Fig. 4.1 Michael Crowhurst (2017) 'Interior landscape/space (view from the kitchen bench)'acrylic and texta and water on reclaimed canvas

Chapter 4
What Do Learners Do: Where, When and/or How Does Learning Play Out? Some Ideas

Michael Crowhurst and **Michael Emslie**

Abstract In this chapter, the focus is on the territory or space that is 'the learner'. What it means to be a learner has shifted over time and has been impacted by a variety of contexts. This chapter briefly details and lists a variety of ways that the learner has been constructed in literature and then moves on to focus on some contemporary ways of thinking about what it means to be a learner. In line with historical and contemporary theory, the chapter suggests that the work that learners are engaged in and with is not only to do with engaging with various ways of knowing but also to do with the shaping of or construction of self. Learners are people who are engaging in contextually mediated processes that impact knowing, doing, sensing, being and becoming. The chapter concludes with a brief consideration of what might happen in (and characterise) a space within which learning might occur. A key theme that is introduced is that being a learner often involves inhabiting and engaging with a multiplicity of ways of being simultaneously. What it means to be a learner is to inhabit an in-between space that straddles what was known and what is yet to be known. What it means to be a learner is that sometimes you will know, sometimes you will be challenged and sometimes you will have no idea at all and these different states will happen within the same learning space. The chapter also considers the ways that other parts of learner's lives travel into and become entangled with processes of learning, knowledge products and learner subjectivity.

Keywords Learning · Learning theory · Pedagogy · Multiplicity · Learner

4.1 Introduction

So far, we have considered 'the school' as a complex constructed space and suggested assemblage theory as a useful way of engaging with or thinking about such spaces. We have also briefly considered 'the teacher' and introduced an assemblage of approaches to support thinking or engagement with the territory that is 'the teacher' and the territory that is 'the educative site or space'. In this chapter we focus on the territory that is 'the learner' and offer some ways of thinking about what it means to be a learner, and what it means to learn, within an educative space.

The chapter briefly considers some of the themes that appear in the literature and suggests that learner identities might be thought of as complex assemblages. I construct a story about the learner and learning drawing on notions of temporality, via a consideration of some of the sensations associated with learning, via a consideration of the notion that learner identity is multiple and via a consideration of learning as involving the navigation and inhabitation of complex pedagogical spaces. The chapter will describe some of the characteristics of spaces where learning happens and by implication suggest some of what might be present within cultural contexts that aim to enable and support learning.

4.2 The Learner in the Literature—Themes and Discourses

> There is no one, simple definition of learning.
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> Learning is a complex concept that is defined differently according to the context in which it is being discussed. (Mahar et al., 2005, p. 5)

There are many discourses that have been deployed to make sense of and to construct the territory that is the learner and the territory that is learning. When people think about learning or learners their thinking is framed in a multiplicity of ways and they might be looking at any one or any combination of factors. The following series of dot points list some of the ways that learners are constructed in the literature and some of the ways that learners might be thought about generally. Learners are constructed as:

- Becoming aware of what they currently know,
- Becoming aware of the spaces they usually know from,
- Moving beyond what they currently know,
- Moving beyond the processes that have governed how they have come to know,

- Engaging in solo endeavours,
- Engaging in group endeavours,

- Working in line with broad intentions, to achieve a known outcome or outcomes,
- Engaging in open-ended processes with unknown outcomes,

- Being involved in an epistemological project,
- Engaging with 'knowledge',
- Producers of knowledge,
- Consumers of knowledge,

- Acquiring things that were/are/will be of value in the past, present, future,

- Moving through biologically determined stages,
- Expressing a learning style or preference,

- Experiencing tension and discomfort,
- Resolving confusions,
- Stalling the resolution of confusions,

- Participating in processes that bestow a private benefit,
- Participating in processes that bestow a public good,

- Shaping an identity,
- Shaping a learner identity,
- Being engaged in an ontological project,

- Doing active work,

- Attempting to belong,
- Leaving what they know,

- Learning how to be socially situated subjects (gender, ethnicity, indigeneity etc.),
- Learning about mainstream and marginalised groups,
- Learning how to be different,
- Learning how to be the same,
- Learning about normativity,
- Learning about otherness,

- Thinking subjects,
- Feeling subjects,
- Doing subjects,
- Being subjects,
- Subjects who are produced as thinking, feeling, doing and being,

- Drawing on the past,
- Doing in the present,
- Moving into the future,
- Occupying and navigating in-between space/s

- Being affirmed,
- Being challenged,
- Aware,
- Unaware,

- Moving into equilibrium,
- Moving out of equilibrium,
- Complex assemblages,

- Seeking saleable vocational skills,
- Seeking fulfilment via education,
- Seeking to change cultural contexts,

- Experiencing privilege,
- Experiencing disadvantage,

- The nations' hope,
- The nations' despair,

- People who have rights,
- People who inhabit spaces,
- People who are produced in spaces,
- People who influence spaces,
- People who inhabit and navigate spaces that mediate doings.

There are so many writers who have tackled the subject of the learner from so many angles. Elizabeth Lawrence (1970) surveys an extensive body of literature and identifies numerous ways that education, learning and teaching have been constructed historically. Piaget (1936) and Vygotsky (1978) suggest that learning occurs in stages. For Piaget, learners move through a series of biologically predetermined stages and learning can only happen when the learner has reached the necessary stage of development to make modes of thinking possible. Vygotsky also favours a stage model of learning but suggests that learning happens in social contexts when people are supported to move beyond their current level of competence. Vygotsky's work suggests that doing precedes thinking and that peers and teachers can support learners to do things they may not have done before. Freire (1999) suggests that learning takes place within contexts that are embedded in values that either limit or support the learner to express who they are, and to be what they want to be. He highlights that the purpose of education might be to support people to change the cultural contexts they inhabit so that these might support expansive identities rather than function to limit what it is possible to be. Connell (1993), Giroux (2019), McLaren (2016), hooks (1994) and White et al. (2017) echo these critical concerns. Fraser's work (1997), as it relates to education, suggests that work that plays out in cultural settings, like the work of education and being a learner, should be critically engaged with to avoid limiting impositions and in her call for critical engagement she is joined by Freire (1999), Giroux (2019), Young (1990) and Arendt (2003). Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) demonstrate the way that class impacts success and failure in educative settings and provide a theoretical language to describe and think and do our way past class-based inequalities. They demonstrate that educative practices, such as testing regimes (that allocate privileges in cultural contexts), are not value neutral and argue the importance of critically engaging with such regimes. In drawing out the often-patterned nature of educative outcomes, these theorists also draw attention to the collective and the individual dimensions of educative work. Davies (1993, 2015) argues that educative systems often reproduce practices that are gendered and that limit the gendered subjectivities we construct and the collective

gendered outcomes across educative systems that we can measure. Pallotta-Chiarolli et al.'s (2001) work on gender and intersectionality draw out the connections between different aspects of complex subjectivities, and the collective and individual dimensions of educative experiences, but caution against oversimplification when thinking about the connections between subjectivity categories and educative experiences or outcomes (Adams & Bell, with Goodman & Joshi, 2016). Related theorists who consider 'othering' and the effects of the often unspoken and invisible, yet all pervasively present normative centre, in educative work come to mind. Foucault's (1977) work as it relates to education is a case in point, particularly where he suggests that educative processes can function to generate people who choose to move through the world in ways that are positioned as usual, where what is positioned as usual is in turn positioned as normative. Foucault examined the ways that systems, like educative systems, discipline the ways that bodies move through time and space and critiqued the potentially limiting effects of such regimes of power. Foucault's work has been used and continues to be used widely by those who write, research and teach into educative spaces. Similarly, Butler's (1990) work, as it is applied to educative spaces, suggests that such spaces are productive of learner subjectivities and that such spaces can function to enable and/or constrain learner subjectivities in that often subjectivities are produced in accordance with normative notions, in ways consistent with existing knowledge and subjectivity binaries. Butler's and Foucault's work have been central in the production of this book. Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) work as it relates to learners and educative spaces highlights the multiplicity and complexity involved in sometimes seemingly singular entities or events. Their work also suggests that learning involves a series of processes to do with an unending building of complexity and movements into and out of equilibrium (Braidotti, 2014, p. 242). These ideas have also been central in the production of this book. Gardner (1993) highlights that there are multiple forms of knowledge, multiple ways of knowing and multiple ways of being a learner, and encourages learners to think in thicker and more complex ways via the use of a multiplicity of forms of intelligence. Greene (2001) argues that thickening the stories we tell about the things we encounter in the world might be thought of as the overriding purpose and definition of learning, as thickening stories potentially thickens lived experience and identity. Heidegger (1977) argues that we know the world from particular vantage points and that it is from these places that we gain a partial glimpse of reality. The educative task, therefore, being to become aware of the places we view from and to move sideways to endlessly explore other ways of knowing, in order to see more of what there is to see. Davis, Sumara and Luce-Kapler (2008, 2015) echo these themes in their use of the notion of knowing frames and suggest the importance to learning of being aware of the places things are known from. Kumashiro (2004, 2008) highlights the sensation of tension that may be involved in learning to think in new ways and that learning is a visceral, embodied experience. Focusing on social justice, he pays particular attention to the ways that discomfort might function to support existing (normative) ways of knowing. Dewey (1902, 1997) reminds us that learning is active, student-centred work and that educative spaces need to be about and constructed in ways that support such work; in doing so, he echoes Piaget's (1936) constructivism. Berlant's (2011) work on affect, as it

relates to education, also draws attention to the multiplicity of sensations involved with learning and suggests that viewing the world in new ways, in ways that are non-normative, may involve pleasures and discomforts with the effect that a learner may retreat back into comfortable and pleasurable spaces that are already known rather than engage with spaces that are perhaps uncomfortable on account of being unknown. Berlant's (2011) work underscores the fact that learning involves affective straddling—that it involves not only experiences of discomfort and or tension but also simultaneously experiences of comfort and or pleasure. I am reminded, at this point, of Wenger's (2003) work and the emphasis he places on what motivates persistence with tense learning. He argues that learners are motivated to do the difficult but pleasurable work of learning when this means that they may come to be recognised as legitimate members of a new community that they value and seek to join. I am interested in how this might be relevant to educative work that aims to further socially just aims with its emphasis on engaging with, changing and ceasing to occupy contexts that are unjust and perhaps comfortable. Halberstam's (2011) work as it relates to education reminds me that educative success (learning new things) might also be thought of as involving a type of failure or loss (failure to hold onto or loss of old ways of knowing/being) and that educative success in some arenas (testing regimes on account of demonstrating normative capacities), may represent other types of failure (taking on the normative). DeLanda's (2006) work, as it relates to education, highlights the radically relational nature of processes of learning, in that all acts of learning, are complex event assemblages, that involve straddling the known and the unknown and the comfortable and the uncomfortable. In a similar fashion to Greene (2001) and Sellars (2013), he highlights the emergent unpredictable and excessive nature of educative work and educative processes as these events play out within complex educative spaces. Finally, I am thinking of Gee's (2005, 2007) work on how people learn to play video games and the emphasis in that work placed on the inhabitation of spaces. Gee illuminates the learning possibilities involved in acts of inhabitation—the inhabitation of a pedagogical space like an avatar. Pedagogical spaces that are *dependent on and that produce* experiences of multiplicities. Pedagogical spaces that are not only dependent on the learner being multiple (the ordinary learner and the learner being the avatar), but also on the learner being aware of this multiplicity, *from another generative dimension of self located somewhere else.* Another generative dimension of self located somewhere else where change or learning is a possibility.

4.3 The Learner as Challenged and the Learner as Affirmed

As demonstrated in the intentionally large single paragraph spray of text above, the literature on learners is comprised of a vast array of themes and is constructed via the deployment of a vast number of discourses. To move through this complexity, I

am going to keep all of the above in mind but I am going to impose an edge and a limit. I will focus on a few issues that I want to highlight.

As well as the complex array of issues listed above, 'the learner' is also a space where a variety of hopes and fears come together. The learner is often constructed via the deployment of discourses of hope; hope that the labour undertaken in the education system by the individual and that the money spent on that system by the collective culture will yield worthwhile results. The proof that these worthwhile results have been achieved being the supported transformation (Foucault, 1977, pp. 104–131) of the individual via education and the continued supported transformation of the nation (for instance). The learner is the actor who engages in the processes that lie at the very heart of the educative system—processes that are intended to support the learner as they currently are, and processes that are intended to support the learner as they learn to be and venture incoherently towards becoming different (Britzman, 2003; Carr, 2003; Gewirtz and Cribb, 2009; Greene, 2009; Grassi, 2016; James, 1997).

The systems' efforts to support the existing learner involve making efforts to come to know and understand that existing learner and then to affirm that learner by pitching educative experiences at the learner that make sense. The systems' efforts at transforming the learner involve making attempts to come to know and understand that existing learner, and then to challenge that learner by pitching work at the learner that is challenging. Transformations in thinking, sensing, feeling, doing and/or being come about as a result of the effort that learners put into transformative projects undertaken and mediated within educative spaces that are constructed by all those who work in and move through the educative assemblage (Foucault, 1977, pp. 104–131) (the notion that education is transformative is returned to later in this book).

The text will now focus on exploring the learning subject. Assemblage theory will be used to explore and narrate one story, involving a few elements, about how transformation/s (learning) on a seemingly individual level might be thought about and take place. Contexts that support transformation will share some of the principles that are evident in an individual learning story. Further contexts that support learners and learning are discussed throughout the text.

4.4 What is a Learner?

A learner is a person who engages with pedagogical spaces. Pedagogical spaces where learning is generated, pedagogical spaces that influence the type of learner subject produced, pedagogical spaces the learner has an impact on and pedagogical spaces that influence the types of knowledge products and learning processes engaged with, produced by and consumed by the learner.

Being a learner however is only one part or one aspect of the complex assemblage that is subjectivity—only one part of what it means to be a person. Learner aspects of subjectivity are in relationship with all other aspects of subjectivity (which in turn are also in relationship with the learner aspects of subjectivity). Ethnicity, gender, gender identity, class, sexuality, indigeneity, ability and learner aspects of subjectivity mutually inform each other, and the spaces where these different aspects circulate and meet generate further territories where possibilities surface. Possibilities to retreat from the other, to sit with the other, to partially become like the other, to flow through, leave a mark and then move on from the other, to incorporate the other, to hybridise with the other, to become entangled with the other (Crowhurst & Faulkner, 2018; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 361–498, 509–510; Harris & Holman Jones, 2019).

Learners are people who are complex and multifaceted. Learners participate in and take shape in a multiplicity of ways within a variety of complex pedagogical contexts—contexts that influence the things done by the learner and therefore the subjectivity produced by learners over time within those spaces. But while being a learner is certainly comprised of a collection of relational components, the lived experience of being a learner sometimes doesn't feel like it's complex at all; rather the feeling or impression is sometimes one of seemingly singular unified wholeness. At other times, the lived experience of being a learner is one whereby the learner is acutely aware of the complexity we are noticing here.

Learners engage in doings that are discursively enabled in a multiplicity of complex contexts and, in the process, are produced in a multiplicity of sometimes contradictory ways that sometimes generate an awareness of multiplicity and, at other times, generate an experience of being a seamless, unified, undifferentiated whole.

Learners function in a variety of ways, with a variety of associated sensations, in a variety of contexts and in a variety of situations for a variety of reasons. On account of the variety of contexts a learner inhabits and travels through, the learner engages with a multiplicity of symbolic or discursive realms. Learners navigate and inhabit media landscapes, book landscapes, educative landscapes, friendship landscapes, discipline landscapes, gender landscapes and so on. This experience with a multiplicity of entangled symbolic or discursive realms and territories produces the territory that is the learner assemblage, this multiplicity of spaces is the territory upon which the assemblage event that is learning happens.

I'll now turn to try to put some edges on the rapidly unravelling complex space that I've started to describe by focusing in on three stories about the complex space that is learning and being a learner. These are obviously not the only stories that could be told or perhaps not even the main stories about learning that should be told. But, in order not to lose myself in the telling I'm going to structure a story and organise the telling into three key stories at this point:

- One story about learning and pedagogical spaces focusing on the linear
- One story about learning and pedagogical spaces focusing on multiplicity
- And one story about learner background influence on pedagogical spaces.

I'm going to suggest that when learners inhabit pedagogical spaces, these three stories play out together and, on account of this, learners sometimes straddle contradictory

sites. I'm going to suggest that learning spaces and learners often move in *at least* three different directions at once, and I'm going to ask and answer a question. If it is the case that a learner can move in three different directions at once, and if it is also the case that a learner can register this multiplicity, then it must also be the case that the learner can be in four places at once. And it is to this fourth place that I now turn.

James Paul Gee (2005, 2007) suggests that when people play video games via the use of an avatar, learning occurs (players need to learn to play the game) on account of the gamer/learner's inhabitation of a multiplicity of spaces. There's the 'ordinary' learner who brings to the game what they know, there's the learner who works out the game and inhabits the space that is being in the game, there's the learner who inhabits an avatar character and moves through the game, and to this I would add that somewhere else in this learning story there is another part of the learner that is aware of all of the above. The inhabitation of multiple spaces is generative of a multiplicity of aspects of learner subjectivity and it is within this multiplicity, on account of the generative spaces such multiplicity affords, that some would argue the learning or growth or becoming that we see happen as people learn to play video games occurs.

4.5 A Story About Learning and Pedagogical Spaces Focusing on the Linear

One way that being a learner has been understood is that it involves navigating a pedagogical space that might be thought of as a process that is about engaging with and travelling towards exteriorities (towards new ways of knowing). The learner is initiated into these new ways of knowing, in a formal educative space, via the deployment of existing skills and existing ways of knowing.

One way of thinking about learning is that it happens in spaces involving the experience of being in-between. That it involves being in an in-between place where what is already known meets the challenge of moving towards knowing something that is different, that is yet to be known. The metaphor of the swimmer venturing into the pool includes this refrain. The swimmer starting off in the safe shallows and then moving to a place where their toes are touching and just lifting off the bottom of the pool (where there is still some control) and where the swimmer also knows that they're teetering on being out of their depth and perhaps beyond being in control. Where the swimmer will have to swim rather than walk through the water for instance. One way of thinking about learning is that it is active work that involves using what is known to navigate the task that is about moving from *a here space, into and through an in-between space, in order to arrive at the other end at a there space*.

While learning might be thought about as involving the straddling of contradictory spaces (knowing and not knowing), the outcome sought, in more linear ways of thinking about learning, is the resolution of contradictions that occur when the learner becomes the subject who knows. One way of thinking about learning is that it involves

a complex series of events, undertaken by the complex entity we call a learner, and that as they learn, learners move through, and manage, a series of movements into and out of various states of equilibrium (Braidotti, 2014, pp. 241–243) and that all of this eventually results in some sort of resolution, and that this is when we know that learning has happened and that this is what we call learning.

Learning might also be thought of as occurring in spaces that involve temporal elements. We learn in some place called now, which is a space where we deploy knowledge/s that we are attached to and that cohere, that we have learnt in the past that are put to use in order to make sense of other ways of knowing that are yet to cohere. And we are motivated to be learners because, for some reason, we have decided that 'x' is worth pursuing, perhaps because it is necessary for some way of being that we desire to inhabit in the immediate or distant future (Wenger, 2003). Another way of thinking about learning is that it involves using what we already know and have learnt in the past in order to move from now into the future.

One way of thinking about what it means to be a learner is that it involves the successful navigation of pedagogical spaces and the development of the capacity to hold opposites (such as knowing and not knowing) in play until these resolve. One way of thinking about learning is that it is a process that is about managing complexity so that it travels along a fairly linear trajectory.

4.6   A Story About Learning and Pedagogical Spaces Focusing on Multiplicity

Another way that being a learner has been understood is that it involves multiplicities that are produced on account of the inhabitation of the complexity of pedagogical assemblage spaces and that these multiplicities do not resolve. Assemblage has been considered in earlier parts of this book. To reiterate, in relation to 'the school', it was suggested that:

> Schools might be thought of as constructed assemblages that are an effect of the bringing together of elements such as spatial arrangements, architecture, values, curriculum, epistemological positions, pedagogical techniques, ontological positions, internal narratives, narratives generated externally, and as sites that change over time. Schools might be thought of as sites that are constructed *by* individuals, and by *groups* of individuals, and as sites that function *for* individuals and for groups of individuals. Schools might also be thought of as spaces comprised of a variety of elements that are mediated by social factors such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, indigeneity, gender identity, ability and class.
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> When thought about via an idea like assemblage, it becomes evident that each school is a space that generates the effect of appearing to be a singular entity, when the reality is that schools are anything but singular. Schools, in this respect, as will be discussed later in this book, are a lot like learners and learning and a lot like the complex pedagogical space that is the seemingly singular and simple 'activity'. Schools are comprised of a constellation of mediated and *relational* elements that collectively produce the whole that is the seemingly stable territory that is the school. And keeping the seemingly stable territory that is the school moving along involves a lot of work.

The experience of learning and the experience of being a learner I am suggesting might be thought about via the use of the theoretical notion of assemblage. Learners inhabit a multiplicity of complex assemblage spaces within which they are produced as learner subjects in a multiplicity of ways. In earlier parts of the book, 'performativity' theory has been used to think about teacher identity—to reiterate:

> When Butler (1990) coined the term 'performativity', she attempted to outline a theory that suggested a complex assemblage of propositions. Among these were: that we become what we do; that we do what is available to us in culture; and that as we do what we do we also (re)make and (re)produce culture. While performativity suggests a dynamic relationship between the subject and cultural context in some ways, it places culture at the very centre of subjectivity (identity) in suggesting that even though subjects are able to choose to enact various discourses, this choosing is understood to be always already discursively limited. Discourse is the limit of agency in Butler and, as such, discourse combined with the actions of the *always already* discursively produced subject for Butler is what produces subjectivity (identity) and what produces cultural change (Youdell, 2011, pp. 44–45).
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> For Butler (1990), these discursive performances are also often enacted along binary lines, where choosing to identify as 'x' can entail a foreclosure of the option to identify as 'y'. Butler argues that we are subtly encouraged to identify with ways of being that are positioned by culture as normative (Foucault, 1977) and to foreclose identifying with those that are positioned as non-normative, and that over time the performances we have enacted come to be naturalised, that is, they come to be experienced as natural (Crowhurst & Emslie, 2018, pp. 32–33). It is this experience of 'naturalness', this performative effect, that Butler explores.
>
> People are produced as subjects as they engage in the work of making selves via the deployment of discourses that are available to them in the various cultural contexts they inhabit, and people are also subject to being positioned as types of subjects by others via the deployment of such discourses. A particular teacher subjectivity, for instance, is an effect of decisions made on some level by a subject to enact (and foreclose) *a multiplicity* of available discourses and to accept or refuse to be positioned in a variety of ways by others deploying discourses. In the process of constructing a teaching subjectivity, it is impossible, given the multiplicity of available discourses, not to engage with, take up and perform sometimes contradictory discourses. And in the process of constructing a teaching subjectivity, the subject will be engaged in the work of constructing other aspects of their complex subjectivity that add to and become entangled with the complexity already briefly discussed.

When notions of performativity (Butler, 1990) and notions of assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) are inhabited as thinking spaces and used so that they become combined or hybridised or entangled, what is generated is an interesting way to think about processes of learning and what it means to be a learner and what being a learner entails.

Learning might be considered to be a process that involves the learner entering into a series of relationships with, or inhabitations of, various territories. What sorts of territories are being referred to here? There are many. To bring some focus to this discussion, I'm going to narrow considerations down to a few. In the previous section, I argued that one linear way of thinking about learning is that it involves

moving from what is currently known to what is not yet known via an in-between space, where the work that is learning happens. There are also less linear ways of thinking about learning and the spaces within which learning happens.

Perhaps a good way to begin to consider these other ways of thinking about learning is via the work of Lyotard (1986, pp. 72–83). Malpas (2014, p. 27) argues that Lyotard suggests that all cultural contexts, including learning contexts, might be thought of as including elements or spaces that are real, elements or spaces that are modern, and elements or spaces that are post-modern. The real being that which is and that which is understood, the modern being that which is challenging but that can be incorporated into the real, and the post-modern being that which represents a way of knowing, doing or being that cannot be incorporated into the real, or the modern, and that ruptures the real and the modern. Lyotard argues that these three tendencies have always functioned *simultaneously* and in productive tension in cultural contexts across time. Lyotard argues on account of this that cultural contexts and processes, like being a learner, do not play out in linear ways where they move from a here to a there via an in-between in a monolithic fashion. Lyotard argues that there will always be a multiplicity of elements that are real, modern and post-modern at the beginning of an event, as an event plays out, and at the end of an event. Lyotard's (1986) ideas, when combined with Butler (1990) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987), provide an additional and a *thicker* (Greene, 2001) way of thinking about the learner and learning.

When people inhabit and navigate the complex assemblage space that is a learning event, when they move into and through the in-between spaces that characterise learning cultures, they encounter and become immersed in an assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) of contradictory tendencies/spaces (Lyotard, 1986) that they engage with and within which they are produced (Butler, 1990) in a multiplicity of ways. Some of the spaces engaged with will be known already, some will be challenging and some will not make any sense at all. Some of the spaces engaged with will be familiar, some interesting and different, and some will be beyond what the subject is currently able to think, do or be. On account of inhabiting a complex learning space, the subject who is the learner will be produced in a multiplicity of ways, including as someone who knows, as someone who is challenged and as someone who hasn't got a clue about what any of that was about at all. And this learner multiplicity will be evident at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of many learning events.

Another way, therefore, of thinking about what it means to be a learner is that learning and being a learner not only involves engaging with and navigating the multiplicities that are a part of a pedagogical space, but also taking on board that the existence of such multiplicities will mean that the learner subject will come to be produced in a multiplicity of ways and that this multiplicity remains rather than resolves.

To return to the pool metaphor that recurs throughout the book, it would seem that learners are a bit like swimmers. While they can use their existing swimming skills to move from the shallow end to the depths, the complex experience that is a swimming event also plays out in a multiplicity of different ways producing a multiplicity of effects. For every time the subject gets into a pool, the ways they are produced as and

become a swimmer are governed by, and an effect of, the multiplicity of elements that gather together to generate the complex territory that is a swimming event.

It would seem so far, that pedagogical spaces can be engaged with by learners in linear ways, and that pedagogical spaces can produce learners in multiple ways. But there is another series of relationships that learners have with pedagogical spaces. We'll now consider the ways that learner backgrounds come to influence learning spaces.

4.7 A Story About learner's Background Influences on Pedagogical Spaces

While the sections above are written with an intentional focus on learning as it plays out in a variety of pedagogical spaces, I want to underline that in addition to inhabiting 'formal' pedagogical spaces (schools for instance), that learners are people who are always involved in the ongoing process of constructing and reconstructing complex, multifaceted subjectivities. This identity work plays out in a multiplicity of environments that are gendered and classed (for instance) and, accordingly, the aspect of a person's subjectivity that we might call their 'learner subjectivity' comes to be entangled with other aspects of subjectivity, such as gender and class, and comes to be gendered and classed (and vice versa). It's important to stress this because, on account of this, such attributes (gender, class etc.) come to be present in the contexts that a learner inhabits and, in turn, in a dynamic and circular way, exert an ongoing influence on how the learner continues to be a learner and on knowledge products and understandings that a learner produces (this will be further considered in the chapters that follow).

Learners are not only being learners in 'educative' contexts or limited to only having learning experiences in spaces that we might call 'educative'. People inhabit, navigate and are produced as learners in contexts that involve entanglements of gender, gender identity, class, ethnicity, sexuality, indigeneity, ability, family, religion, friendship, relationships, animals, nature, the non-human, affect and the sensory in a multiplicity of ways. And just as a learner subject will use what they know in order to navigate such 'exterior to the classroom' contexts, and will be challenged within these contexts and will encounter things that don't make any sense or register at all within such contexts, and just as elements of subjectivity will be produced within such contexts, so too these 'exterior to the classroom' contexts that may come to be present in the learner, that may come to be part of the person that the learner is, these 'exteriorities' may also become part of the way the learner goes about the doing and making sense of things. These may also become part of what happens in learning events and processes and part of what comes to be assessed and may also

become part of what comes to be present within the formal educative space called the school and/or the classroom.

In this way, we can see that territories that are sometimes thought to be 'exterior' to the classroom or 'exterior' to learning and the construction of knowledge products, are not exteriorities at all, but rather are very present in learning and classroom events. Territories that are seemingly exterior to interior formal classroom and learning territories are often not exterior at all. Educative processes are territories where various exteriorities and interiorities meet, where thresholds are encountered, and where various opportunities for partial refusals, partial journeys into, and partial combinings, on account of such meetings present (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 361–498, 509–10).

Learners are complex assemblages who engage with a multiplicity of potentially formative and complex assemblage spaces inside and beyond the formal educative space that is the classroom. Some elements of the vast assemblage of spaces that a learner is involved with and that have become part of the learner will travel into (Youdell, 2011, pp. 44–45) classroom learning spaces and into processes of knowledge production with the learner and these travelling aspects of subjectivity might actually *be* the spaces and vantage points from where the learner experiences relevance or that enable the learner to be a learner. It's important, therefore, that educative processes recognise, welcome (Derrida, 2001) and acknowledge learner diversity and deploy tactics that aim to construct learning environments that enable a diversity of learners, and diversity as it presents with each learner, to become present in learning environments, in learning processes and in knowledge products. Learners and learning involves elements that at first might appear to be external to formal learning events and spaces but on closer inspection are entangled with such events and ever present.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987, pp. 361–408) discuss some of what might happen where differences meet. They suggest that where this meets that, where one learner meets another learner, or where this learner meets that idea, that a multiplicity of effects and possibilities are generated, a multiplicity including that:

- Difference might be refused by the subject (the subject closes off to difference)
- Difference might flow through the subject *and* leave a mark with/on the subject (a statement that is spoken and heard)
- The subject might partially flow into difference and become lost in a new territory (a learner becomes partially lost in a confusing but captivating idea)
- Synthesis and entanglement events might happen or come into being (a learner listens to another learner and their thinking merges and this learner becomes someone who thinks differently)

- The learner's current way of thinking might become destabilised (the solid ground that is 'this way of thinking' becomes less solid)[1]

Youdell ([2011](), pp. 44–45), via an examination of Butler's work on 'discursive agency', highlights how generative relations of difference come to be present within classroom contexts. Classroom contexts might be thought of as complex interiorities that exist in relations of difference with all that exceeds them, with various exteriorities. Learners, when they inhabit classroom contexts, do so, as we have been discussing, as complex subjects who have been produced in a multiplicity of contexts beyond the formal classroom walls.

When learners inhabit classroom spaces, while their experience is mediated by that classroom space, they also come to exert considerable influence on such spaces. Subjects who inhabit spaces bring with them into such spaces a multiplicity of discourses, evident in the multiplicity of contexts beyond the classroom, that a learner inhabits and has been produced within, a multiplicity of discourses that travel into the classroom with each learner (Youdell, [2011](), pp. 44–45).

Each of the learners in a classroom group, therefore, might be thought of as not only produced by discourses, but also as agents or as vectors or as hosts that enact discourses, that engage with discourses, and that function as vehicles for discourses. Vehicles via which discourses travel into classroom spaces, discourses that reflect a diversity of learner backgrounds and, once in the classroom if welcomed (Derrida, [2001]()), these discourses can come to be entangled with processes of learning, classroom and whole school contexts and knowledge products (these ideas, particularly as they relate to the relationships that exist between learner background and learning processes, classroom spaces, and knowledge products, will be returned to in later chapters of the book).

It would seem that learners experience a multiplicity of relationships with pedagogical spaces. Pedagogical spaces are navigated by learners in linear ways, produce learners in multiple ways and are influenced by learners in complex ways. To return to the pool metaphor, it would seem that learners are a bit like swimmers, in that while they can use their existing swimming skills to move from the shallow end to the depths, the complex experience that is a swimming event also plays out in a multiplicity of different ways producing a multiplicity of effects. For every time the subject gets into a pool, the ways they are produced as and become a swimmer are governed by, and are an effect of, the multiplicity of elements that gather together to generate the complex territory that is a swimming event, including whether they enter the pool wearing flippers they have brought with them from home, which will make them swim faster or not.

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[1] Deleuze and Guattari ([1987](), pp. 361–408) discuss relations of difference quite broadly and highlight that the possibilities that relations of difference generate are not only to do with additive effects but also to do with destabilising normative ways of thinking doing and being.

4.8   Learners Are also in Relationships with Ways of Knowing Doing and Being

So far, the main focus of the discussion has been to consider some of the relationships that a learner might be thought to have with a learning space. I want to begin to draw this chapter to closure by commenting on what are often considered to be the key spaces that the learner is in relationship with—namely spaces concerning ways of knowing (epistemological engagements), ways of doing (learning processes) and ways of being (ontological engagements). I want to highlight one key idea that has been introduced and demonstrate what this means via use of a simple example. I want to demonstrate what it means to suggest that learners are not only influenced by learning spaces, learning processes and knowledge products but that learning spaces, learning processes and knowledge products are also influenced by learners. I want to begin to show what it means to suggest that learner diversity and learning spaces, knowledge products and learning processes are entangled.

Earlier in this chapter I wrote:

> Each of the learners in a classroom group, therefore, might be thought of as not only produced by discourses, but also as agents, or as vectors, or as hosts, that enact discourses that engage with discourses, and that function as vehicles for discourses. Vehicles via which discourses travel into classroom spaces, discourses that reflect a diversity of learner backgrounds, and once in the classroom, if welcomed (Derrida, 2001), these discourses can come to be entangled with processes of learning, classroom and whole school contexts and knowledge products (these ideas, particularly as they relate to the relationships that exist between learner background and learning processes, classroom spaces, and knowledge products, will be returned to in later chapters of the book).

Where can we see this happening? We see it happening in the following seemingly simple activity/complex pedagogical space. Learners are offered the opportunity to participate in an activity. *Move into groups of four and read and discuss page 22.* Learners are invited into a pedagogical space. *Spend 20 min discussing this page.* Learners use what they know to make sense of the page. Learners are produced as analysts. Some learners speak a lot, others listen, all see things that some of the others don't. *As a group, on a shared file, write a single paragraph that responds to the page in some way.* Learners begin to build a knowledge product. They're produced as writers. *Each member of the group is to contribute to the paragraph using a different coloured font.* The different coloured font isn't used as a disciplinary device to check that all students have done some work, rather it is a device that tracks and makes visible the ways that a diversity of learners coming from a diversity of backgrounds and spaces have come to be present and entangled in a learning process, in a knowledge product and how each have been produced, as writer, reader, thinker and collaborator in entangled ways within this seemingly simple activity/pedagogical space.

The classroom context where learning happens is a complex space where the educative system meets the learner and the learner's background. And in this complex learning space a diversity of learners from a diversity of backgrounds and a diversity of educative system offerings and outcomes meet and mix and become entangled, each with the other (Fig. 4.1).

4.9   Learners as Experiencing Sensations and Making Choices

This chapter has argued that to be a learner involves the navigation of pedagogical spaces, being produced in a multiplicity of ways within pedagogical spaces and exerting influence on pedagogical spaces in a variety of ways. Being a learner also entails recognising and *sitting with* the sensations that such experiences provoke and negotiating the multiplicity of choices and opportunities on offer in such generative spaces (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 361–498, 509–10). When learners are in relationship with the difference that is a pedagogical space, a number of choices and sensations present, including:

- The choice to retreat back into a space that is known, where experiences and sensations are comfortable and the learner subject is possibly less aware of self or the movement of time.

- The choice to attend to new ways of thinking *and* existing ways of thinking to stall decision making and to sit with the sensations or affectivities that emerge, and perhaps in the process to be more aware of self and more aware of time.

- The choice to register new ways of knowing and to incorporate these into what is already known and perhaps in the process to experience affectivities or sensations of pleasure and time moving quickly on account of doing so.

- The choice to combine and/or hybridise old ways of knowing with new ways, or new ways of knowing with old ways, to let old and new become entangled, and perhaps in the process to experience an affect or sensation of pleasure and timelessness on account of doing so.

- The choice to begin to learn to imagine and think in entirely new ways, in ways that are so strange and different, that they are unimaginable and unintelligible and perhaps, in the process, to experience an affect or sensation of pleasure and timelessness on account of doing so.

When learners are in relationship with pedagogical spaces, on account of learner complexity they're present in a variety of ways. When learners are in relationship

with pedagogical spaces and a number of choices and sensations present, sometimes a learner will opt to make one choice and sometimes a learner will entertain *multiple* choices and experience *multiple* opportunities. And the experience of engaging with or inhabiting pedagogical spaces will involve a multiplicity of sensations, a multiplicity of effects, and a multiplicity of flows, and all of this is sometimes pleasurable and sometimes not.

The learner is a person who moves with and through all of the above. The learner is a person who moves into and out of various states of messiness and order, who maintains control and who gets lost. The learner is a person who occupies spaces where the normative and the non-normative coexist. The learner is a person who navigates a multiplicity of spaces and who is produced in a multiplicity of ways within pedagogical spaces, within pedagogical spaces that are designed to enable learning. The learner is a person who meets and influences pedagogical spaces and who becomes entangled with and partially changed by those spaces. The learner is a person who stays the same and who experiences challenges and who becomes different. A learner is more than *a* learner. In line with the 'auto-teach(er)/ing focused research' process this book deploys, I want to note here that these are ideas that I find useful, and that have emerged, as I have engaged in the work of teaching.

4.10   Symbolic Intersections

The image at the beginning of the chapter is painted on a found canvas and is based on an assemblage of objects that are on the kitchen bench—a kitchen bench that overlooks a lounge room that it is part of and a lounge room that includes that kitchen bench. The background includes remnants from the original found canvas— and the old background intrudes into the new painting. The background spaces ended up unintentionally intruding into the foreground spaces and the foreground into the background—entangled. The existing background being a key part of the space from within which this painting was produced. I navigated the space but the space governed choices. Choices re colours for instance—what would 'go' with the existing background? This painting is here because the more I look at it—now that it's finished— the more about in-between spaces I realise it becomes—the more about navigation of spaces and being produced within spaces it becomes. The watercolour above is a complex, multiple and ambiguous figure too. Lines and pleasant colours—water-stained paper. Is it on the paper or in the paper? Does it move forward or backwards? Does it make sense or not or both? It's a bit connected with some of what this chapter has been saying about learning … (Fig. 4.2)

Learning involves acts of inhabitation

The inhabitation of pedagogical spaces
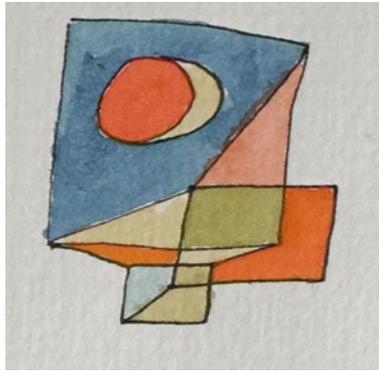
Fig. 4.2 Michael Crowhurst (2019) Cropped detail element of cover image 'part/whole' Watercolour and pen on paper

Complex pedagogical spaces where the learner is produced in a multiplicity of ways

Complex pedagogical spaces that require navigation

Navigation around what is known, what is in-between, and what is yet to be known

Complex pedagogical spaces involving this aspect of subjectivity and that

Complex pedagogical spaces that the learner brings their background to

Complex pedagogical spaces that learner backgrounds travel into

Complex pedagogical spaces where backgrounds and formal systems meet

Learning involves sitting between this way of thinking doing being and that

Learning involves sitting with this way of thinking doing being and that

Learning involves the collective and the individual

And plays out in complex spaces

In complex spaces involving the real, the modern and the postmodern

Where we are produced as real, as modern and as postmodern

Complex spaces where we experience sensations

Complex spaces where we are comfortable and not

Complex spaces where we sit and stall and name and notice

Complex spaces where we combine existing ways of knowing

Complex spaces where existing ways of knowing are combined

Complex spaces where we venture off into the new and stay the same

Complex spaces that are navigated

Where the learner is produced in a multiplicity of entangled ways

4.11   Invitation to Dialogue

> In I go … Splash … water displaced … something that was an externality becoming an internality … smooth surfaces ruptured … by me … flippers flipping … energy moving outwards and behind me … water moving outwards … … fragmenting, gathering … drops becoming a wave becoming drops … I want to move through the pool … from here to there … bit colder down here in the deep end … wasn't expecting that … brrrrrrrrr … keep swimming … keep becoming a swimmer … will I keep being produced as a swimmer or get out of the pool? … Woops is that a wave … no … I'm being 'bombed' by some teenagers … Being moved by the water to over there … flippers flip … as I swim away from the teenagers … and back to where …

I once listened to a podcast where David Bowie discussed the necessary conditions for creative work to happen. Bowie suggested that the place where creative work was most likely to happen was akin to being in the ocean or in a swimming pool and being just at the point where your feet were no longer in contact with the floor. The creative place was just before you were out of your depth. In many ways the place where the toes are no longer in contact with the floor is where I feel that I am when I try to say something clear about something as complex as learning.

Years ago, I shot a very short video (using my phone) of light shimmering on water. I suggested that shimmering surfaces function as a metaphor of the experience of being able to see and not being able to see. The video suggested that the experience of trying to look at light shimmering on water was a little like the experience of trying to say something clearly about something complex. If I were to make a new video to add to this one, I would also add a picture of a fully clothed man walking from the shallow end of a swimming pool towards the deep end—just about to the point where his feet no longer touched the floor. I would make a video that conveyed something about what it means to occupy multiple spaces—spaces where you know, spaces where you are aware you don't know, and the in-between spaces where you are aware that you do and you don't know. Learning is creative work.

In a relaxed and pleasurable way, think, write and draw about learning:

- If you were to make a three-dimensional artefact that encapsulated some of your thinking, writing and drawing about what learning is, what would that object be?
- What discourses are being deployed to enable you to imagine your artefact?
- How are you being produced as a kind of learner in the space that is this activity?

In a relaxed and pleasurable way, think, write and draw about not learning:

- If you were to make a three-dimension artefact that encapsulated some of your thinking, writing and drawing, what would that object be?
- What discourses are being deployed to enable you to imagine your artefact?
- How are you being produced as a kind of learner in the space that is this activity?

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Dialogue with Self

Michael 4   Not sure I like the slab spray section or the dot points at the start
Michael 2   Oh I don't know
Michael 1   I like the way it's written—it builds on the introductory sections
Michael 3   And sets up what's coming next
Michael 1   I like the way we waded through a long list of names and then settled into a short story
Michael 2   Yes—it settles in on one short—but complex story about learning
Michael 1   Certainly not the only short story
Michael 3   But … I think teachers and those who teach teachers might like this story
Michael 4   Hope you're right

Michael 1   This chapter's got elements that retain the feelings I associate with sketching

Michael 2   Yes, putting marks on paper that have an energy about them

Michael 3   The beginnings of a space … and a space in itself

Michael 1   But a space that has a lightness about it

Michael 2   Not the heaviness of paint

Michael 1   This chapter sketches out some thinking about learning and spaces

Michael 2   And it hints at what's to come

Michael 3   Where we'll talk about activities as complex spaces that learners inhabit and influence

Michael 1   Where they're produced in multiple ways

Michael 4   Don't give the game away just yet

Michael 2   I agree 4 (for once)