of democratic competency; that is, an ability to participate sensitively and actively in collective social life and to be responsive for one's fellow citizens.

This is akin to Paulo Freire's notion of 'critical pedagogy',<sup>35</sup> in which students are empowered to recognise, think through, and perhaps reimagine, the political structures that guide their epistemological outlook and worldview.<sup>36</sup> Henry Giroux summarises one aspect of Freire's stance as being 'to teach students to inhabit a particular mode of agency',<sup>37</sup> and this is precisely what is at stake in SCLEs: how teachers can enable students to cultivate forms of agency which are democratically and ethically sound. It is not enough for SCLEs to repair the agential cut between teacher and student; they must also attend to the distribution of agency between students. Without this critical dimension, there remains the risk in group settings that learners will replicate existing power structures that exclude certain people or find themselves undermining one another's individual efforts towards (expressive) freedom. This requires both self-knowledge, in the sense of recognising the idiosyncrasies of one's own subjective position, and an ethic of care bonding teachers and students into a learner collective or assemblage.

Thus, to design a SCLE in a critical way is to invite learners not only to appropriate learning resources to their own individual ends<sup>38</sup> but, perhaps more importantly, to encourage them to form agential collectives which enable them to recognise self-with-other and to embrace diversities of outlook. Accordingly, SCLEs must support learners and educators to co-create multiple and mutual paths to learning with and through one another. In other words, they must nurture impactful student-teacher, student-student, and, perhaps, teacher-teacher intra-actions. In doing so, SCLEs might cultivate a sense of ontonomy (i.e. collective agency and togetherness) in participating teachers and students, founded on shared convictions and collectively-defined rules of engagement. In my view, CRP is an example of how such a system of intra-action can be transparently, and ethically, defined.

In conclusion, and returning to the vignette sketched above, by attending to the connections between individual and collective forms of agency, CRP acts to enable and shepherd freedom of expression rather than to constrain it. This is because the

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34 Bayley, 'Posthumanism, Decoloniality and Re-imagining Pedagogy'.

35 Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 50th Anniv edn, trans. by Myra Bergman Ramos (London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018).

36 Ronaldo Marques, Talita Fraguas, and Rosicler Maria Alchieri, 'Theoretical and Methodological Aspects of Paulo Freire's Pedagogy: A Pedagogical and Dialogic Possibility in the Teaching and Learning Process', *Conjecturas*, 22 (2022), 190–99, <https://doi.org/10.53660/CONJ-1990-MP12>

37 Henry A. Giroux, 'Rethinking Education as the Practice of Freedom: Paulo Freire and the Promise of Critical Pedagogy', *Policy Futures in Education*, 8 (2010), 715–21 (p. 718), <https://doi.org/10.2304/pfie.2010.8.6.715>

38 Damşa, Nerland, and Andreadakis.



process de-centres individual perspectives, thus fostering an equitable space in which a diversity of viewpoints can be heard and critically evaluated together. Far from inhibiting individual freedom of speech, the obligation to neutralise opinions and to entertain alternative viewpoints enables differences of outlook to be collectively held and observed, rather than allowing disagreements to become distracting or obstructive. Drawing together the subjectivities of individual learners into a productive classroom assemblage therefore requires a collective mindset to be established through an ethic of care between students and teachers. This involves not only enabling students to uncover their own agency as individuals but also encouraging them to guarantee the agency of their peers. In doing so, SCLs can create networks which amplify the agency of everyone, whilst affirming new and unexpected opportunities for collective learning to take place.

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