

# SPECIAL SECTION

## Introduction

### *Mobilities and Pedagogy: Moving Forwards*

Sarah Gibson and Lynne Pearce

This is the second instalment of a special section exploring the pedagogies—classroom and otherwise—associated with mobilities scholarship. As we discussed in the previous introduction (*Transfers* 13.1/2), the collocation of mobility and pedagogy is by no means a one-way street when it comes to innovation since, in several instances, novel theories and methodologies have emerged directly out of classroom teaching rather than the other way around.<sup>1</sup> This dynamic was apparent in the discussions that took place at the first-ever conference dedicated to mobility pedagogy, which took place at Waterloo University, Canada, in 2018 (see Nicholson, 13.1), and is evidenced here in several articles across the two issues.<sup>2</sup> As we discussed previously, the field's reputation for innovative methodologies is often the link between research and teaching, and the variety of applications continues to grow. In this special section introduction, we have therefore taken the opportunity to reflect upon some possible new directions for mobilities and pedagogy that take account of not only topical theoretical and political debates but also the pedagogic practices that may, themselves, inspire new research and “real-world” applications. In particular, we share some reflections on the way in which the concept of mobility justice, as first advanced by Mimi Sheller in 2018, lends a new dimension to mobility pedagogies and connects with research and teaching on social justice more broadly.<sup>3</sup>

In advance of this discussion, we also welcome the opportunity to introduce the second set of articles presented here. The first of these, by Peter Adey and Simon Cook, raises intriguing questions about the “where from?” of mobilities teaching; in particular, those issues of positioning and power that covertly underpin so many aspects of the educational experience (from disciplinary contexts to the physical/digital space of the contemporary classroom to the im/mobile bodies of the students and instructors themselves). With specific reference to a third-year geography module on mobilities taught at Royal Holloway College, London, Adey and Cook reflect upon the challenge of teaching mobilities in a “just” and non-hierarchical way and share some of the participatory methods they devised to help students grasp the complex-



ities of “socially produced movement” across a range of contemporary and historical contexts.<sup>4</sup>

The “mobile methods” Adey and Cook have incorporated into their teaching—for example, go-along interviews, use of GPS, photo diaries, and more—also feature in Chiara Rabbiosi’s article in the form of student video-making: a novel approach to learning and assessment introduced to meet the challenges of the pandemic. During a time when personal mobilities were severely restricted and students and teachers were unable to meet in person, Rabbiosi’s class made use of their short time outdoors each day to produce video-diaries of their movements and encounters and, in the process, learned the benefits of embodied engagement in an understanding of space and place. The unique circumstances in which this learning took place—reflected in the compelling reflections of the students as part of their assessment—lends special historical significance to the data, once again blurring the distinction between the knowledges created by research and teaching.

Meanwhile, Giada Peterle (Rabbiosi’s colleague at the University of Padova) reflects upon the process of bringing physical mobility to bear upon the teaching of literary texts. Once again, the practice of urban walking enables students to engage with space and place in a fully immersive, three-dimensional way and, in the process, challenge the notion that texts can only be understood in terms of their textuality. By contrast, Peterle’s students, on their “geo-literary” field trips to Arcella (a suburb of Padua), are shown a different type of reading practice: one that gives permission to loosen ties with the meaning-making properties of the text itself and explore that spatialities and mobilities that inspired it. During the pandemic Peterle’s creative writing students were also given the task of producing a piece of writing based on their experience of “walking the city” in order to better understand “the narrative essence of spaces as well as the spatial dimension of narratives.” Both here and elsewhere, this connects innovative pedagogy with long-standing theoretical debate on narratology.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, and in contrast to the other articles featured in this double special section, Paola Jirón et al.’s article demonstrates how pedagogy need not be restricted to the classroom or, indeed, other educational purposes (e.g., engagement activities aimed at the general public).<sup>6</sup> The piece describes how a mobilities-inspired board game, *Trayectopia*, was designed for, and has since been implemented in, an urban planning context. This successful application of mobilities-inspired research to the workplace could not be more important since it reminds us of the role pedagogic activities can play in problem-solving across many sectors (as exemplified by Monika Buscher’s work with the emergency services).<sup>7</sup> Once again, this productively complicates the relationship between research, methods, and pedagogy as far as the field of mobilities studies is concerned.

## Mobilities, Pedagogies, and the Future

Looking ahead to how mobilities will feature on our school and university syllabuses ten years hence nevertheless invites caution, not least on account of the tendency for traditional disciplines to “retrench” during times of economic uncertainty and for inter- and cross-disciplinary teaching programs to bite the dust. This was fate of many gender and women’s studies programs, as well as cultural studies, in the UK in the early 2000s, when universities grew anxious about the prospects of less obviously vocational courses. In addition, as Adey and Cook reflect upon in their article here, at the undergraduate level, mobilities courses have typically figured as “options” within other disciplines (e.g., sociology, geography, transport history) and may thus easily be dropped when key staff members leave or change research direction. In the UK and Europe, it is at the masters’ level where mobilities most often achieve course or program status, and even here there have been casualties in recent times (including at Lancaster University) due to the loss of leading scholars working in the field. For this reason, the recent success of the University of Padova’s master’s in mobility studies, which attracts hundreds of students every year, has been especially welcome and we must hope that, across the world, colleagues will recognize the benefits of team-teaching mobilities *across disciplines* as well as within them. Meanwhile, dedicated attention to mobilities and/as pedagogy—as here—should further help to cement the field’s credentials.

In terms of the specific subfields and topics, it is equally hard to predict the direction of mobilities-led teaching over the next decade, but emerging trends are clearly visible. For example, the popularity of mobilities-led art practice in geography and the social sciences continues to expand both as a research method and a mode of student learning; likewise, the innovative mobile methodologies adopted by colleagues working in the field of design and planning.<sup>8</sup> Meanwhile, Simon Cook and Peter Adey’s new interest in sport mobilities (the subject of a panel at the 2024 Royal Geographical Association Conference) has the potential to inform, and learn from, research and teaching in the field of physical education (an obvious pairing that has nevertheless remained unexplored). In addition, we may expect the growing popularity of mobilities scholarship in Asia to spread its own innovative pedagogy across the globe—for example, the University of Konkuk’s impressive education program for adult learners.<sup>9</sup> And the mobilities of students and academics themselves have and will come under increased intellectual and pedagogic scrutiny in the context of the climate emergency.

This last point brings us to the subfield that, for the moment, is having the greatest impact on how mobilities is taught: mobility justice, characterized by Sheller as “one of the crucial political and ethical issues of our day.”<sup>10</sup> Sheller’s mobility justice theoretical framework has been interrogated by Verlinghieri

and Schwanen in terms of its practical application for research and teaching. They ask, “*How, for instance, might empirical research projects by students, early career researchers and faculty members contribute to the agenda Sheller has proposed?*” (italics in the original)<sup>11</sup> Sheller herself recognizes that such research needs to develop a methodology—and an audience—appropriate to the research being undertaken; one that can effectively identify, and respond to, uneven mobilities and epistemic injustices.<sup>12</sup> For David Butz and Nancy Cook, this means making more explicit the connections between mobility justice and epistemic justice by incorporating the former into wider debates concerning decolonization, migration, and climate change.<sup>13</sup> While this new “mobility-knowledge nexus”<sup>14</sup> should, as a priority, attend to the inequalities in the institutions in which such knowledge is (re)produced (and where curriculum reform is already underway), Sheller also recognizes the value of moving the debates out of the academy in order to “influence policy, planning, design, social movements and politics ‘in real-world scenarios.’”<sup>15</sup> This “applied” mobilities research may then, in turn, be fed back into classroom teaching by promoting “experiential learning and civic engagement among students, and demanding broader impacts of work among faculty.”<sup>16</sup>

Another means of scrutinizing what mobility justice means in a classroom context is to align it with the aims and objectives of social justice education. Social justice education seeks to provide students with “the critical analytical tools necessary to understand oppression and their own socialization within oppressive systems, and to develop a sense of agency and capacity to interrupt and change oppressive patterns of behaviors in themselves and the institutions and communities they are part of.”<sup>17</sup> The educational objectives that are prioritized include “tools for critical analysis, tools for social change, tools for personal reflection, and an awareness of multicultural group dynamics.”<sup>18</sup> Also key to social justice education is critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy does not regard education as politically neutral but, instead, “draws attention to the ways in which knowledge, power, desire, and experience are produced under specific basic conditions of learning and illuminates the role that pedagogy plays as part of a struggle over assigned meanings, modes of expression, and directions of desire.”<sup>19</sup> Such an empowering experience must be participatory, affective, problem-posing, situated, multicultural, dialogic, desocializing, democratic, research-oriented, interdisciplinary, and activist.<sup>20</sup>

With principles and practices such as these brought to the forefront of the educational experience, Elizabeth Moje’s distinction between a “socially just pedagogy” and a “pedagogy for social justice” becomes a useful lever for reflecting on the future direction of mobilities-centered pedagogies in an international context.<sup>21</sup> Following this distinction, a “mobilities just pedagogy” would be concerned with equitable access to education (e.g., physical access to university classrooms, media access to computers, online learning, digital e-books, participation in mobile pedagogies such as walking tours and field

trips), while a “pedagogy for mobility justice” would focus on teaching and learning dedicated to social change outside the academy (e.g., critical citizenship, community-engagement research, and academic activism). Where our priorities as educators lie vis-à-vis each of these commitments reveals our own “uneven mobilities.”<sup>22</sup> For while students and teachers located in the Global North may be expected to prioritize the latter because access to education is broadly assumed, those situated in the Global South are confronted with what it means *not* to have their basic educational needs met on a daily basis. The two articles on mobilities teaching in a South African context featured in *Transfers* 13.1/2 are a testament to this disparity and, in particular, how young black students negotiating their own oppression and disadvantage are positioned very differently than their white/privileged counterparts in terms of mobilities research “on” issues of social justice.<sup>23</sup> The implication here is that, as mobilities research and teaching becomes ever more global, the relationship between the student (and teacher) and the topics taught in the interest of mobility justice will become (productively) strained and generate new perspectives on the issues themselves.

Its accessibility, as both paradigm and method, makes it highly likely that future generations of students and teachers will continue to welcome mobilities into the classroom. Even in the context of the sometimes overwhelming social and political problems addressed by mobilities scholars, movement and mobility remain concepts inscribed by agency and hope. Indeed, “critical hope,”<sup>24</sup> as expounded by Paulo Freire and bell hooks, has long been recognized as a vital ingredient of pedagogies developed *for* the oppressed as well as “a thoughtful way of being directed toward the future” more generally.<sup>25</sup>

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## Notes

1. Sarah Gibson and Lynne Pearce, "Introduction: Mobilities and Pedagogy," *Transfers* 13, nos. 1–2 (2023): 3–12.
2. Judith A. Nicholson, "Critical Pedagogies for Mobilities Studies," *Transfers* 13, nos. 1–2 (2023): 13–31.
3. Mimi Sheller, *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes* (London: Verso, 2018); Mimi Sheller, "Theorizing Mobility Justice," in *Mobilities, Mobility Justice and Social Justice*, ed. by Nancy Cook and David Butz (London: Routledge, 2019), 22–36; Mimi Sheller, "Mobility Justice," in *Handbook of Research Methods and Applications for Mobilities*, ed. by Monika Büscher, Malene Freudendal-Pedersen, Sven Kesselring, and Nikolaj Grauslund Kristensen (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2020), 11–20.
4. Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (London: Routledge, 2006).
5. Giada Peterle, "Narrative Mobilities: Moving Texts from Representation to Practice," in *Reimagining Mobilities across the Humanities*, ed. by Lucio Biasiori, Federico Mazzini, and Chiara Rabbiosi (London: Routledge, 2023), 102–116.
6. Also see Margherita Cisani, "Mobilizing Landscape Pedagogies: Enskillment and Frictions in Informal Educational Practices," *Transfers* 13, nos. 1–2 (2023): 82–94.
7. Michael Liegl, Alexander Boden, Monika Büscher, Rachel Oliphant, and Xaroula Kerasidou, "Designing for Ethical Innovation: A Case Study on ELSI Co-Design in Emergency," *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies* 95 (2016): 80–95.
8. Kaya Barry, Jen Southern, Tess Baxter, Suzy Blondin, Clare Booker, Janet Bowstead, Carly Butler, et al. "An Agenda for Creative Practice in the New Mobilities Paradigm," *Mobilities* 18, no. 3 (2023): 349–373; Ole B. Jensen, Ditte Bendix Lanng, and Simon Wind, "Mobilities Design: Towards a Research Agenda for Applied Mobilities Research," *Applied Mobilities* 1, no. 1 (2016): 26–42.
9. HK+ Mobility Humanities Education Center: <https://mobilityhumanities.org/>.
10. Sheller, *Mobility Justice*, 1.
11. Ersilia Verlinghieri and Tim Schwanen, "Transport and Mobility Justice: Evolving Discussions," *Journal of Transport Geography* 87 (2020): 102798, 3.
12. Sheller, "Mobility Justice"; Malene Rudolf Lindberg, Nikolaj Grauslund Kristensen, Malene Freudendal-Pedersen, and Katrine Hartmann-Petersen, "Uneven Mobilities and Epistemic Injustice: Towards Reflexive Mobilities Research," *Mobilities* 19, no.1 (2024): 134–150.
13. David Butz and Nancy Cook, "Mobile Methods, Epistemic Justice and Mobility Justice," in *Mobilities, Mobility Justice and Social Justice*, ed. by Nancy Cook and David Butz (London: Routledge, 2019), 81–98. There has been some work on decolonization within mobilities research that would have implications for decolonizing the curriculum knowledge being taught: Ersilia Verlinghieri and Jennie Middleton, "Decolonising and Provincializing Knowledge within the Neoliberal

University? The Challenge of Teaching about Sustainable Transport,” *Journal of Transport Geography* 88 (2020): 102785. Tim Schwanen, “Towards Decolonised Knowledge about Transport,” *Palgrave Communications* 4, no. 1 (2018): 1–6; Bryan S. R. Grimwood, Lauren J. King, Allison P. Holmes, and Lutsel K’e Dene, “Decolonising Tourism Mobilities?: Planning Research within a First Nations Community in Northern Canada,” in *Tourism and Leisure Mobilities*, ed. by Jillian Rickly, Kevin Hannam, and Mary Mostafanezhad (London: Routledge, 2016), 232–247; Astrid Wood, Wojciech Kębłowski, and Tauri Tuvikene, “Decolonial Approaches to Urban Transport Geographies,” *Journal of Transport Geography* 88 (2020): 102811; Cathy Sutherland, “All at Sea? Using Seaborne Mobilities to Decolonialise National Narratives in Maritime Museums,” *Mobilities* 17, no. 3 (2022): 382–396.

There are now numerous publications that focus on epistemic injustice and decolonization in higher education globally that are important for mobilities scholars to take forward in reflecting on their own teaching, curriculum, and educational space. See for example: Mlamuli Nkosingphile Hlatshwayo, Hanelie Adendorff, Margaret A.L. Blackie, Aslam Fataar, and Paul Maluleka, eds., *Decolonising Knowledge and Knowers: Struggles for University Transformation in South Africa* (London: Routledge, 2022); Jonathan D. Jansen, ed., *Decolonisation in Universities: The Politics of Knowledge* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2019); Jonathan D. Jansen and Cyril A. Walters, *The Decolonization of Knowledge: Radical Ideas and the Shaping of Institutions in South Africa and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Francis B. Nyamnjoh, *Decolonising the Academy: A Case for Convivial Scholarship* (Switzerland, Basler Afrika Bibliographien, 2020); Felix Maringe, ed., *Colonization and Epistemic Injustice in Higher Education: Precursors to Decolonization* (London: Routledge, 2023); Amrita Pande, Ruchi Chaturvedi, and Shari Daya, eds., *Epistemic Justice and the Post-colonial University* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2023); Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *Epistemologies of the South: Justice Against Epistemicide* (London: Routledge, 2015); D.A. Wood, *Epistemic Decolonization: A Critical Investigation into the Anticolonial Politics of Knowledge* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020); Aram Ziai, Daniel Bendix, and Franziska Müller, eds., *Beyond the Master’s Tools? Decolonizing Knowledge Orders, Research Methods and Teaching* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020).

14. Susan Ilcan, “Introduction: Mobilities, Knowledge, and Social Justice,” in *Mobilities, Knowledge and Social Justice*, ed. by Susan Ilcan (London: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2013), 3–22, here 4.
15. Sheller, “Mobility Justice,” 19; Malene Freudendal-Pedersen, Kevin Hannam, and Sven Kesselring, “Applied Mobilities, Transitions and Opportunities,” *Applied Mobilities* 1, no.1 (2016): 1–9.
16. Sheller, “Mobility Justice,” 19.
17. Lee Ann Bell. “Theoretical Foundations for Social Justice Education,” in *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*, 2nd edition, ed. by Maurianne Adams, Lee Anne Bell and Pat Griffin (London: Routledge, 2007), 1–14, here 2.
18. Heather Hackman, “Five Essential Components for Social Justice Education,” *Equity & Excellence in Education* 38, no. 2 (2005): 103–109, 104.
19. Henry A. Giroux, *On Critical Pedagogy*, 2nd edition (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 2.

20. Ivor Shor, *Empowering Education: Critical Teaching for Social Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 17.
21. Elizabeth Moje, "Chapter 1 Developing Socially Just Subject-Matter Instruction: A Review of the Literature on Disciplinary Literacy Teaching," *Review of Research in Education* 31, no.1 (2007): 1-44.
22. Lindberg, et. al, "Uneven Mobilities and Epistemic Injustice."
23. Sarah Gibson, "Mobilizing Cultural Studies: The Pedagogy of Walking, Field Trips, and the KwaZulu-Natal Battlefields Route," *Transfers* 13, nos. 1-2 (2023): 32-54; Bradley Rink, "Emplacing Students through Everyday Mobilities: From Practice to Theory," *Transfers* 13, nos. 1-2 (2023): 55-67.
24. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London: Continuum, 1993); Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope* (London: Continuum, 1994); bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (London: Routledge, 2003).
25. Sara Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (London: Duke University Press, 2010), 181-182.