Academic libraries and working class experiences of higher education

Working Class Academics, 14 July 2020
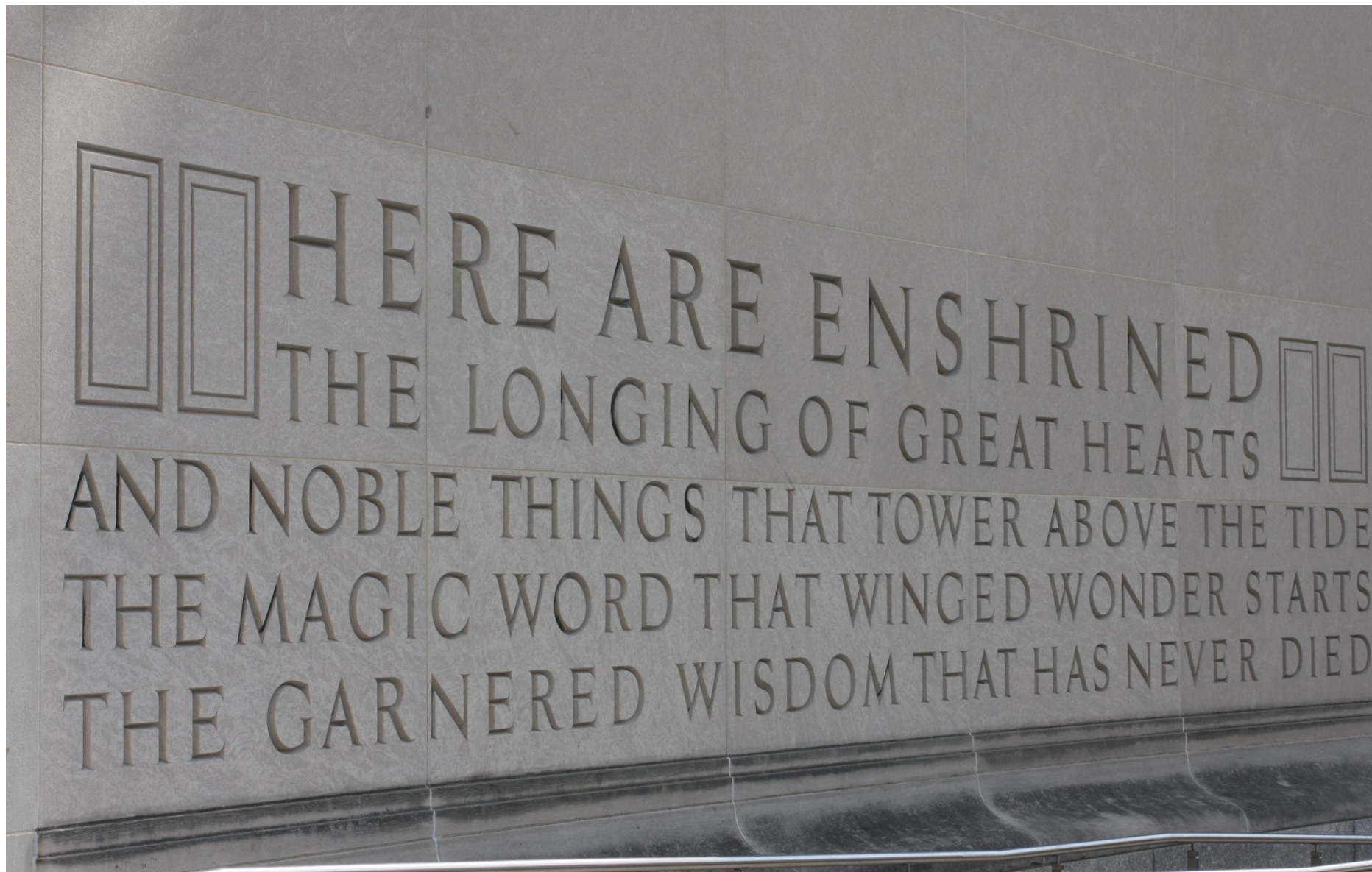
Andrew Preater (he/him)

What do I have for you today?

- Critical reflection on libraries and cultural misrecognition

- What causes this?

- Are there ways forward for education workers and students?

What is in the library, who is in the library?

Durham University Library. *Palace Green – Bishop Cosin's Library from the Gallery post C.G. Pace restoration*. License CC . Retrieved from https://iiif.durham.ac.uk/index.html?manifest=t1msf268511h

HERE ARE ENSHRINED THE LONGING OF GREAT HEARTS AND NOBLE THINGS THAT TOWER ABOVE THE TIDE THE MAGIC WORD THAT WINGED WONDER STARTS THE GARNERED WISDOM THAT HAS NEVER DIED

Roscoe C. Brown. Central Library, Brooklyn Public Library, USA (1940)
My photo, license

Libraries and cultural capital

The library intentionally selects and provides access to "large reserves of cultural capital" in the form of information resources.

Goulding, A. (2008). Libraries and cultural capital. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, **40**(4), 235–237. doi:10.1177/0961000608096713

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge.

What should happen?

Libraries represent a space of non-assessment on campus, in which students develop those academic literacy practices which are heavily implicated in assessment.

Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.) & R. Nice (Trans.). *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp.241-258). New York, NY: Greenwood.

Vocational awe

"…the set of ideas, values, and assumptions librarians have about themselves and the profession that result in beliefs that libraries as institutions are inherently good and sacred, and therefore beyond critique." (Ettarh)

Ettarh, F. (2018) Vocational awe and librarianship: the lies we tell ourselves. *In the Library With the Lead Pipe*, 2018. Retrieved from http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/vocational-awe/

What goes wrong?

Libraries as institutions represent and reflect middle-class norms in spaces and collections, in policy, and deficit model framing.

Why is this, and what can we do about it?

Recognition and misrecognition

Fraser: inequality in status, based on how institutions acknowledge and stratify different forms of cultural value.

Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The field of cultural production* (R. Johnson, Trans.). New York, NY: Columbia University.

Fraser, N. (2003). Social justice in the age of identity politics: redistribution, recognition, and participation. In Fraser, N. & Honneth, A., *Redistribution or recognition? A political-philosophical exchange* (pp.7-109). London: Verso.

Fraser's dimensions of injustice

- Economic dimension: maldistribution of resources
- Cultural dimension: misrecognition based on cultural value
- Political dimension: misrepresentation based on political exclusion

Fraser, N. (2007). Re-framing justice in a globalizing world. In Lovell, T. (Ed.), *(Mis)recognition, social inequality and social justice* (pp.17-35). London: Routledge.

What does that look like and feel like?

"I thought I'd update you on my trip to the library. As I arrived I was determined to get help so I approached one of the staff at the library counter and explained that I was new and that I had some problem using the library at home. With a big smile the lady directed me to one of the computer desk and asked to follow the instructions. She added that it was straightforward and usually students find it very easy to use and she pointed to some leaflets which were self explanatory (according to her). At that point I felt too shy to express my despair to have more support. So I used the computer, obviously got confused and ended up annoying the student next to me who was more helpful. I am probably 'thick' and computing is definitely not my strength" (Burke, p.94)

Burke, P.J. (2012). *The right to higher education: beyond widening participation*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Rethinking class and deficit

Inverting the deficit model

"Largely the people I work with are middle class. I am trying to think of anybody that I work with there are very, very few people who are working class […]. Firstly it means that these people have no real experience of working-class people or working-class life or understanding of working-class life."
(Wilkins and Burke)

Wilkins. A. & Burke, P.J. (2015). Widening participation in higher education: the role of professional and social class identities and commitments. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, **36**(3), 434-452. doi: 10.1080/01425692.2013.829742

Cultural recognition

We can destabilise misrecognition, by recognising working-class social and cultural capitals

We can normalise recognising the right of working-class students to conceptualise their own knowledge and knowledge production

Yosso, T.J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, **8**(1), 69-91. doi:10.1080/1361332052000341006

In conclusion, a caution

"It is […] imperative that teachers drawing on participatory pedagogies acknowledge the importance of helping all their students to gain access to the practices and epistemologies that have the greatest social and cultural legitimacy." (Burke)

Burke, P.J. (2012). *The right to higher education: beyond widening participation*. Abingdon: Routledge.

What questions do you have?

@preater

wcconf@preater.com

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*. London: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. (1993). *The field of cultural production* (R. Johnson, Trans.). New York, NY: Columbia University.

Burke, P.J. (2012). *The right to higher education: beyond widening participation*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Durham University Library. *Palace Green – Bishop Cosin's Library from the Gallery post C.G. Pace restoration*. License CC BY ND 4.0. Retrieved from: https://iiif.durham.ac.uk/index.html?manifest=t1msf268511h

Ettarh, F. (2018) Vocational awe and librarianship: the lies we tell ourselves. *In the Library With the Lead Pipe*, 2018. Retrieved from http://www.inthelibrarywiththeleadpipe.org/2018/vocational-awe/

Fraser, N. (2003). Social justice in the age of identity politics: redistribution, recognition, and participation. In Fraser, N. & Honneth, A., *Redistribution or recognition? A political-philosophical exchange* (pp.7-109). London: Verso.

Fraser, N. (2007). Re-framing justice in a globalizing world. In Lovell, T. (Ed.), *(Mis)recognition, social inequality and social justice* (pp.17-35). London: Routledge.

Goulding, A. (2008). Libraries and cultural capital. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 40(4), 235–237. doi:10.1177/0961000608096713

Wilkins. A. & Burke, P.J. (2015). Widening participation in higher education: the role of professional and social class identities and commitments. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 36(3), 434-452. doi: 10.1080/01425692.2013.829742

Yosso, T.J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91. doi:10.1080/1361332052000341006