

Kristin Elaine Reimer · Mervi Kaukko ·
Sally Windsor · Kathleen Mahon ·
Stephen Kemmis *Editors*

Living Well in a World Worth Living in for All

Volume 1: Current Practices of Social Justice,
Sustainability and Wellbeing

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Sustainability and Wellbeing

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Preface

This is the first of two volumes that seek to explore the critical question for our era: ‘What, for our times, does it mean to live well in a world worth living in for all?’

This question conveys the essence of the work of the Pedagogy, Education and Praxis (PEP) international research network. Stephen Kemmis, one of the founders of PEP, brought this important question to life when he proposed that the double purpose of education is *to help people live well in a world worth living in for all*.

Since 2006, PEP has joined educational researchers from across different intellectual traditions, different languages and different geographical locations to explore what ‘good’ education means and how researchers, educators and practitioners can work to bring that *world worth living in for all* into reality.

The *World Worth Living In* project, across the two volumes, connects 30 individual studies—focused on praxis, well-being, social justice and sustainability—conducted by researchers in six countries, all of whom are associated with the PEP network. In each study, researchers listen deeply to a range of individuals and collectives as they respond to the above question, ensuring that understandings of ‘living well’ and ‘a world worth living in for all’ genuinely reflect diversity both within and across nations. With the COVID-19 pandemic re-configuring priorities and practices, and with well-being and sustainability increasingly recognised as critical for our global existence, this project is both urgent and timely.

The two volumes focus on the following three questions:

- What does it mean to live well?
- What is a world worth living in for all?
- What, for our times, does it mean to live well in a world worth living in for all?

This first volume focuses on people’s current experiences within the world: How is education enabling or constraining people to live well and to bring into reality a world worth living in for all?

The second volume focuses on the future: What can we learn so that we can create change in educational policy and practice in order to enact praxis?

The volumes will be accompanied by a multimedia component. Please find more about the World Worth Living In Project—including short films and podcast

episodes—at <https://www.monash.edu/education/wwli>. Join the conversation and help move us toward a better future where education consistently helps us live well and helps us create a world worth living in for all.

Clayton, Australia
Tampere, Finland
Gothenburg, Sweden
Borås, Sweden/Brisbane, Australia
Wyoming, Australia

Kristin Elaine Reimer
Mervi Kaukko
Sally Windsor
Kathleen Mahon
Stephen Kemmis

Acknowledgments

This volume is only possible thanks to the sustained commitment and full-hearted work of the members of the PEP international research network and their colleagues. We value their support in the initiation and realisation of this project.

We also wish to acknowledge the voices and perspectives of a vast range of people and communities who have allowed us to listen to them in this volume. In listening for the answers to the question ‘What, for our times, does it mean to live well in a world worth living in for all?’, we acknowledge the voices and wisdom of:

- Aboriginal leaders in Australia;
- Young people in Australian schools;
- Teachers in Swedish-speaking schools in rural Finland;
- Leaders in Steiner schools in Australia;
- Australian Aboriginal youth;
- International university students in Sweden;
- Asylum-seeking students in Australia;
- Refugee youth in Finland, Norway and Scotland;
- Families with children who tube-feed in Australia;
- Climate activists in Finland.

Thank you for helping us think through—and act into being—a world worth living in for all.

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Chapter 1

Searching for Worlds Worth Living in



Mervi Kaukko, Sally Windsor, and Kristin Reimer

Abstract The idea of living well, the ‘good’ life, and the type of world that allows all lifeforms to thrive is not new. Its outlines are visible in many Indigenous knowledges. In the Western tradition, its roots stretch back beyond Aristotle in ancient Greece. This chapter presents the book at hand as a listening project. Through the 13 chapters of the book, we invite the reader to pause, ponder, identify and interpret what ‘living well’ or a ‘world worth living in’ means in different contexts and for different groups of people, and how the meaning changes depending on where one stands. Hearing from knowledge holders standing in different positions in the world, our knowledge gets richer. As we listen deeply to all the chapters of the book, we can hear clearly the language of criticism: how educational practices are currently stopping us from living well; and how educational practices are creating a world of inequity and unmet needs. But we can also hear the language of hope: how education is helping us to live well and to live well together—both today and in the future; and how education is supporting us, together, to create a world, day by day and practice by practice, that is worth living in for all.

Keywords World worth living in · Deep listening · Praxis

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Searching for Worlds Worth Living in

‘Super Visor’, my 7-year-old said, repeating a word he’d heard me use in conversation, but separating it into its two parts. ‘What’s that even mean?’

I love when his mind catches a word and tosses it back to me. Words that I use unthinkingly, often as shorthand, get placed in front of me to consider and explain. My son slows my speech down so that we can, at least momentarily, examine a word’s meaning and be present to its use in context.

Supervisor. Meaning *above* (super) and *to see or observe* (visor): to observe from above.

Not necessarily the superhero superpowers that my son was imagining, and yet power is indeed inherent in the definition. By pausing to consider the meaning of a word I use daily in my academic work context, I’m confronted anew with its intentions and implications. (Kristin)

Words and phrases that we use often—as powerful as they may be in the first hearing—can quickly lose some of their intensity, their impact and their meaning through repetition. As Williams (1976) pointed out, pausing to consider keywords and phrases helps to reveal complex historical, cultural and social interrelationships and tensions. For a word or phrase to maintain or grow into its rich meaning, we need two things: (1) for people new to the word or phrase to stop, ponder on it and ask what it really means, and (2) for people familiar with the word or phrase to intentionally pause and ask, what does it mean now, in this time and in this context?

This book is an attempt at pausing, pondering, identifying contexts and interpreting Stephen Kemmis’ phrase that education’s purpose is ‘to help people live well in a world worth living in for all’ (see, for example, Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 25). Kemmis refers to education as having a double purpose: it should help individuals to live well, and it should contribute to making the world a better place, and one that all people find worth living in.

The idea of living well, the ‘good’ life, and the type of world that allows all human and non-human lifeforms to thrive is not new, of course. Many nations and cultures express similar concepts in their own language. In Australian Indigenous knowledge, it is articulated in the Wiradjuri term *Yindyamarra Winhanganha*, which has been translated as ‘the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in’ (Charles Sturt University, 2021). We are grateful to have received permission from Wiradjuri Elder Uncle Stan Grant Senior to share this term. The Wiradjuri have inhabited the country in what is today called New South Wales, Australia for at least 60,000 years, and although we can’t accurately date the concept and term *Yindyamarra Winhanganha* we can assume that it has been a part of Wiradjuri consciousness for many millennia. On the opposite side of the globe, the Northern Sámi term *árbediehtu*, ‘the collective wisdom and skills of the Sámi people’ outlines the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment. It, too, connects a vision of how each person should live with a vision of how all creatures can thrive together.

Two millennia ago, in ancient Greece, Aristotle also pondered upon the purpose of life in his question ‘How should we live?’ to which he believed there was a simple

answer—‘to seek happiness’ or *eudaimonia*. *Eudaimonia* is a Greek word which is not exactly happiness as a feeling of enjoyment as we think of it today, but perhaps better translated as ‘flourishing’ (Warburton, 2011). Neo-Aristotelian philosopher MacIntyre (1981, p. 204), in turn, says:

... the good life for [humankind] is the life spent in seeking the good life for [humankind], and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for [humankind] is.

Following MacIntyre’s view of the good life for humankind, perhaps we could say a world worth living in is a world in which people can spend time seeking a world worth living in, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else a world worth living in is.

But how does a person educate others in ways that will ‘help people live well in a world worth living in for all?’ This is a question that instantly resonates with people, and captures the essence of much of the work of the Pedagogy, Education and Praxis (PEP) international research network. In fact, it captures what the PEP network was established to do in 2006: to bring together educational researchers from across different intellectual and educational traditions, different languages and different geographical locations to understand what ‘good’ education means and how it could be implemented (e.g. Kemmis & Smith, 2008; Kemmis et al., 2014; Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018; Mahon et al., 2020). Like so many concepts in education and philosophy, the phrase—to live well in a world worth living in for all—is open to interpretation. At a PEP meeting in 2019, a few newcomers voiced this into a question: ‘What does the phrase actually mean—on the ground, to real people, in diverse locations, and diverse situations?’.

We took this question as an opportunity to intentionally pause and interrogate the meaning of the phrase—now, in this time, in our various contexts. The phrase itself was never meant to become taken for granted. Instead, Kemmis et al. asserted in 2014 that ‘what counts as the good life for humankind, individually and collectively, must always be determined anew for changing times and circumstances. Similarly, what is good for any person or group to do at any particular historical moment is always a matter for practical deliberation’ (p. 27).

Bringing together a range of diverse voices from across different geographical locations, PEP researchers and our colleagues explore the critical question for our era: ‘What, for our times, does it mean to live well in a world worth living in for all?’ Asking the question—*aloud* and *with* and *to* others—is an act of mobilisation. Moving the question out of our heads and into the world catalyses new ways of thinking, acting and being—with one another and with/in the world. The act of asking the question is an act of living well, as MacIntyre (1981) might say. It is also an act that invites a response and requires those of us asking to be fully present in that response. And, while we must keep deliberating about what counts as a good life, we must keep in mind that our deliberations are happening in a time of nested eco-crises (Kaukko et al., 2021) and supercomplexity (Barnett, 2015). In this book, PEP researchers and our colleagues hear from those that are committed to the dual

purpose of education, that is, ‘a common good for the benefit of people, nonhuman beings, our environment and shared life conditions’ (Pedersen et al., 2021, p. 2).

A Listening Project

Deep listening requires the full presence of the listener. To really listen one must engage with curiosity and ‘an openness toward the unforeseeable in-coming (*l’invention*; invention) of the other’ (Miedema & Biesta, 2004, p. 24, italics in original). Waks (2010) discusses ‘apophatic listening’ which he contrasts to ‘cataphatic listening’. Cataphatic listening has the listener reducing what they hear to fit set categories in their mind. Apophatic listening involves intentionally laying aside categories and entering into a conversation with no predetermined end in mind.

When engaging without an end in mind, listening is generative and understanding grows and changes. Bohm (2004) suggests that to listen deeply, people must attend to one another sensitively, not only to find what is in common but also to be able to understand differences more fully. He calls for people in dialogue to suspend assumptions, to literally imagine assumptions ‘suspended in front of you’ so as to more clearly view them. It is only through listening to our differences with sensitivity that Bohm (2004) believes it is possible to co-create something new.

The PEP network has been involved in listening sensitively to the differences across educational theory and practice traditions since its establishment. The network engages in a ‘conversation of traditions’ in order to appreciate those differences more fully and ‘as a means of interrogating the origins and formations of our own understandings, presuppositions, and traditions’ (Kaukko et al., 2020, p. 3). This book, in its entirety, can be viewed as a listening project, where we ask the question and then listen sensitively to our commonalities and our differences. All the chapters in the book involve the authors listening deeply to the people they work with, listening with curiosity to better understand and to develop our ideas about the depth and breadth of life worth living. We suspend in front of us what we believe and what others believe about what it means to live well and what a world worth living in looks like, to see them all more clearly. Taken as a whole, we then can co-create something new: a new way to see, think and act.

Listening as an Educative Practice

Education is a thread that weaves its way through all the chapters in the book. Most of the authors work in the field of education, as researchers, teachers or other educational professionals. The educative listening practices that the authors of each chapter have engaged in show them as ‘*being attuned to and engaging with*’ (English, 2009, p. 73 italics in original) people in different contexts. As you will see, this book is by no means a passive listening project. Each chapter in its own unique way is educative in the sense that it is ‘intended or serving to educate or enlighten’ (Lexico, 2021) about

living well in a world worth living in for all. As Susan Groundwater-Smith (Chap. 3) explains in her chapter, educative practice is ‘formed, re-formed and transformed ... through the processes of participative inquiry.... [and] is made possible by the various arrangements inherent in the sites within which educative practices occur’.

Based on the deep listening we have done, as editors, reading through the texts, we think many of the writers express versions of the concept of *Bildung*. *Bildung* is arguably one of the most complex terms describing educational processes and practices (Taylor, 2020) and impossible to simply translate into English (Biesta, 2002) or many other languages. It is also hard to define, but Pauli Siljander sees it as

... the historical development process of both individuals and societies in which people systematically strive towards developing themselves and their sociocultural environment into something ‘more humane’, ‘more enhanced’ and ‘more developed’ (Siljander, 2007, p. 71)

In line with this definition, we see *Bildung* as a process in which an individual acquires the needed skills and knowledge for individual growth and character formation (on an individual level) while also learning to be an active and critical member of their community (the social level) to open up new possibilities for individual and shared lives. The self-formation and transformation of individuals living together foster the development of communities that are able to critically address crucial social and other concerns (Kaukko et al., 2020; Taylor, 2020). So, character formation does not refer only to a person’s inner cultivation, that is, their capacity for living well, but their reflective and critical self-refinement is also linked to broader hopes for a better society—or as we say, a world worth living in for all (see also Strand, 2020). Importantly, *Bildung* is a concept that is not limited to formal schooling. In fact, we enjoy Ellen Key’s expression from over a century ago: ‘*Bildung* is what is left when we have forgotten what we have learned’ (quoted in Gustavsson, 2013, p. 38) in formal education. As you will see in this book, people learn to live well and learn what a world worth living in might be all the time and in all places by continuing to engage in educative and self-educative practices.

The chapters that follow consider the double purpose of education from their specific points of view. Each of them brings a different group of people into the spotlight, and all these groups have experiences that are shaped by their unique circumstances. Many, but certainly not all chapters in the book, use the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008); so, it is a theory that you, the reader, will become familiar with. Many that use theories of practice do so in dialogue with one or more other theories, such as communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) in Chap. 8; transformative activist stance (Stetsenko, 2020) in Chap. 11; temporarily embedded agency (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) in Chap. 9; relational well-being (White, 2017) in Chap. 10; and Steiner epistemology (Steiner, 1964) in Chap. 5. This variety is important to us as it speaks to both the flexibility and inclusiveness of the PEP network and the educational theories that can be used to think about a well-lived life in a world worth living in.

Chapters of the Book

Following this introduction, the chapter by Stephen Kemmis lays the groundwork for the book by introducing the theory of practice architectures and touching on the history and the rationale of the double purpose of education. The chapter reminds us that two purposes of education must be considered both separately and in conversation: education is not only about forming good people who will then, individually, ensure society is good but also about forming society at the same time (see also Biesta, 2002). One's idea of what a good life for each person depends on one's view of a good society; and, at the same time, one's idea of what a good society depends on one's view of what constitutes a good life for each person. Kemmis argues that education fosters:

- individual and collective self-expression that not only forms people who can reason well but also helps to form cultures based on reason;
- individual and collective self-development that not only forms people who can do things well but also helps to form productive and sustainable economies and environments; and
- the development of individual and collective self-determination that not only forms people who act justly and fairly but also helps to form just and democratic societies.

The next two chapters consider 'voice' in educational contexts. Susan Groundwater-Smith, in Chap. 3, emphasises the importance of including the voices of all involved in educational research. Attentive listening to those who participate in schooling in Australia, not only students but also teachers, is needed to understand how 'educative practices' can and should take place. The chapter offers a critical reading of Hart's (1992) 'ladder of participation' and how teachers and learners can unite to inform just and equitable pedagogical and curriculum processes—to make visible the otherwise unsayable.

Chapter 4 by Gunilla Karlberg-Granlund takes the reader to a completely different school context of small rural schools in Finland's Swedish-speaking region. The chapter explores the pedagogy of such schools with a metaphor of a candle. In this candle, the heart represents the connection that links the pupils' home cultures and their optimal development with the support of the village school, whereas the candle holder represents the teacher and her educational aims. The chapter argues that small rural schools can offer their students unique experiences of freedom, safety and proximity while also helping to maintain rural culture and continuity in areas that are at risk of being deserted. In Chap. 5, Virginia Moller's focus is on how Steiner schools in Australia develop people who act with agency in an ever-evolving future. Moller explores the dialogue between Steiner epistemologies and the theory of practice architectures and argues that Steiner pedagogical values of love, life, wisdom and voice are truly a call to action for all who aspire to educate children and offer hope for a revitalisation of what matters in education.

The next two chapters draw on the voices of Australian Aboriginal people, children, youth and educational leaders. Christine Edwards-Groves's Chap. 6 explores the voices of young Aboriginal Australian males, at risk of entering the juvenile justice system, as portrayed through creative media—poetry and photography. By creating practice architectures for a rich process of joint meaning-making, these methods enabled the participating young men to locate, negotiate and mediate their Aboriginal identity in intersectional, intergenerational and intercultural ways. The beautiful poems and photos reveal a world worth living in as seen by the artist behind them, that is, the Aboriginal youth in Edwards-Groves's study. In this world, living well comes with self-worth, self-awareness, personal identity and agency. In Chap. 7, Catherine Burgess, Christine Grice, and Julian Wood argue that to shape a society that enables all Australians to live well, Aboriginal knowledges, as expressed through Aboriginal voices, should be central. The focus of the chapter is on educational leadership but the message is universal: including Aboriginal-informed knowledges in policy and practice is a needed, yet radical shift. Through the lens of the theory of practice architectures, Burgess and colleagues propose that educational leadership practices founded on deep listening, reciprocity and respect, and those that are critical of Western leadership practices, are key to organising education so that it fosters a world worth living in for all.

In Chap. 8, Sally Windsor and Amoni Kitooke write about a community of new researchers from 14 countries who came to Sweden to study for a degree in educational research, but whose studying practices changed rapidly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The group engaged in a project exploring the question of *What does it mean to live well in a world worth living in?* and found that it consists of political engagement; connection and basic needs; social stratification and access; living slow and in 'flow'. Overarching for all these themes was the role of education, and the importance of connection and equality in/through it.

In Chap. 9, Sally Morgan listens to how young asylum seekers in Australia engage in a dialogue with the author, a participant-researcher working with them, and how this talk is a form of agentic narrative practice. Although asylum policies bring multiple barriers to the lives of the participants in Morgan's study, the chapter sheds light on their narrative agency as a practice. The young asylum seekers have the capacity to imagine a world worth living in, meaning that they creatively reconfigure and make judgments of their situation and talk in ways that run counter to government discourse. Narrative agency is a relational rather than solitary practice, and it links with the participants' past, present, and imagined future. Likewise, Chap. 10, by Nick Haswell, Mervi Kaukko, Marte Knag Fylkesnes and Paul Sullivan, draws on empirical research with young people who were once asylum seekers but are now young, settled refugees in Finland, Norway and Scotland. The focus of their chapter is on the relational well-being of the young refugees, and how it requires three types of relational movement: movement with, for the sake of, and in relation to other people in their lives. The destination of this movement is not static, but a state of living well together in a changing world.

Nick Hopwood wrote Chap. 11 together with 7-year-old Australian Henry Gowans, his mother Jessica Gowans, an artist Kate Disher-Quill and a clinician Chris Elliot. The chapter focuses on Henry, a child with a metabolic disease who requires tube feeding. The text brings Henry's words into dialogue with images, art and one of Henry's original recipes to discuss what living well in a world worth living in means for a child in Henry's position. As for most children, perhaps, living well for Henry is about being joyful and accepted and having a chance to realise himself now and in the future. The deficit that has to do with his feeding does not lie in Henry as an individual, but in society and in its exclusionary arrangements. Finally, Tomi Kiilakoski and Mikko Piispa's Chap. 12 listens to young people in Finland who are worried about the state of the world and the ecological crisis we are facing. The chapter paints 'everyday utopias' of democracy—a political system that could preserve a planet that can sustain decently and eco-socially just conditions for all, arguing that while democracy is the best and most effective platform to approach the eco-crisis in a just manner, it needs to become less hierarchical and more bottom-up in order to work.

Utopia—The Language of Criticism and Hope

Taken together, the twelve chapters show that living well and a world worth living in look different depending on where one stands. When the viewer moves, their worldview changes. Hearing from knowledge holders standing in different positions in the world, our knowledge gets richer. They all envision their own version of utopia, which, according to Kiilakoski and Piispa, requires both a language of hope and a language of criticism.

This book, as a listening project, allows us to listen in to diverse understandings of what it means to live well and what makes a world worth living in. As we listen deeply to all the chapters of the book, we can hear clearly the language of criticism: how educational practices are currently stopping us from living well; how educational practices are creating a world of inequity and unmet needs.

But we can also hear the language of hope: how education is helping us to live well and to live well together—both today and in the future; how education is supporting us, together, to create a world, day by day and practice by practice, that is worth living in for all.

May we continue to listen deeply, and act thoughtfully, to live as well as we can and to continue our attempts to make the world more worth living in, for all, every day. Please visit <https://www.monash.edu/education/wwli> to access more information, videos, podcast and join the conversation.

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Chapter 2

Education for Living Well in a World Worth Living in



Stephen Kemmis

Abstract This chapter sets out to articulate and provide a theoretical justification for the view that education has a double purpose: the formation of individual persons and the formation of societies. The argument proceeds in four parts. First, it outlines the dialectic of the individual and the collective articulated in Marx's third thesis on Feuerbach. Second, using the theory of practice architectures, it describes the three-dimensional intersubjective space in which this dialectic is realised: the space in which people encounter one another as interlocutors, as embodied beings, and as social and political beings. Third, it shows that the dialectic of the individual-collective, as it unfolds through time, is more than an abstract matter, which Hegel pursued in the form of a history of ideas; against Hegel, the Young Hegelians, including Feuerbach and Marx, argued that the dialectic of the individual-collective is a concrete and practical matter, realised in human history and practice. The final section draws these three strands together in a contemporary theory of education underpinned by the theory of practice architectures.

Keywords World worth living in · Practice architectures · Purposes of education · Praxis

Some people think that education is a process concerned principally with the formation of individuals, so each can live a good life. They may also believe that a society of educated people will inevitably be a good society. I will argue, however, that education is not concerned only with the formation of individuals; rather, it has a double purpose: the formation of both individuals and societies. Education pursues both the good for each person and the good for humankind—and, one might add, the good for the community of life on Earth. In the form of an aphorism, I express the double purpose of education as helping people to *live well in a world worth living in*.

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Stetsenko (2013, 2019) discusses this dialectical relationship of the individual and the collective in terms of what she calls the ‘collectividual’, an amalgam of ‘collective’ and ‘individual’. In doing so, she echoes Marx (1845, 1852) in emphasising that individuals are shaped by the cultural, material, and social circumstances in which they live, while many of those circumstances have themselves been formed through practices, that is, through people’s actions in history (or history-making action), sometimes, over generations.

Education is among the circumstances that form people. As a process, education itself has been formed and transformed over millennia, manifested in the practices of the diverse array of institutions that have evolved to become the schools, colleges, universities and early childhood education institutions we have today. These institutions are produced, reproduced and transformed through practices, and they are also among the conditions that enable and constrain other practices: the lived practices of students, teachers, communities and nations. The institutions of schooling thus conserve recognisable forms of life, but they may also, in moments of crisis or opportunity, produce *changed* forms of life, both for individual people and for the communities and societies in which they live.

Marx on the Dialectical Relationship Between the Individual and the Collective¹

According to the philosophical idealism of G.W.F. Hegel (b.1770–d.1831), human history is a history of the progress of ideas towards the ‘absolute knowledge’ through which humans will come to a complete understanding of themselves in the world. The ‘Young Hegelians’, among them Ludwig Feuerbach (b.1804–d.1872) and Karl Marx (b.1818–d.1883), were critical of Hegel’s idealism. They wanted to bring Hegel ‘back to earth’, one might say: to show how human history is not just a history of ideas, but a history of tangible cultural–discursive, material-economic and social–political circumstances that shape events. Thus, Feuerbach countered Hegel’s idealism with a version of this historical materialism. Yet Marx was not fully satisfied with Feuerbach’s formulation. In the third of his (1845) *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx wrote:

The materialist doctrine that [people] are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed [people] are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is [people] who change circumstances and that the educator must [him- or herself] be educated.

Marx argued that Feuerbach’s historical materialism was incomplete because it did not grasp the role of *people* in making history. In the third thesis on Feuerbach (for example), Marx thus drew attention not only to the notion that people are shaped by circumstances and upbringing but also to the notion that people play an active, agentic

¹ These ideas are also discussed in Kemmis (2019, pp. 25–28) and Kemmis and Edwards-Groves (2018).

role in this history: it is people who change circumstances, and people who educate the educators (or ‘upbringers’). Since it recognised this dialectical relationship between the formation of people and the formation of societies, Marxian theory is often described as *dialectical materialism*.

Extending this idea in his (1852) *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx later wrote:

[People] make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living.

These traditions ‘given and transmitted from the past’ are prior, pre-existing modes of social life—the ways people formerly lived their lives. Evolving traditions underpin all proposed and new ways of doing things in the present and the future; traditions prefigure (Schatzki, 2002) but do not predetermine what can be thought, what can be done, and how people relate to one another and the world. This implies that, to some extent, all social practices reproduce practices from the past. At the same time, however, as circumstances change, practices also change, are transformed, and evolve.

On this view, then, there is a powerful dialectic between the past and the future, and between the practices (*praxis*; history-making action) of individuals and the traces that practices leave in histories and traditions.² The traces of traditions can be read in their imprints on the collective cultures and discourses of different groups, and on the material–economic and social–political conditions under which people in different places and epochs live. Figure 2.1 aims to capture this dialectic schematically in the form of a lemniscate (like an infinity symbol). It may also represent what Stetsenko (2013) describes as the ‘collectividal’.

This dialectic is not only an abstract relationship; it is played out in history and the material world, in *practices*, in *intersubjective space*. I will now suggest that practices and intersubjective space are composed of three dimensions.

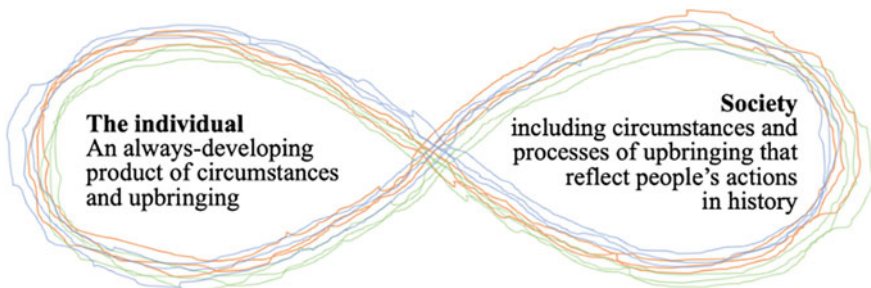


Fig. 2.1 A lemniscate depicting Marx's Third Thesis on Feuerbach

² Bernstein (1971) and MacIntyre (1998) give illuminating commentaries on this dialectic.

Three Dimensions of Intersubjective Space

Marx (1852) argued that people do not make history as they please but make it under existing circumstances and in terms of *traditions*. Human actions and practices do not come into being entirely at the will or whim of individuals. The world in which we encounter one another is always already pre-constructed in ways that shape our ideas, our possibilities for action and the ways in which we can relate to others and the world. Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008) and Kemmis et al. (2014) describe this mediation in terms of three dimensions of *intersubjective* space that people inhabit together. Practices happen in this three-dimensional world.

I define a *practice* as a form of human action in history, which

- a. is comprehensible in terms of characteristic ideas and talk (*sayings*) in and about the practice;
- b. is identifiable in characteristic activities (*doings*) enacted among characteristic set-ups (Schatzki, 2002) of material objects and time; and
- c. involves characteristic webs of relationships (*relatings*) between the people involved in and affected by the practice,

and when this particular combination of sayings, doings and relatings ‘hangs together’ in the *project* of the practice (that is, the ends the practice pursues and the purposes that motivate it).

The sayings, doings and relatings of practices, and the projects that make them cohere, do not spring just from the ideas and intentions of the people who enact them. As Marx’s third thesis on Feuerbach makes clear, they are always already pre-shaped by traditions. Traditions are also composed in three dimensions: semantic space, physical space–time and social space.

- a. What people think and say in their practices (*sayings*) occurs in the shared *semantic space* in which they encounter one another as *interlocutors*. In practice, this local semantic space is always already pre-constructed in the medium of *language*, realised in the *cultural-discursive arrangements* found in or brought to the particular place where the encounter occurs.
- b. What people do in their practices (*doings*) occurs in the shared *physical space–time*³ in which they encounter one another as *embodied* beings. In practice, this local physical space–time is always already pre-constructed in the medium of *activity* or *work*, realised in the objects and set-ups (Schatzki, 2002) of *material-economic arrangements* found in or brought to the particular place where the encounter occurs.
- c. How people relate to one another and the world (*relatings*) in their practices occurs in *social space* in which they encounter one another as *social and political beings*. In practice, this space is always already pre-constructed in the medium of *power* and *solidarity*, realised in the *social–political arrangements* found in or brought to the particular place where the encounter occurs.

³ Schatzki (2010) describes this space in terms of ‘the timespace of human activity’.

On this view, then, the space between people is not an empty void; on the contrary, it is a three-dimensional intersubjective space that actively mediates—that is, enables and constrains—what is likely to happen when people encounter one another. Thus:

- a. the sayings of my practices are shaped by the languages I use, even to describe myself, and by my prior experiences in conversations and communications in talk and text;
- b. the doings of my practices are shaped by my prior activities and forms of work, that take place among more or less familiar arrays of physical objects in activity timespaces; and
- c. the relatings of my practices are shaped by the kinds of prior roles and relationships I've experienced in my life and work, including
 - i. my lifeworld relationships with other persons I encounter as unique individuals like myself, and
 - ii. the functional and role relationships characteristic of the different administrative and economic systems in which I participate, for example, in organisations and institutions.⁴

As Marx's insight into the third thesis on Feuerbach indicates, we do not come to new situations unencumbered; we are always already primed to experience them in ways that are prefigured in all three of these dimensions. Figure 2.2 aims to depict these relationships.

The lemniscate in Fig. 2.2 is intended to indicate that these relationships of mediation do not occur only within the rows of the table but also across the three rows between one side of the table and the other. In combination, the cultural–discursive, material-economic and social–political arrangements that prefigure practices form *practice architectures* that enable and constrain practices, generally holding them in their course. They act as environmental *niches* that are *the conditions of possibility* for different species of practices.

For example, a practice like Education for Sustainability (EfS) involves characteristic kinds of sayings, doings and relatings that are made possible by relevant cultural–discursive, material-economic and social–political arrangements found in or brought to a site. Figure 2.3 illustrates these with a few examples.

⁴ Habermas (1987) draws a distinction between the *lifeworlds* in which people encounter one another as unique persons like themselves and the administrative and economic *systems* in which they encounter one another in system functions and roles. He proposes two theses about the tensions that have arisen between lifeworlds and systems in modernity: (1) the functioning of administrative and economic systems (e.g. business organisations and public institutions like universities or government departments) has become increasingly autonomous from their grounding in the lifeworlds of the people who work in them, and (2) the imperatives of administrative and economic systems have increasingly colonised the lived relationships of people's lifeworlds so people increasingly interpret their lifeworlds in system terms (e.g. thinking about the educational work of schools or universities not in terms of categories like the formation of persons or professions, but chiefly in terms of categories like *targets* for graduation rates; *key performance indicators* about progress towards targets, like progression and retention rates; and *outcomes*, like the number of students graduating).

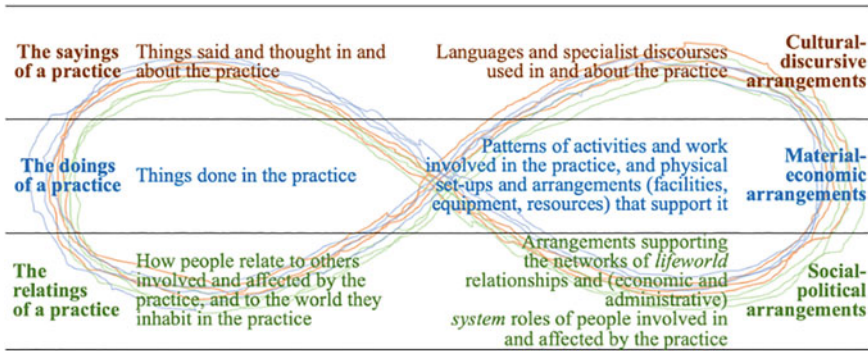


Fig. 2.2 The reciprocal mediation of the realms of the individual and the social

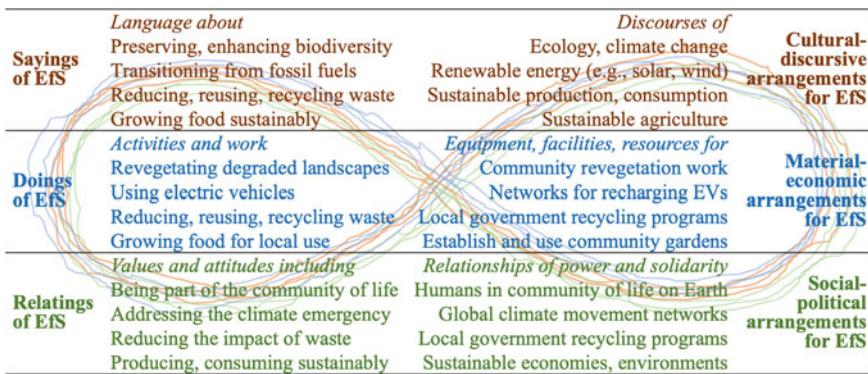


Fig. 2.3 Examples of some aspects and arrangements of Education for Sustainability (Efs)

These relationships are at the heart of the theory of practice architectures (e.g. Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018; Kemmis et al., 2014), as depicted in Fig. 2.2.

The Theory of Practice Architectures

The theory of practice architectures is a species of practice theory.⁵ It aims to show how the enactment of practices is shaped by practice architectures. Practice architectures enable and constrain practices in their course in the same way that sandbars, beaches, boulders, cliffs and headlands contain and direct the flow of tides and waves as they meet the land. Over time, however, the relentless action of the waves, sometimes amplified by storms and cyclones, grinds stone to sand, reshaping sandbars and beaches and shifts boulders and erodes cliffs, reshaping headlands. Similarly,

⁵ See Nicolini (2013) for an introduction to some different varieties of practice theory.

under new and changing circumstances, practices can also reshape the practice architectures that enable and constrain them, and also reshape the conditions for other, different practices.

Practices are secured interactionally in characteristic sayings, doings and relatings, and by the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements that hold them in their course. Together, these arrangements form *practice architectures*. As Mahon (2014) showed in the case of critical pedagogical praxis in higher education, practices like doctoral supervision or online pedagogy are shaped simultaneously by many different kinds of practice architectures, like the backgrounds and experiences of the teachers and students involved; and aspects of the history, materiality and organisational arrangements of the place where the practice occurs.

The sayings, doings and relatings of practices are bundled together in participants' projects (or purposes; what they intend to achieve by enacting the practice). These projects are put in motion by participants' *agency* and their *dispositions* to act in certain ways in particular circumstances—a disposition that Bourdieu (1977) described as *habitus*. In turn, actors' agency and their dispositions both depend on their *situated knowledge* (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Lave, 2019): how and what to say and to do, and how to relate to others and the world in conducting the practice.

Similarly, the arrangements that compose practice architectures exist in *practice landscapes*, among other practices that may or may not influence them—in the way that a classroom may principally be a landscape for pedagogical practices, but other practices also occur there, like cleaning, teachers' consultations with parents, and the changing of light bulbs. Equally significantly, practice architectures also form *practice traditions* which come to be 'the ways we do things around here'—practice traditions like progressive education, or critical education, or Education for Sustainability, for instance. While practice traditions usually foster the reproduction of existing ways of doing things, and sometimes provoke opposition or resistance to new or different ways of doing things, they also frequently transform and evolve when circumstances change.

The theory of practice architectures is summarised in Fig. 2.4.

The theory of practice architectures summarised in Fig. 2.4 offers one particular view of what practices are composed of, and what shapes their unfolding and evolution. Other practice theories (see Nicolini, 2013) see the world of practices differently.

In our research on practices, both in work in the field and in subsequent analysis, my colleagues and I frequently use Fig. 2.4 as a guide to remind us of the elements of practices (e.g. sayings, doings and relatings) and the arrangements (cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political) that form the practice architectures that generally hold practices in their course.

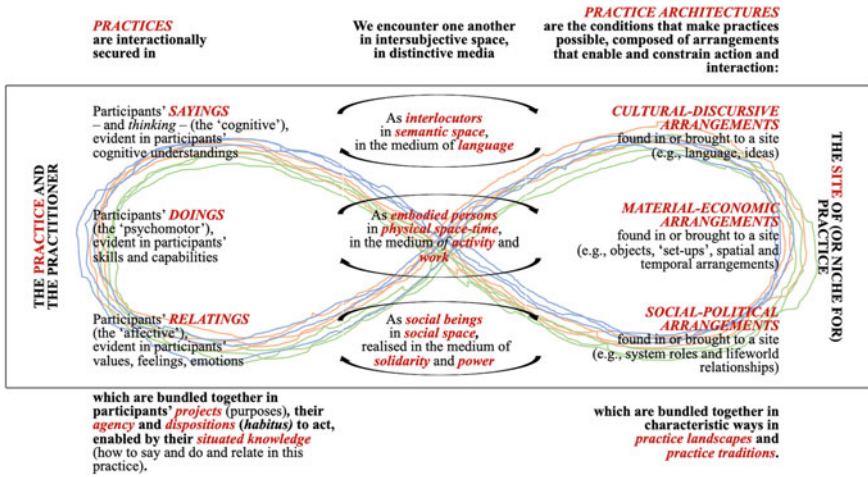


Fig. 2.4 The theory of practice architectures

A Theory of Education

Peters (1964) argued that education is an initiation into *forms of knowledge*. More recently, Smeyers and Burbules (2006) described education as initiation into *practices*. When people learn new practices, it might be said that they are initiated into these practices, or that they initiate themselves into practices. Sometimes newcomers are initiated into practices by co-participating in them with others, through what Lave and Wenger (1991, p. 27) called the newcomers' 'legitimate peripheral participation' in practices carried out by old-timers. Kemmis et al. (2014) regard learning as an initiation into practices and, following Wittgenstein (1958), as *coming to know how to go on* in practices. But, they also think of education as something much greater than just *learning*—as does Biesta (2009) who has written about the 'learnification of education': the mistaken perspective that education is no more than learning. Kemmis (2021) notes that.

Kemmis and Edwards-Groves (2018, 120; see also Kemmis et al., 2014, 58), assert that 'what we learn arises from, represents, recalls, anticipates, and returns to its use in practice'. One way to re-describe this claim might be to say that knowledge comes from practice, and that the point of having knowledge won, in one way or another, from experience is that this knowledge shapes the knower's future practice: her future life lived in practices. (p. 9).

and thus suggests that

we might now understand learning as coming to participate differently in practices, conceding that, while learning may include the acquisition of knowledge, it is also more than that. More generally, we might say, learning is a process of coming to practise differently. (p. 10)

On this view, then, education is not only an initiation into practices but also coming to know how to go on in the different kinds of situations and circumstances

that call for particular kinds of practices—like being able to practise teaching in a classroom, diagnosis in a doctor’s room, or shoeing a horse in the stables at a horse stud. Practices are not indifferent to their surroundings; as already suggested, sites contain (or may lack) the conditions of possibility that provide the *niche* for this or that practice.

The dialectical relationship between practices and the practice architectures that make them possible leads us back to the dialectic of the individual and the collective identified in Marx’s third thesis on Feuerbach: people learn to practise in certain ways under certain kinds of conditions, but it is people who create many of those conditions (sometimes for themselves, and sometimes encountering arrangements constructed by other people). Thus, good people might be the products of a good society, but a good society is also the product of good people’s organisation and sometimes legislation. The good for each and the good for all are dialectically connected. Thus, in *The Nicomachean Ethics* (Bartlett & Collins, 2011) and in *The Politics* (Aristotle, 1962), Aristotle spoke about ethics and politics as necessarily connected by education. To have an oligopoly requires educating people to participate in an oligopoly, Aristotle argued, just as to have a republic requires educating people to participate in a republic. Moreover, the good life for a person is one thing seen from the perspective of an oligopoly, and another from the perspective of a republic.

On this view, then, education is not concerned only with the formation of individual people, nor only with the formation of societies; it is always concerned with both. Thus, every educator, and every tradition of educational practice, is (knowingly or unknowingly) informed *both* by a view of the good for each person *and* by a view of the good for humankind⁶ (which, in these more ecologically aware times, we might replace with ‘the community of life on planet Earth’). Education always has a role to play in the formation of individuals and in the formation of the cultural, material, and social conditions of our collective life.

I will now make a short diversion before returning to these cultural, material and social conditions. Philosopher Iris Marion Young (1990) made a critique of some contemporary views of justice, which led her to the view that people might be better equipped to deal with the notion of justice if they approached it from the perspective of *injustice*. According to Kemmis and Edwards-Groves (2018, p. 17), Young thinks

we can make more headway towards achieving justice in society not by focusing principally on the positive ‘justice’ but rather by concentrating our efforts on avoiding or overcoming and ameliorating the negative ‘injustice’. For Young, there are just two forms of injustice: *oppression* and *domination*. She elaborates each in her book. *Oppression*⁷, she argues, occurs when social structures and practices unreasonably limit people’s opportunities for individual or collective *self-expression* and *self-development*; *domination* occurs when social structures and practices unreasonably limit people’s opportunities for individual or collective *self-determination*. A society that aims to be just, then, must work against the injustices of oppression and domination, that is, against structures and practices that unreasonably limit

⁶ This view is elaborated in Kemmis and Edwards-Groves (2018), Chap. 1.

⁷ Young (1990, Chap. 2) describes five “faces” of oppression: exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

people's individual and collective powers of *self-expression*, *self-development*, and *self-determination*. We think Young's picture of a society working continuously against injustice gives a possible answer, for our time, to the question of what the good for humankind might look like: *a society that works both to overcome limits to, and to extend, people's individual and collective opportunities and capacities for self-expression, self-development and self-determination in ways compatible with the collective opportunities and capacities of all.*

My colleagues and I (2014, p. 20) took up Young's idea of individual and collective self-expression, self-development and self-determination in our definition of education:

Education, properly speaking, is the process by which children, young people, and adults are initiated into forms of understanding, modes of action, and ways of relating to one another and the world that foster (respectively) individual and collective self-expression, individual and collective self-development, and individual and collective self-determination, and that are, in these senses, oriented towards the good for each person and the good for humankind.

Building on this definition, Kemmis and Edwards-Groves (2018, pp.17–18) wrote:

Put more generally, we would say that, on the side of the intersubjective world we share—we hope, first, for individual and collective *self-expression*, and thus we work to secure *a culture based on reason*.⁸ We hope, second, for individual and collective *self-development* of a kind that will sustain us and also sustain the world we live in, and thus we work to secure *a productive, sustainable economy and environment*. And we hope, third, for individual and collective *self-determination*, and thus we work for *a just and democratic society*. These, it seems to us, are the three most crucial elements of 'a world worth living in'.

These three elements—self-expression, self-development and self-determination—align felicitously with the three dimensions of intersubjective space at the heart of the theory of practice architectures. Self-expression, self-development and self-determination not only aim to be pursued for individual persons but also aim to be pursued for people collectively—for societies.

In this sense, we may describe the double purpose of education both in terms of helping people to live well, and in terms of helping to bring into being a world worth living in.

The language of 'forms of understanding, modes of action, and ways of relating to each other and the world' to secure 'a culture based on reason, productive and sustainable economies and environments, and just and democratic societies', may sound more aspirational than achievable in history and everyday practice. But the alignment of this view of education with the theory of practice architectures allows us to evaluate how these aspirations are, or are not, achieved in history and practised through different forms of education. The dialectical relationship between practices and the arrangements that make them possible is parallel with the dialectical relationship between the individual and the collective, and between the formation of

⁸ By 'reason' here, we do not only mean a narrow rationalistic view of knowledge but also the reason of the heart. As Pascal (1623–1662) put it (*Pensées*, 1670/2013, Sect. iv, 277), "The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know". On this view, we should include reasonableness and reason giving as part of what is meant by 'a culture based on reason'.

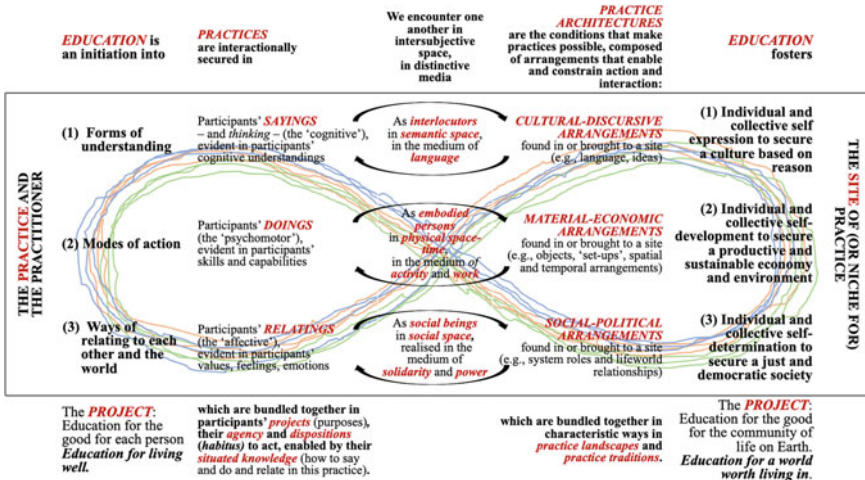


Fig. 2.5 A theory of education

persons and the formation of societies. Indeed, these parallel relationships, which are observable in human social practice and in history, yield a distinctive theory of education that sees education as powered by the dynamics articulated in the theory of practice architectures. This theory of education is summarised in Fig. 2.5.

The aphorism ‘Education for living well in a world worth living in’ arises from this theoretical perspective. More formally speaking, the theory aims to provide a justification for the view that education has the double purpose of ‘collectively’ (Stetsenko, 2013, 2019) forming both persons and societies.

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Chapter 3

Why Listen? Student Voice Work Defended: Students as ‘Expert Witnesses’ to Their Experiences in Schools and Other Sites of Learning



Susan Groundwater-Smith

Abstract This chapter makes the case for educative practice in which teachers and learners unite in a form of participative inquiry with an emphasis upon inclusion and social justice. It will demonstrate that taking this stance acts as an interruption to pedagogical power relations and hierarchical governance leading to a reconsideration of the typical assemblages of engagement on the part of all participating in the dance of education. The chapter honours the capability of young people to witness the manner in which educative practices can and should take place in a world worth living in. It will illuminate its assertions by offering a range of examples varying in levels of participation and the scale of the engagement in participative inquiry with a focus upon mutual learning that attends to a variety of voices including those often marginalised, even silenced.

Keywords Participative inquiry · Student voice · Student agency · Social inclusion · Educative practice

* * **

In writing of his prison guards “If we speak they will not listen to us and if they listen they will not understand” (Levi, 1959, p. 21)

Driven by thirst he spied a fine icicle outside the window which he seized, but it was snatched from him by a large, heavy guard ‘Warum?’ Levi asked in his poor German, the reply came at once ‘Hier ist kein warum’ There is no why here. (p. 24)

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Introduction

To eliminate voice and agency in a totalitarian regime is no accident. The elision of ‘why’ effectively silences dissent. There may seem a great distance between a repressive, cruel and immensely hostile system and learning sites of today but all too often student questioning of educational practices, what they mean in their lives and why they are as they are, exist as no more than whispers in the corner. More often than not such questioning is considered ‘unsayable’ (Butler, 1997; Teague, 2017). The uncovering of ‘unwelcome’ truths is not ‘welcomed’ (Charteris & Thomas, 2017); such uncovering may be perceived as ‘nettlesome’ knowledge, that is those ‘elements of knowledge that are deemed taboo in that they are defended against, repressed or ignored because if they were grasped they might “sting” and thus evoke a feared intense emotional and *embodied* response’ (Groundwater-Smith, 2014, p. 123).

Voice in this chapter is taken to signify a means for learners to be included as active agents in the processes of educative practices, particularly in relation to a substantive engagement in research and inquiry. Having a voice is essentially seen as an enabling factor, having a value in participatory processes in a world worth living in wherein students may act with authenticity and confidence (Couldry, 2010).

This chapter will argue for a form of ‘educative practice’ in which teachers and learners unite in the development of participative inquiry whose objective it is to inform just and equitable pedagogical and curriculum processes—to make visible the otherwise unsayable. It will recognise the contested matter of affording young people greater agency but will take a transformative rather than adversarial stance. It will remark upon that which is problematic in practice but argue that those people, in this case, young people, ‘closest to the problem should be part of the solution for that problem’ (Christens et al., 2014, p. 156).

The chapter will explore the critical matter of context when engaged in research and inquiry with students. It will, in particular, refute misunderstandings that have arisen from the dominance of psycho-statistical discourses that have underpinned much of what is represented as educational research. It will seek to illuminate the ways in which those who participate in schooling, and adjunct sites, such as cultural institutions, as teachers and learners, have an ambition to know and understand the conditions under which productive learning for well-lived and inclusive lives can and should occur.

‘Ambition’ is not a word that has been chosen lightly. Too often it is associated with having an ardent desire for achievement in terms of wealth and fame, capital ‘A’ Ambition; less often does it align with something that is earnestly sought for—having *an* ambition to engage in the good work of contributing to *Yindymarra Winhanganha*, a Wiradjuri phrase meaning ‘the wisdom of knowing how to live well in a world worth living in’.¹ The sentiment can be viewed in the light of MacIntyre’s means-ends discussion where he asserts that ‘ends [wishing to achieve such wisdom] have to be discovered and re-discovered and means devised to pursue them’ (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 317).

¹ This phrase is to be found on a number of public sites, including Charles Sturt University.

In making the case for student voice and agency the chapter will draw upon a number of studies in which young people have been participative, both as individuals and groups. The settings range from schools to systems and cultural institutions that have a commitment to social justice and inclusion. These studies will explore *why* it is that both individuals and groups of young people may feel disengaged from what it is that is being taught within a competitive academic curriculum, or perhaps, *how* it is taught; and they will propose the benefits of listening and acting upon student voice.

The chapter will weigh and consider practical matters that govern student participation and offer a cautious brief for those who choose this path. Furthermore, it will acknowledge educative practices as being embedded within the concept of *practice architectures*; that is to say, in consideration of sayings, doings and relations as enacted within the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements present in specific sites (Kemmis, 2018; Kemmis et al., 2014). Educative practice, then, is formed, re-formed and transformed in this case through the processes of participative inquiry that engages educators and learners. This is made possible by the various arrangements inherent in the sites within which educative practice occurs: the languages and discourses that are employed, particularly in relation to an understanding of *voice*; the varying nature of the physical context; and, the relationships that occur in consideration of power and control.

Educative Practice

It would appear to be self-evident that practices in education should be ‘educative’; but the very term itself is problematic. Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2019, p. 25) argue that educative practice is that which is strategic and underpinned by transformational inquiry that is inclusive of all who are participating in the educational setting, including the students themselves; it may be seen as a ‘practice changing practice’ (a phrase first introduced by Kemmis, 2007, with regard to the practice of action research). For the purposes of this discussion, I may go a little further and assert that being educative serves to illuminate an action in an inclusive transactional manner embodying new possibilities and alternative practices. It is a recognition of the situated knowledge of young people as they live out their lives. It alludes to a transformational process built upon dialogue and negotiation. Educative practice generates knowledge that goes beyond the promulgation of practical skills and training by aligning practice with that which contributes both intrinsically and extrinsically to the public good (Freire, 1998). It could be said to address a question that Biesta (2019) puts to his readers in the title of his paper, ‘What kind of society does the school need? Redefining the democratic work of education in impatient times’. In creating this title he is turning around the question normally considered which asks ‘what can the school do for society’, emphasising the policies that governments and more broadly society itself want of schools. By moving away from practices

established by outsiders Biesta makes a plea for a more responsive and dynamic alliance that approaches education from the inside.

While we generally imagine that *educative practice* can be manifest in schools it is also the case that it can take place within cultural institutions that offer learning services. Natural history and science museums, art galleries, libraries, historic houses and the like all employ educators who have a desire to enliven and enrich the understanding of their visitors. They are also motivated to engage in research and enquiry with those audiences (Kelly & Fitzgerald, 2011). They can be seen to have the capacity to ‘point things out’—Biesta (2022) sees this as ‘gesturing’.

Educative practice flies in the face of Hammersley (2003) when he argues that educational research itself cannot be educative, only informative. He sees research in education as informative, designed to provide knowledge of practice that is useful, but scarcely enlightening. By way of contrast, this chapter exhibits a concern for forms of inquiry that illuminate value and complexity and inform a more progressive and risky trajectory. In effect, it argues for a mode of participative inquiry. It recognises heterogeneity in relation to young people’s experiences that are various and contingent upon such variables as status, race and gender (Cook-Sather, 2007).

The Case for Teachers and Students Uniting in the Conduct of Participative Inquiry

Let’s begin with a thought experiment. Sullivan (2020, p. 18) illustrates one of his poignant short stories regarding discipline with a photograph of two crew-cut youngsters seated at a shared desk in a one-room school. Behind them, on a chair, sits a ‘dunce’s cap’ used as a device to humiliate those students who could not meet their teacher’s expectations. The photo is a mock up designed to draw attention to the ways in which externally imposed discipline is essentially ineffective. But the dunce’s cap was still employed right up until the mid-twentieth century as a means to impose discipline upon those who could not, or would not, bend to the teacher’s will. Now, imagine this. The student and teacher engage in an authentic conversation regarding the difficulties being experienced. Each, in this ‘ideal speech situation’, is entitled to believe that the other speak what they believe to be the ‘truth’ of the encounter. They are engaged in an act of social validity whereby their exchange is comprehensible, truthful, sincere, and appropriate (Habermas, 1987). The youngster explains that he does not understand the teacher’s question and so cannot answer it; he was sitting at the back of the class and cannot hear very well. The teacher speaks of her frustration that whenever she addresses a question to the student, he looks at her blankly. Of course, this scenario could be further elaborated but it serves to demonstrate how respectful listening on the part of both protagonists could serve to better inform practices in classrooms and other sites for student learning as an authentic dialogic encounter.

How could such an exchange be made possible? Recognising, of course, that in some circumstances listening to the voices of students has been long observed. For example, progressive education at schools such as Summerhill, led by A.S. Neill, are renowned for their participative inclusion of teachers and students in school meetings (Neill, 1960). But it can be argued that the greatest and widest change to enhancing student agency came about as a result of the United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). Particular attention has been given to Article 12 which states that young persons should be provided with the right to be heard in any judicial, and administrative proceedings affecting them, either directly or through a representative or appropriate body (Niemi et al., 2016, p. 81). There is here an implicit distinction between listening and hearing; as Fielding (2004) reminds us it is the difference between speaking with rather than speaking *for* others and thus 'rupturing the ordinary' (p. 296). What is required is a relational ecology that builds upon trust and mutual regard, thus breaking traditional pedagogical boundaries that normally elevate the teacher and diminish the students in terms of their capacity for agency (Lundy, 2007).

Not only do we need to make a distinction between listening and hearing we must also move from voice to agency. It is also essential that we consider the matter of acting by asking ourselves 'what is to be done?' In this case we are considering the voices of the range of participants in the matter of education. Clearly teachers have a voice (although their voice is increasingly constrained by government policies, see for example Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2018). Through the work of participatory inquiry students, also, are being accorded an authority to speak and act regarding issues that have an impact on their lives (Rodriguez & Brown, 2009). An emergent understanding sees them 'engaging in a process that positions them as agents of inquiry and experts in their own lives' (McIntyre, 2000, p. 126) in a form of youth participatory action research (YPAR) (Fine et al., 2007):

The glue to YPAR is the centering of the wisdom of those who are most affected by the issues that are being addressed. Young people design, implement, and disseminate the research, as well as the actions or social movements that both motivate and extend from the research. Inclusive modes of performance, presentation, and writing tend to be used to share findings with diverse audiences and to activate these audiences to action (Silver, 2019, p. 12 on-line).

Engaging in YPAR is arguably a radical action for it works against the grain of current policy formulation. Many education policies are driven, not by those upon whom they impact, but by specific and preferred forms of academic research, often characterised as 'evidence-based practice' with little questioning of the nature of evidence itself (Biesta, 2014). Indeed, there is now a trend for social policies such as education to be strongly influenced by quantifiable factors adopted from elite networks based on business and commerce (Exley, 2019; Hendrickson et al., 2016).

Refuting ‘WEIRD’ Psychology

A world worth living in is a world that puts traditional research under the microscope. This has been undertaken most successfully by Henrich (2020) in his extended narrative on the evolution of Western psychology that has persistently espoused the specific cultural practices, not only of one nation, but of a sub-group: Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich and Democratic (WEIRD) with the research derived from studies of mainly male undergraduates. The underpinning belief is that matters of interest and concern to that group may be readily applied to others that have evolved in a very different fashion.

Globalisation has tended to lead us to believe that cultural difference is of little consequence when it comes to pedagogical practices and values. But we have only to explore approaches to teaching and learning, within what is known as Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC) to be found across Asia, to bely that belief (Nguyen et al., 2006; Tran, 2013). The dangers of over-generalisation can lead to over-simplification when attempts to implement specific practices are made. For example, CHC places an emphasis on interpersonal relationship and in-group cohesion and an avoidance of confrontation and conflict in nuanced and complex ways. These emphases do not lead inexorably to Western models of group learning, cooperation, and even competition.

Australian concerns with identifying appropriate pedagogical practices when providing education for Indigenous people have decried the homogenisation of culture and argued that the what, how and why of learning must be appropriately considered and strengthened through an understanding of cultural identity (Yunkaporta & Kirby, 2011). This requires drawing upon family, Country, and story that may in turn draw upon thinking, acting, making, and sharing that may or may not be captured by words (Bat et al., 2014). The impetus is to seek for cultural interfaces that can inform two-way teaching and learning whereby students are not expected to leave their cultural knowledge at the school gate. All of this is to caution those wishing to engage in participative inquiry with students to be mindful of the cultural context from macro to micro levels, best achieved through authentic interaction preceding action, building trust and genuine relationships.

This chapter will now outline three examples of the ways in which young people have acted as witnesses to their own experience and learning such that they have been able to make a contribution to the enhancement of educative practice within systems, cultural institutions and schools. Participation itself is complex, ranging from consultation to full involvement in the design, engagement and enactment of research contributing to policies and practices (Hart, 1992, 2008). Hart’s ladder of participation (1992) building upon Arnstein (1969) refers to an eight-step continuum. The first three steps are virtually non-participation, i.e. manipulation; decoration; and tokenism. Level 4 is assigned, but informed; Level 5, consulted and informed; Level 6, adult-initiated shared decisions with young people; Level 7, child-initiated and directed; and Level 8, child-initiated, shared decisions with adults.

It is incumbent upon us to be alert to the working of metaphors such as the notion of a 'ladder of participation' that suggests a rigid process. Hart himself has become increasingly cautious of organisations that believe that they can plan for inexorable progress up the ladder, arguing instead that development comes about as a result of innovation and collaboration (Hart, 2008). As well, we need to be wary that educators and learners, in their engagement in participative inquiry, are not aiming at a discourse of 'sameness'; that is, 'thinking alike'. In seeking to bond unity and diversity it is vital to first establish a more nuanced sense of unity and avoid conflating the term with uniformity. Rather they might be seen as seeking to find unity in diversity, where difference is recognised and explained. As such, inclusive, participative inquiry is a generative, transformative form of collaboration that is always a complicated conversation, even at times, given the legacy of power relations, a *liaison dangerous* (Rudduck, 1999, p. 41).

Even so, each example offered here is illustrative of a different step on the ladder; acknowledging that the steps are not entirely discrete. The first case exemplifies Level 4 in that the participants were given opportunities to set out their experiences in relation to a changing state-wide policy but there was no evidence that they contributed to any changes in policy; the second example reflects Level 6 wherein the participants responded to an adult initiative, and also contributed to decision making in a large and influential cultural institution; while the final case can be identified as a Level 8 example in which a reference group of students investigated practices leading to the assessment of learning in an Independent Girls School.

Listening to Student Voice Can Inform Policy

This study, as a demonstration of Level 4, was devised to seek the views of a range of young people across the state of New South Wales (NSW), Australia, regarding the impact of the changes to the school leaving age upon their experiences, choices, and decisions. By raising the school leaving age by one year it ensured that young people would stay on at school for further study; the senior curriculum, however, was unchanged. There was a concern that those who would have preferred to leave school might feel that they were required to continue under duress, while more academically oriented students might view the retention of disengaged learners as a distraction (further information regarding this policy change may be found in Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2015). It followed a sequential mixed methods approach in which there was a qualitative phase (focus group discussions) that was succeeded by the quantitative phase (online survey). Each phase was designed to elicit student feedback regarding the changes to the school leaving age in New South Wales. It was desired that the investigators 'represent the multiple layers of human experience (that is) fraught with challenge, alternative and limitation' and 'is not merely a matter of opinion' (Freeman et al., 2007, p. 31).

This was not a study that enabled the young people to be active designers and researchers, rather it was one that enabled their voices to be heard.

The qualitative component of the study, excerpts from which are reported here, relates to the concept of symbolic interaction—the premise that human beings will act towards things on the basis of the meaning that those things have for them; the meaning then is derived from or arises out of the social interaction that one has within a given world. These meanings are themselves modifiable as experiences grow and change. Thus, the study was interested in the ways in which the young people who participated in the focus groups perceived their experiences of schooling in the senior years and the value and significance of their experiences. Both students who had intended to stay on and those who had anticipated leaving school at the end of Year 10 were included in the focus groups. The purpose was not to change the policy, but to anticipate the impact of the policy upon the ways in which the senior years of schooling might be best managed.

It was determined that students from 12 NSW High Schools, one from each of the ten regions of the state and two from the more populous regions, would participate in the focus group discussions and a following online survey. Given that the study explored the participants' experiences of the senior years of secondary schooling, criterion-based selection of sites and participants was warranted to ensure that some, but not all schools, catered for students from challenging socio-economic backgrounds. Schools were requested to select students for the focus group discussion to represent a range of ability and academic engagement—thus allowing for both 'convenient' and 'inconvenient' voices (Fletcher, 2013).

The selection of a focus group discussion, rather than individual interviews, arose from the understanding that by providing for the generation and analysis of interactions a more comprehensive range of perspectives could be revealed. The moderation of the focus group was such that the facilitator was not seeking for consensus but created conditions that allowed for multiple perspectives to emerge. It was seen as a participatory process designed to maximise the input of all members of the group (Barbour, 2007).

The discussions were designed to set the participants at ease. For example, an icebreaking activity required participants to relate to a series of images that could be understood as metaphors for 'how things were going for them at school'. Using a projective technique in this way is one that is greatly familiar to the conductors of this study whose work is reported in Colucci (2007).

As stated earlier in this chapter the purpose of this study was to widely consult with young people themselves as the consequential stakeholders most affected by the changes to the school leaving age. Focus group questions variously addressed issues in relation to student plans, their knowledge of the changes to the school leaving age, the difference that the policy might have made to their planning, and the various programmes and pathways offered to them. In the case of the latter, the questioning broadened to consider current strategies, their overall interest and engagement with school, and what was required to further demonstrate to them that school was the place for them. The following brief discussion was based upon extracts presented

at an equity conference (Groundwater-Smith, 2011²) and focused upon aspects of student plans, the ways in which their plans had changed, and their interest and engagement with learning in school.

Student Plans

In accordance with their school histories and academic potential, student plans varied considerably both within and between groups. Year 12 students clearly felt the heat of the Higher School Certificate at their backs and wished to ‘stay focused and organized’. This group had already made a commitment to senior studies and had not been caught in the newly mandated school leaving age net. They were intent on continuing with their education by one means or another.

The plans for Years 10 and 11 students, however, were mixed. A number were interested in pursuing a range of careers that would be enabled by TAFE (Technical and Further Education) courses in areas such as tourism, hairdressing, carpentry, real estate, hospitality, child care, music and the like. Others hoped to progress to tertiary courses in teaching, nursing and business studies while some nominated the Australian Defense Forces as a career objective. Where there was less of a commitment to senior studies, students expressed their frustration at the way in which they had been caught by the new policy.

One wanted to find a job: ‘I’m over it, I don’t like it (school) I’m sick of people telling me what to do’. He had work experience in the automotive industry but teachers still ‘talked down to me’. Another would like to finish the HSC and gain a university entrance score (ATAR) that he might not use. He wanted to do something involving carpentry and would not seek for any kind of work that put him in an office.

For some students, traineeships and work experience opened doors for them. A student spoke of finishing school, then undertaking training at age 18 to be a flight attendant. She wanted to travel, but in the longer term was interested in joining some aspect of the marine industry. She has undergone work experience and now had a weekend job on a whale-watching vessel and would like to have her dive licence.

For most students staying on at school had not interrupted their plans. In several groups it was indicated that parents believed the policy to be a good idea and that it gave young people greater opportunities to develop and mature.

Looking back several of the students saw that the changes allowed them to ‘get on track’. One pointed out that his mother wished that the regulation had been in place when she was at school, since she regretted leaving early. He saw that the policy allowed him to aim for ‘a decent education, have decent goals, have a go’.

While there was some agreement that most students’ plans were not interrupted, the question regarding changes to plans did seem to evoke a series of responses: Students spoke of dealing with unmotivated young people in their classes which have increased in size, ‘half of them don’t want to be there’. They believed it was

² The conference proceedings were not published.

difficult for teachers to 'nurture teaching and learning' and give full attention to everyone but that the effect was for the more competent students to just be 'treading water'. They saw that they were 'warehoused' in their chosen subjects.

The changes had not made an impact on student plans, but had made an impact on the learning environment. Some of the young people caught in the net were 'creating havoc and that affects other people's learning'. They saw that some teachers were finding resistant students very difficult to manage and resorted to yelling at them and this was a distraction for others. They saw that those who were staying on against their will chose classes that were perceived to take the least amount of work.

Interest and Engagement

The matter of student engagement was of considerable interest. It may be that alienated young people, who would have preferred to leave school, lose motivation. Schools would need to anticipate ways in which they might ensure students would find their classrooms stimulating and absorbing. Students were asked to consider the ways in which their schools interested and engaged them in their learning. In the main their responses related to the social milieu of the classroom and school.

Learning was seen as enjoyable when it was in a good social context, 'when the teachers get along with the kids'. Younger teachers seemed to relate better to young people and did not talk down to them. They liked the teaching and learning in the TAFE setting. 'It's more show and tell, more hands on'. For example, in woodwork or photography or construction, the teacher would be demonstrating and explaining at the same time.

The young people also emphasised active and practical 'hands-on' learning with teachers who were themselves professionally engaged. The students suggested that it was important that they could have more fun and practical activities at school and spend less time copying off the board (often an electronic whiteboard). They saw that copying was not learning, 'it's not sinking in—no-one goes back and reviews what they've written'. When they are just copying the teachers do not take the time to explain what is written 'they just say, "here copy this" and they don't explain what it means'. Some teachers just 'show up'. They re-cast the concept of being interested and involved as 'What it is that gets you going'. They saw that blending theory and practice was important. Doing practical work needed theory behind it.

The students were well able to contrast teaching and learning that worked for them and that which provided them with little motivation. They nominated the attributes of teaching that were interesting and engaging for them: making learning fun, being energetic, enjoying the work, asking questions, getting everyone involved, making students feel welcome, and conducting discussions. They were disengaged when students were required to copy material.

In the case of a school servicing a remote community, students also identified the role the teachers played outside the classroom. On the whole, students valued the ways in which their teachers were part of the community, 'we play footie with them'. They

thought it would be very different if they were in the city. They saw that teachers who were familiar with the local environment understood how the community functioned, but that some, coming from the city ‘have no idea’. The students believed that some city-based teachers did not understand how the community functioned. This led to some interesting contrasts:

We go shooting; they go to the movies.

They catch up in the mall, we catch up on the river bank or at water skiing.

They are on about technology, we are on about cars.

The students also heard from their teachers how different it was from their perspective to be teaching in a country town. They cited a teacher who had been working in an inner-city school where he had to contend with knives, “we just use fists” and with drugs “we just smoke in the toilets”.

The report with its accompanying data from the online survey was well received by the government employing authority. Paradoxically, while the policy of changing the school leaving age was mandated across the state, it was a matter of individual districts and regions to develop practices that would pay attention to student voices. This process was not apparent to either the researchers or the students themselves.

Thus, the desired process may be seen as incomplete. Ideally, in a world worth living in, the young people who were consulted should know and understand how their insights may, or may not, have contributed to changes in those policies that continue to drive practice. It may not always be possible to operationalise some changes, but the ‘warum’ question, so poignantly raised at the beginning of this chapter remains—that is ‘why’ a policy is formulated and ‘what’ its impacts might be.

Listening to Student Voice and Cultural Institutions

Although developing and enacting policies and practices in school education may vary from region to region, as reported above, there are clearly over-arching regulatory frameworks. Cultural institutions, for example museums, art galleries, zoos, have formulated their own means of dealing with the engagement of young people in their evolving practices. They may be seen as distinctive from schools in that educators in these settings are interacting with a range of bodies including curators, exhibition designers, and school systems themselves. When speaking of their work they would characterise themselves as ‘educators’ freed from some of the constraints governing teachers in schools. Nevertheless, while distinctive, they hold regular forums where they share innovative practice. At one such meeting, Kelly et al. (2019) presented a discussion regarding consultation with young people as a form of audience research.

It was reported that some years ago the Australian Museum ran a series of consultations regarding upcoming exhibitions with a selection of young people from a variety

of schools.³ Amongst the participating schools was a residential facility providing short-term programmes for young people living in troubling conditions in rural and remote parts of the state. Two young people reported that this was the first time in their short lives that anyone had thought them worthy of being asked—it was always the school captains and members of the Student Representative Council who had a say. It was a salutary and moving experience.

There are serious questions to be asked regarding which young people are enabled to contribute to a greater or lesser degree to discussions such as this (Robinson, 2014). The debates centre around the notion of ‘participatory capital’ (Wood, 2013). Participatory capital is seen to relate to class, race, gender, age, sexual identities and abilities; the variables that make it more or less unlikely that various young people are consulted and included. While it has become customary to engage with what are often token groups, believed to represent the views and experiences of a particular cohort, selection into those groups can often be mediated by the selection of candidates who possess particular desirable attributes in relation to their perceived abilities to communicate. Various communities of practice, including schools and cultural institutions have a number of ‘gate-keeping’ procedures that knowingly, or even unconsciously exclude the less articulate, the non-conforming, and the troubled young members of the community.

One case study reported in the paper related to the State Library of NSW programme commemorating the centenary of World War 1 (WWI). The State Library holds over 1000 diaries from 550 individual diarists as well as supporting material such as maps, photographs, drawings and artefacts documenting the Australian experience of WWI. In 2014 an exhibition, *Life Interrupted: Personal Diaries from World War I*, was developed. The Library was keen to investigate the impact of this exhibition on young people and how it could enhance the study of WWI, a mandatory component of the History syllabus.

Twenty-two Year 10 (14- to 15-year-old) students from five schools⁴ participated in an evaluation of the exhibition. The group was first introduced to the State Library, the collections and resources; for all the students it was their first visit to the Library. The curator of the exhibition provided background information to the collection and her framework for the development of the exhibition. Students were then invited to explore the exhibition armed with an iPad to record their responses to the following:

The most interesting section of the exhibition is...

The most surprising thing in the exhibition is...

I felt when I visited the exhibition.

I would like to know more about...

³ The group of schools was known as The Coalition of Knowledge Building Schools and included both government and non-government schools, single sex and coeducational schools, primary and secondary schools who met regularly to consider a range of educational policies and practices. A number of cultural institutions were also members of the Coalition (Kelly & Fitzgerald, 2011; Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2011).

⁴ All members of the aforementioned Coalition of Knowledge Building Schools.

So, What was Learned?

Students were deeply engaged with the exhibition and this engagement was primarily on an empathetic-emotional level. It was clear that the exhibition design and content allowed students to ‘connect’ with the diarists and to gain some insight into their lived experience. Comments of the students included:

It brought home to me that these people once actually lived, had families and friends. They were not just some person in a history textbook.

Students were able to see the soldiers as individuals, not merely part of a battalion, participants in a battle or a statistic. Instead, they connected with them as individuals, fathers, sons, brothers, and friends, who they were before the war, what their motivations were for joining up, how they took their passion with them, their war experience, how they were changed by the war and how they emerged from the conflict. It was clear from the responses of the students that their understanding was deepened by the connection they made to the individual soldiers.

A particularly poignant moment was noted when a small group of boys drew attention to the fact that while much material addressed the outbreak and conduct of the war, not much related to how the war ended. A boy, for whom English was a second language, recently arrived in Australia, asked, ‘But do wars ever really end?’ and drew attention to his homeland that continued to be entangled in the aftermath of conflict.

By consulting young people, the Library was able to understand how the design and content of the exhibition facilitated their engagement and led to an enhanced understanding of this important historic event. This in turn influenced the development of further exhibitions and learning experiences around the centenary of WWI.

Listening to Student Voice Can Change the Question Being Asked

Details of the final study cited here have already been well documented (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2019). This study most approximates Level 8 on Hart’s (1992) ladder, child-initiated, shared decisions with adults. This iteration concentrates upon the ways in which the engagement of students in systematic inquiry can substantially alter school-based research questions. The school, Soriah College,⁵ an independent girls school, caters for students Kindergarten to Year 12. In recent years it has made a decision to pay particular attention to pedagogical practices in the middle years, i.e. 12- to 13-year-olds. Consequently, it arranged for those teachers concerned with this cohort to reimagine their approach to the assessment

⁵ Name changed.

of learning. The focus was related to the matter of ‘authentic and reflective assessment of learning with high expectations’, in particular an exploration of formative assessment in the middle years of schooling at Soriah College and aimed to address the following two questions:

1. How can teachers, through participatory action research collect information that contributes to a better understanding of assessment for learning and assessment in learning?
2. How can the processes be sustained by busy teachers and their students so that their joint work becomes increasingly positive and enjoyable?

Following consultation with the school’s academic partner (the author of this chapter), it was decided that understanding the nature of (in)formative assessment would be greatly enhanced by engaging students as active participants and researchers in the project.

As a result, a steering committee composed of twelve students and three teaching staff was formed. The student body was invited to submit expressions of interest for inclusion in the steering committee, with an understanding that they would be sacrificing time to the project from May to December. In sifting through the expressions, staff were enjoined to consider some ‘outliers’, students who were known to be non-conformists. Several early meetings with the steering committee and mentor teachers were devoted to participatory research methods outlined in a resource booklet devised specifically for the purpose of informing practitioner research in schools (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2003). The steering committee underwent a number of research training sessions and was familiarised with a range of data gathering methods (both qualitative and quantitative), and also the necessary ethical conditions that would be required when they were working with their peers, in particular in relation to matters of informed consent and confidentiality.

An important development was the re-casting of the project’s key questions to:

How do I know myself and what contributes to my learning?

How do I know I am learning?

How do you know I am learning?

What do we need to do next?

In this way the investigation shifted from that which teachers do when assessing learning to that which students experience as they learn, what may be argued as ‘under-represented knowledge’ (Beattie, 2012; Rubin et al., 2017). While the 47-page report documented, in detail, the ways in which these questions were addressed the point here is to see the project as one that struggled with the essential balance to contribute to teacher professional learning (the original intention) and to convey the students’ own witnessing to their learning. Thus, there was an intertwining of teacher learning and student voice through YPAR that created a new and exciting ‘third space’ as a safe context in which learning and assessment could be studied (Caraballo & Lyiscott, 2018).

Conclusion

This chapter has argued for a form of ‘educative practice’ in which teachers and learners unite in the development of participative inquiry with an emphasis upon social justice and inclusion. It has used three examples to distinguish between using student voices to learn *about* educational phenomena, and learning *from* them as a means to inform and reform practice, as a practice changing practice (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2019). It has claimed that this can be achieved through authentic mutual learning relationships that have attended to those ‘inconvenient voices’ (Fletcher, 2013) that deserve a place in a world worth living in.

The three examples discussed in the chapter clearly represent varying levels of the participation of young people in a range of educational settings and the contributions that they were able to make to practice. There was also a difference in scale: the first example involved well over one hundred young people; the school example only twelve. Common to all was the effort to create a supportive, psychologically safe environment characterised by trust and a genuine curiosity about what students have to say. In each case, the selection of students was based upon a belief that less conforming students should be included, thus subverting the tradition of ‘who is permitted to create knowledge in our society’ and ‘whose voices possess legitimacy?’ (Mirra et al., 2015, p. 4).

While the first two studies were designed to elicit student responses to the circumstances in which they found themselves, the final study, representing Hart’s (1992) Level 8—child-initiated, shared decisions with adults—could be seen as a more transformative kind. An intensive training programme provided the student steering committee with the tools necessary to conduct their enquiries and to consider the associated ethical implications. Participation required a significant sacrifice of time on both the students’ and mentoring teachers’ parts; thus there were significant opportunity costs. The adult support was such that students were assisted in the framing of their questions, but teachers refrained from imposing their own constructions. At first this proved difficult for students who were accustomed to turning to their teachers for approval and endorsement. The process of constructing the guiding questions proved to be transformative for all parties.

Pearce and Wood (2019) argue that such work as has been reported here can be seen as dialogic, intergenerational, collective and inclusive, and at times transgressive. Each of these attributes can be seen to form an integrated foundation, which, when taken together, articulates a transformative stance on a full and satisfying engagement with students in the many learning environments in which they find themselves.

The chapter has raised questions in relation to what it is for young people to ‘witness’ the ways in which educative practice takes place. Busher (2012) has made the case for young people to be ‘expert witnesses’ with respect to teaching and learning in schools. Of course, in such a context, students cannot always be *au fait* with what it is that teachers do and think; much of it is invisible. Similarly, teachers cannot fully inhabit the lives of their students. But with good will on both sides, it

is possible to have better insight into how good educational practice takes place, not only in schools but in the wider community.

Further, it must be acknowledged that these various forms of what we might call participative democracy can be seen to interrupt the norms of pedagogical relationships so embedded in educational arrangements. The cases cited here were all facilitated by partnerships between various bodies be they systems, cultural sites or individual schools and academic associates. One may speculate about the possibility of conducting participative work of this kind with young people as a practice independent of such facilitation—that working in such ways with students be seen as ‘bottom-up’ as a kind of ‘citizen voice’. But this is difficult to accomplish in the face of entrenched power relations. It may be that a way forward will come about through the flourishing and democratisation of social media, as a form of leaderless and horizontal collective action as espoused by Dumitrica (2020), forming a bridge between students and those who teach and guide them.

Returning to our opening quote regarding ‘warum’; if the question of ‘why’ is one that is put to all who participate in the practice of education then a significant part of the answer must lie in the capacities of all to speak openly and freely, within environments that are safe (Könings et al., 2020) and accessible. As educators we must not choose a ‘widening gyre’ where we can no longer hear each other and ‘things fall apart’.⁶ Instead we must go optimistically forward into a world worth living in.

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⁶ Phrases from *The Second Coming* by W.B. Yeats. Written after WW1 and at a time when his wife was seriously ill with the Spanish flu. Words to be seriously considered at the time of the COVID19 pandemic.

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Susan Groundwater-Smith Following a six-month study leave at the Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE) at the University of East Anglia in 1983, Susan has long been an advocate for what has variously been known as ‘Action Research’ and ‘Practitioner Inquiry’ and linking these to program evaluation. While there she was privileged to spend time with Jean Rudduck, such that her interest extended to being inclusive of the voices of young people when investigating educational practices. These concerns have infused her own practice as a teacher educator working closely with schools and other sites of learning such as cultural institutions.

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Chapter 4

The Heart of the Small Finnish Rural School: Supporting Roots and Wings, Solidarity and Autonomy



Gunilla Karlberg-Granlund

Abstract The aim of this chapter is to explore the cultural, educational, and social environment and characteristics of small rural schools, laying a foundation for understanding the possibilities, challenges, and constraints that teachers and pupils may face in these contexts. Questions about what educational quality and equity mean in the rural context underpin the narrative. The inquiry builds on research in some of the smallest rural schools in Finland, schools that might not even exist anymore due to demographic and political reasons. A figure, in the symbolic form of a candle, sums up the pedagogical thinking of rural village school teachers. The candle also illustrates the double purpose of education for living well in a world worth living in. What the small village school teachers articulate as being important in their work and what they wish their pupils would carry with them from the school into their future lives, involves roots and wings, relatedness and autonomy, in coexistence. The culture and education of the small school comprises both the optimal development of the individual and social participation. The small rural school has got a double function as a mediator of education and of community life, i.e. pedagogy and culture.

Keywords Small rural schools · Educational quality · Values · Equity · Multigrade classes · Teaching

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Introduction

In Finland, hundreds of small rural schools have been closed or consolidated during the last decades due to demographic changes and political decisions (see for instance Lehtonen, 2021). Small schools can even be called an endangered species in the Finnish education system. In 1990 the number of small¹ comprehensive schools with less than 50 pupils still comprised more than 60% of the comprehensive schools; in 2000 they comprised about 38%; but in 2020 they were only 16% of comprehensive schools (Statistics Finland, 2022). Analysing and documenting the educational, cultural, and social qualities of the diminishing number of these small rural schools thus seems an inescapable duty for a Finnish educational researcher.²

The structure of education, considering the location and size of the school, the size of the classes and the age mixture of the pupils, are all co-dependent with the possibilities of pedagogy, and influence the culture of the school and its cultural models, and, in the long term, even society as a whole (see Kvalsund, 2004). Structural changes in education can even be regarded as “hard” changes that have a concealed effect on the “soft” culture of the school (Hofstede, 1991). Previous research shows that there is also a difference between how changes are perceived on a macro and micro level. Processes of change are affected by complex mechanisms, but the perspective of the micro level is often neglected (Benveniste & McEwan, 2000). As McLaughlin (1987, p. 174) indicates, “change ultimately is a problem of the smallest unit”. Small rural schools can be regarded as “smallest units” of the Finnish school system.

In Finland, local municipalities have the responsibility for arranging basic education. Their different economic situations affect school network solutions causing increasing regional differentiation. Lehtonen (2021, p. 145) even asks whether it would be necessary to re-establish the state aid to small schools which were removed in 2006, to strengthen the vitality of rural areas. For children living in rural areas with very long travel distances to their so-called “neighbourhood school”,³ the statutory right to equal basic education is endangered. According to Tantarimäki and Törhönen (2020) there are 60 Finnish municipalities (out of 311) that have only one

¹ ‘Small’ and ‘small-scale’ are relative concepts, always considered in relation to something else characterised as larger. When studying small schools, the number of pupils defines which schools are small. In an international context, a small primary school usually has less than 100 pupils (e.g. in Australia, Anderson, 2010). In Finland, schools with <50 pupils have been considered small (see Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015). During the last decades, however, many schools with more than 50 pupils have also been considered to be too small, and thus they have been closed down.

² The reanalysis is building on doctoral thesis research exploring the plight of small rural schools in Finland, through listening to the voices of 12 teachers and contrasting their narratives into a wider societal context (Karlberg-Granlund, 2009).

³ According to the Finnish Basic Education Act of 1998, a child should be assigned to a ‘neighbourhood school’ that makes school travel as short and safe as possible, to ensure adequate equity in education across the country.

comprehensive school left, while all the previous village schools have been closed and centralised into bigger schools in municipality centres.

The situation is similar in rural areas in many other countries. Debates about the future of small rural schools focus not only on local economic conditions but also on their educational and social qualities. Often, large urban schools are considered as the norm for what counts as good schooling, and centralised structures appear cheaper, although there is no empirical evidence that smaller schools are inferior (Solstad & Karlberg-Granlund, 2020). Considering differences in school size and grouping, several researchers question whether standardised tests can identify differences in pupils' development and learning between rural and urban contexts (Åberg-Bengtsson, 2009; Bæck, 2016; Galton, 1998; Kvalsund, 2004). As also pointed out in Karlberg-Granlund (2009), differences are to be found by analysing more complex phenomena like school culture, cultural models, and relational patterns. Structures of schools affect school cultures and thereby also teaching and informal learning, self-esteem, and relationships. In the long term, this may have implications in terms of what values and competences the school transmits, which subsequently influences society (Kvalsund, 2004). These findings are similarly supported in a meta-ethnographic study in the Nordic countries, concluding that children and young people from rural, sparsely populated and peri-urban areas are "far more creative and capable of learning" than international and regional school evaluations and statistical comparisons may show (Beach et al., 2018, p. 9).

In a September 29, 2021 press release, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC), together with the Ombudsman for Children in Finland, Rural Policy Council, and Island Policy Council, announced that they will start an independent and comprehensive evaluation of the consequences of school closures for children and for the local communities affected. The evaluation will focus on children's rights to equal basic education and healthy personal growth, with enough time for play and hobbies, in line with the UN Declaration of Children's Rights. It will also pay attention to the viability of rural and archipelago municipalities, and the cultural and social dimensions of small schools (Ombudsman for Children in Finland, 2021).

The rural village school contexts have long been characterised by tensions mirroring larger issues in society. There seems to be an inbuilt conflict in the intentions of educational planning to simultaneously achieve equality, cost efficiency, and quality. Analysing debate material in a Finnish municipality where several small schools in the periphery were threatened with closure, Karlberg-Granlund (2009) concluded that the rural village school has a double function as a mediator of both education and of community life, that is, pedagogy and culture. The village school symbolises a sense of belonging, ownership, and hope for the future. Defending the village school and fighting for the continuity of "the village school story" is a struggle for local space, for a sense of community, security, and coherence. The struggle is a defence of both local quality of life and of educational quality for the individual pupil. The defence of the village school, and people's identification with it, can also be seen as a countermovement in a globalised and changing world.

Analysing the small village school in relation to a larger societal context opens questions about what quality means and what values should be guiding long-term educational planning. Instead of focusing on urban advantage, Hargreaves (2020, p. 7) proposes that there is a need to focus more on “examples of rural advantage which could justify the investment to ensure adequate provision of qualified teachers, better material resources, and teacher education for smaller, multi-age classes.” Until now, rural research has been a marginalised minority interest, but recent research agendas presented in the book *Educational research and schooling in rural Europe* (Gristy et al., 2020) calls for those who live in rural areas to “assume agency” in relation to policies that affect their lives.

Teachers in Small Rural Village Schools

This narrative study listens to the voices of 12 teachers in ten of the smallest of the small rural village schools in Finland: schools with less than 30 pupils. The smallest of these schools had six pupils and the largest had 29 pupils at the time of the study. The primary schools consisted of classes 1–6 (ages 7–12); some also had pre-primary school (for 6-years-olds). Of the 12 class teachers interviewed, five worked in so-called one-teacher schools (having only one full-time teacher) and seven in schools with two full-time teachers. Ten of the teachers were also teaching principals. All the schools were Swedish-speaking minority schools.⁴ Some of the teachers had worked in the same little school for their whole career, while others had also worked in bigger schools. The teachers’ working experience varied from six years to more than 30 years.

The original research project additionally focused on cultural and political aspects of small rural school contexts, through qualitative analysis of media debates and policy documents. The results were presented in a doctoral monograph (in Swedish, with English summary, Karlberg-Granlund, 2009). Parts of the study were then enlarged in continued research about teachers in rural areas (Karlberg-Granlund, 2011, 2019; Karlberg-Granlund & Korpinen, 2012; Olin et al., 2016).

Although the small schools in the study might not even exist anymore, the results are valuable for understanding small school contexts. For demographic reasons, other schools have now become small schools, creating new challenges for teachers not acquainted with small school pedagogy. Focusing on small Swedish-speaking schools is also interesting since pupils in these schools often have a greater sense of well-being than their Finnish-speaking counterparts (Palmgren et al., 2021; Silverström et al., 2021).

⁴ The two official languages in Finland are Finnish and Swedish. In addition, there are also other languages whose users’ rights are laid down in law (https://www.kotus.fi/en/on_language/language_of_finland). In 2020, about 5.2% of the population were Swedish-speaking Finns (https://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto_en.html).

Focusing on teachers' voices is also motivated by the fact that the teachers constitute the principal embodiments of the pedagogy and culture of a school (Arfwedson & Lundman, 1984; Berg, 1991). By listening to teachers' voices, an understanding can be reached about what they value in their work and in their relationships with the pupils; in other words, an understanding of the teachers' pedagogical intentions and purposes, as well as of their sense of meaning (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996).

Narratives and stories can be seen as the core of human existence (Bruner, 1987, 1996). Culture can be described and analysed as patterns of thought and practices (Cole, 1998). Values are seen as the core of culture (Hofstede, 1991). A small school and its surrounding context can be compared to a cultural weave, which is interconnected, developed, and carried by narratives and values.

Teaching as Praxis in a Small School

Smith (2008, p. 65) summarises the intentions of good education and teaching in the notion of *teaching as praxis*. The commonly used term "practice" generally refers to "one's actions and ways of being as a teacher". The term "praxis" goes beyond that and captures the competence of making wise and sensitive judgements in a particular situation that inform reflective, moral, and thoughtful actions (Smith, 2008, p. 65). Similarly, Carr (2011, p. 174) emphasises the importance of both teachers' own moral aims for "the pursuit of truth and justice, and their promotion of such attitudes, values and virtues to others". The characteristics of good teachers and good schools are not reducible to general rules, because teachers' work is contextually dependent. Teachers need capacities for contextually sensitive reflection and judgement, which can be called "pedagogical phronesis" or "practical wisdom", connected to professional virtues and professionalism. Phronēsis is the disposition for wider reflective understanding of the circumstances affecting the work (Carr, 2011; McLaughlin, 1999); it is the disposition that guides praxis.

Several researchers claim that teachers' *pedagogical thinking* (Kansanen, et al., 2000) and *practical knowledge* (Elbaz, 1983) are developed in interaction with their working contexts (Connelly & Clandinin, 1999; Elbaz, 1983; Goodson, 1996; Kalaoja & Pietarinen, 2009; Raggl, 2015). Although "the commitment to the ethic of care" brings many teachers to elementary teaching (Fullan & Hargreaves, 1996, p. 22), different settings make it more or less likely that a teacher will manage to create trustful relationships (Noddings, 2001). Generally, the teaching profession is trusted and appreciated in Finnish society. Finnish class teachers (primary school teachers) experience wide professional autonomy. They have completed a master's degree at a university. A class teacher is a generalist, with in-depth pedagogical knowledge and broad knowledge of the curriculum and of different subjects (Tirri, 2014).

The constraints and challenges created by school closure plans make it hard for principals and teachers in small rural schools to plan their work and plan for school development. Challenging economic circumstances may however create a special

form of creativity, which produces innovative solutions in difficult situations (Halsey, 2011; Karlberg-Granlund, 2011). This innovativeness found in small schools should not be taken for granted, however. It is co-dependent with good relationships in the local environment, and the “freedom of action” (Swedish: *handlingsutrymme*, Berg, 1981) that may be found when the principals and teachers individually and collaboratively analyse the policies that guide their work in their small schools, to find good educational solutions with a focus on what is in the pupils’ best interests (Olin et al., 2016). The superintendent of a school district with schools of different sizes has an important consultative and supportive role in making small schools work and providing equal resources for all schools. As Kemmis et al. (2020, p. 108) state: “Only when teachers are well-supported, including by appropriate laws and policies for education, and by the provision of appropriate resources, do teachers have a realistic chance of actually doing good teaching.”

In my interviews with teachers in some of the smallest schools in Finland, it became clear that the work in a small school is characterised by a great amount of autonomy, that is, both freedom and responsibility. This can be rewarding and challenging, and sometimes even too arduous if there is not enough support (Karlberg-Granlund, 2019). Teachers’ work in these environments requires contextual and local cultural knowledge, good planning and organisational strategies in the multigrade classroom, good communicative skills, and an ability to envision, anticipate and promote the holistic development of the pupils in the long-term (Karlberg-Granlund, 2009, 2011, 2019). The characteristics of these small rural schools will be further explored in the next parts of the chapter.

Characteristics of Small Rural Schools

This section explores the cultural, educational, and social environment and characteristics of small rural schools, and thus lays a foundation for understanding the possibilities, challenges, and constraints that teachers and pupils may face in these contexts. Research about small rural schools tends to focus on cultural perspectives and the meaning of the school in the local society, or geographical and structural perspectives of school network planning and provision of educational equity, or educational and social aspects of teaching and learning in small schools (Fargas-Malet & Bagley, 2021). By paying attention to current research and connecting this to results from a qualitative study about teachers’ pedagogical thinking in Finnish small rural schools, the chapter aims to give an overview of different dimensions of rural school contexts.

The Cultural Environment of a Small Rural School

As Lehtonen (2021) and Tantarimäki and Törhönen (2020) indicate, small rural schools still have an important role in promoting community viability and encouraging new inhabitants to settle in a village. Solstad (1997) identifies three different kinds of educational and cultural school-community relations: a “community ignorant school” which becomes an isolated island in the community; a “community passive school” that takes advantage of the local community for teaching and learning; and a “community active school” which not only integrates teaching and learning into the local context, but also plays an active role in community life and culture. Researchers have acknowledged that positive school and community relations do not come into existence automatically. The principals’ and teachers’ roles are decisive for establishing flourishing connections between a school and its community (Anderson & White, 2011; Bagley & Hillyard, 2011; Hargreaves, 2009; Hargreaves et al., 2009; Karlberg-Granlund, 2019).

Being a teacher and principal in a small school requires certain skills of ethical responsibility and cultural sensibility. Cultural sensibility involves understanding the contextual possibilities, strengths, weaknesses, and constraints, and acting in an authentic, honest, impartial, and sensitive manner with respect for the individuals and families. Cultural sensibility also means that the teacher understands the background and culture of the students, and how this affects their learning, so that teaching can be designed in an appropriate way (Ingalls et al., 2006). One of the teachers interviewed expressed the delicate balance in small environments like this:

When something occurs that affects the children’s feeling of security, because of emotional or practical, real, or imagined reasons, then you need the courage to be present then, to maintain routines, talk about the things you can talk about without exposing anyone. This is always problematic in a small village like this, where everyone knows everybody. But still, you have to talk about something, and do it with respect and honesty. (Dan, teacher in a small village school)

The smallness of the school enables the teachers’ closer familiarity with their pupils and the families. When teachers teach the same pupils for a long time, they have an opportunity to follow and support pupils’ optimal development. Nevertheless, it may also create vulnerability. When recognised, however, this vulnerability can also be a strength. Kelchtermans (2005) explains that there is a vulnerability in all educational relations. Indeed, he thinks that vulnerability is a prerequisite for good pedagogical encounters. In the interviews, teachers in small schools said they feel a certain ethical responsibility for their pupils:

You have the responsibility for pupils for a long time, six years. If you teach the pupils only one year, you may think that another teacher will then take care of them, and you push the problems away. But here, you couldn’t live with yourself if one of the pupils goes to the next school with sub-standard reading or writing abilities. You know then that it is completely your own fault (Bo, teacher in small village school).

In an analysis of rural subject teachers’ implementation of local knowledge into their teaching, Autti and Bæck (2021, pp. 78–79) identified a gap between policies

affected by urban frames of reference and more practice-oriented rural perspectives. They found that teachers' interests in local matters and their views on local curriculum are key factors for successful teaching. Integrating local topics into teaching not only supports meaningful learning, but also increases pupils' sense of place and appreciation of their environment, helping them to realise that it could be a relevant choice in the future to return to the village after finishing their studies. Autti and Bæck (2021, p. 83) conclude that "knowing where you come from builds students' self-confidence, which in turn is an important base for success in life."

Active collaboration may make a small village school unique in its environment like a tree rooted to place. The village school can form an educational and cultural environment that is in a close symbiotic relationship with the village. Pupils, teachers and others in the school context are fostered into, and mediate, the culture of the small school. Each small school has its own distinctive school culture (Bell & Sigsworth, 1987; Kalaoja & Pietarinen, 2009).

When the relationship between a school and community works well, it is as if the walls of the school are transparent. The school is characterised by a welcoming and open atmosphere. One teacher interviewed explained that "the school is really open; no doors are closed even in the evenings." The school belongs to all the community, and many activities are arranged in the school after the school day.

Teaching in the Multigrade Classroom

Teaching methods in multigrade classes are not very familiar to most teachers; some say more research into small schools is needed and the findings more fully integrated into teacher education (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015; Lindblad & Oksanen, 2021). The heterogeneity of a multigrade class can be seen as an asset rather than a deficit.

The research literature explores several concepts to describe multigrade classes where children of different ages are taught together. Veenman (1997) uses the concept *multigrade teaching* when this type of class is organised because of a diminishing number of pupils and resources, while he uses the concept *multi-age teaching* when the class is arranged with educational motives and benefits in mind. In small schools, multi-age groups are arranged when there are not enough pupils for *monograde teaching*.

In an overview of teaching strategies in Finnish and Austrian multigrade classrooms, Hyry-Beihammer and Hascher (2015) call the method of teaching common themes to pupils of different ages *common timetable* or *spiral curriculum* (from Cornish, 2006; Kalaoja, 2006). Choosing other instructional strategies depends on subjects, group composition, and group size. In science, religion and art, whole class teaching of the same theme for all grades is common. In mathematics and languages, more individualised teaching is needed for each grade level separately but still in the same classroom with the same teacher. Teaching in multigrade classes thus needs

thorough planning so that the teacher can manage to instruct, guide, and help all the students at their different levels. As one teacher interviewed put it,

In the morning, when the school day begins, you need to have a clear aim for your work. It is your responsibility to plan your teaching well. In a multigrade class like this, encompassing all classes, you can't come in and improvise, you have to know exactly what to do. (Siv, teacher in small village school).

The interviewed teachers explain how they have learnt step by step to teach multi-grade groups, although they were not prepared for it in their teacher education. The pedagogical professionalism of the teachers in the small schools includes *practical knowledge*, striving for a pedagogical balance between planning and spontaneity, structuring and flexibility, as well as between guidance and student empowerment in the multi-age classroom. The small number of colleagues and teamwork promotes flexibility, but the structure in the form of planning and organisation seems to be a prerequisite for functioning pedagogical freedom and flexibility in practice.

Teacher professionalism in small rural schools also includes the ability to balance between recognising the pupil's actual competence and offering relevant challenges within the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978). Creating an optimal space for individual growth, learning, and development entails finding the educational balance and possibility for each pupil, which metaphorically can be described as finding the perfect balance between "holding someone by the hand" and "letting them walk on their own", that is, between guidance and accompaniment on the one hand, and encouraging independence, personal activity, and responsibility on the other. This delicate balance between safety and challenge in teaching exists in all types of schools and classes, but becomes especially evident in multigrade classes, where the pupils are of different ages. Differentiated teaching strategies and individualisation are very important, as the different age groupings give an added dimension for the teacher to continually acknowledge, compared to differentiation in monograde classes (Napanan & Alinsug, 2021).

The most important thing for me is the well-being of the pupil. I really think that this is most important. If you notice that a pupil feels bad, then you also feel bad. I meet each pupil on his or her own level and start there, and then I think it's a great advantage that I am allowed to have them for six years.../I don't have to rush, or think that next year a new teacher comes, you have to learn this and that, but I can wait for them—and all of a sudden there is a change. (Siv, teacher in small village school)

These findings are quite similar to Raggl's (2015, 2020) findings in an ethnographic study exploring how Montessori pedagogy is implemented in multi-age teaching in mountain schools in Austria and Switzerland. Larger primary schools in German-speaking countries also implement multigrade classes especially for younger pupils, stressing the educational and social advances of multi-age groupings. Small schools can even be places of innovation, inspiring the teaching in larger schools.

According to Solstad (2003), approaches like place-based teaching and experiential learning enhance the connections between practical and theoretical knowledge, in a balance between the local and the global, and concrete and more abstract levels

of understanding. Autti and Bæck (2021, p. 82), though, consider that especially new teachers from urban backgrounds, who are not familiar with rural contexts and cultures, may at first have some difficulties in integrating local content into their teaching. Autti and Bæck (2021) thus ask for new projects and initiatives to help both prospective teachers and professional teachers to implement locally relevant teaching.

Likewise, Kalaoja and Pietarinen (2009) acknowledge that teachers working in small rural schools in Finland may lack professional self-respect, although they are valued in the local society and have got a special competence. Working in a school that is continuously threatened by school closure, may hinder teachers' professional development (Karlberg-Granlund & Korpinen, 2012). The educational and social benefits of multi-age teaching may therefore neither be fully explored nor developed in the multigrade classes in Finnish small rural schools.

Social Aspects of the Multigrade Classroom and Small School

Sigsworth and Solstad (2001) point out that in a multigrade class, the composition of the group changes slowly year by year when older pupils move to the next class, and new younger pupils are integrated into the group. This creates a special stability and culture in the classroom. The older pupils are familiar with the routines and foster the younger pupils into these. Routines are important for the children, and they also co-create them together with the teacher. Not only the teachers, but also the pupils carry on and affect the traditions of the school.

For learning, it is most important that the environment is peaceful. It is not the big projects, but the continuous and familiar routines, that create security and well-being. You don't have to change your teaching all the time. When you want to do something new, then the pupils say: "We didn't do that last year" (Marianne, teacher in small village school).

In research about the social environment of rural schools in Norway, Kvalsund (2000, 2004) distinguishes between bigger and smaller rural schools, finding that there are differences although they are both rural. In the smaller rural schools, the social "mechanism of difference" is prevalent on recesses and in the playground (Kvalsund, 2000, 2004). This means that the pupils play with everyone, despite differences in age or gender. When the number of pupils is small, everyone becomes important. But in a small group of classmates, it may also be difficult to find a so-called best friend, with similar interests and hobbies. A feeling of loneliness may therefore occur, although the pupils belong to a community of peers and participate actively in the classroom and playground. The teacher needs to be aware of this, and actively create possibilities for collaboration and play over age boundaries.

In the bigger rural schools, a "mechanism of similarity" is prevalent instead (Kvalsund, 2000, 2004). Pupils stay together in small groups during the recesses, and older pupils think it is too childish to play with younger pupils. In bigger schools, pupils

more easily find friends with similar backgrounds, interests, and hobbies. There is also a risk that similarity becomes a norm, so that pupils may become afraid of standing out. According to Kvalsund, age composition impacts the culture of the school. Small rural schools with multi-age classes form a special learning environment that may have implications also for the future lives of the pupils, fostering tolerance and collaboration over age boundaries.

Another social aspect recognised by previous research is that it becomes very natural that everyone is working differently or may have special needs when children of different ages work in the same class. Differences become something normal (Sigsworth & Solstad, 2001). The heterogeneity of a multi-age group apparently makes individual differences legitimate and accepted, and the children learn to recognise and help each other (Raggl, 2015). One teacher interviewed explains:

We all know each other, and it is very normal that everyone is on different levels. I try to think, we are all different, and how can I support that difference. (Gabiella, teacher in a small village school).

Research about small schools and multigrade classes additionally stresses the educational possibilities of learners who are supporting each other, becoming helpful and attentive to each other's needs, and less dependent on the teacher. Pupils are also fostered to work independently, and they have to wait for guidance (Hyry-Beihammer & Hascher, 2015; Lindblad & Oksanen, 2021). This can be intentionally integrated into the teaching methods, but is also something informal, affecting the school culture (Peltonen, 2002; Sigsworth & Solstad, 2001). As noted earlier, the teachers' awareness of pupils' differences and needs is essential for creating a good and safe learning environment and promoting optimal and balanced development.

Visualising the Heart of the Small Rural Village School

Some common themes emerged from the analysis of these narratives from teachers in small rural schools in Finland; these were identified across cases. The findings were summarised in a map, where lines between different cultural, educational, and social aspects illustrate how different dimensions of the social reality of small rural schools hang together and interweave. A figure, in the symbolic form of a candle (Fig. 4.1), sums up the teachers' pedagogical thinking, parallel with mirroring the teachers' aims and values in previous research about teachers work in small rural schools.⁵

The candle can be regarded as a root metaphor for the small village school and the work of the teachers in these schools. In the Finnish historical context, the folk school teacher (class teacher, primary school teacher) has traditionally been called

⁵ For a more detailed presentation of the method, see Karlberg-Granlund (2019). An earlier version of the candle model (Fig. 4.1) has previously been presented in Swedish in Karlberg-Granlund (2009) and in Finnish in Karlberg-Granlund (2010).

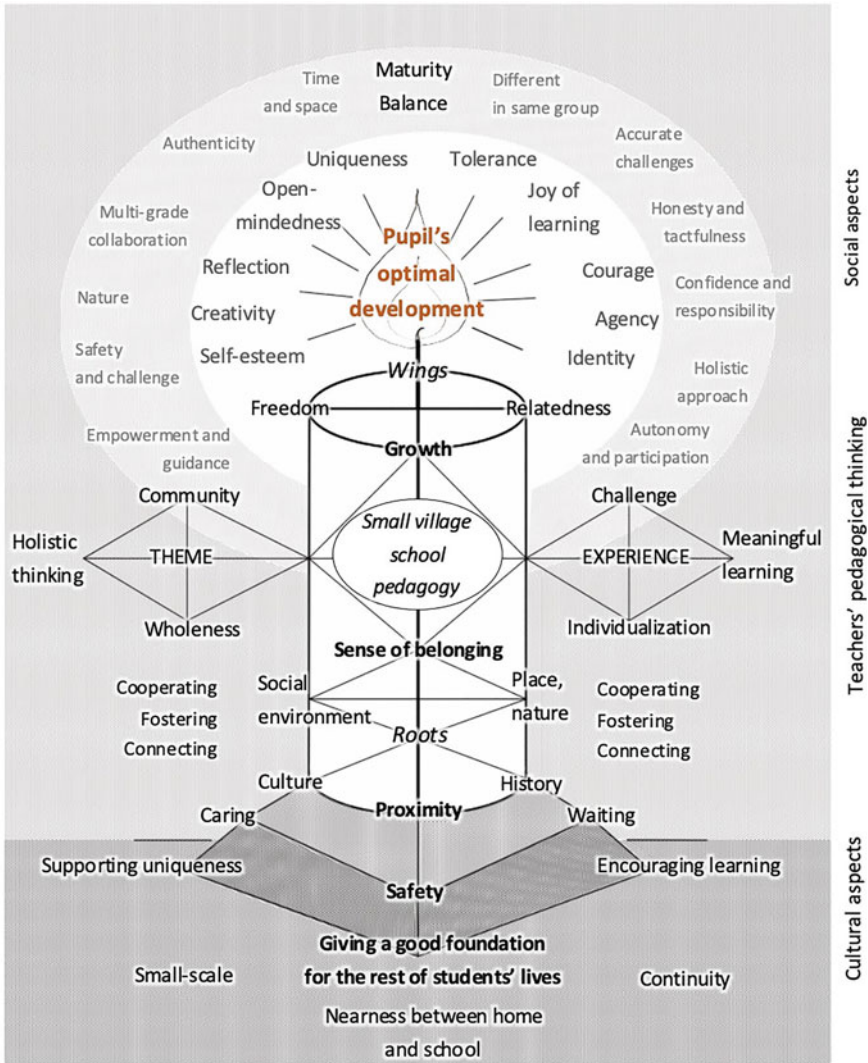


Fig. 4.1 Village school teachers' pedagogical thinking (candle model)

kansan kynttilä in Finnish, that is, the candle of/for the people. One of the teachers interviewed also refers to the village school as “the last light in the village.”

Although the illustration comes from a special context, interpreting it may reveal deeper existential and educational meanings connected to the aims and values of education and teaching in general. The map has got an aesthetic dimension, connecting aims, values, teaching methods, and environment to an integrated whole, as in a cultural weave.

The symbolic meaning of Fig. 4.1 should not be generalised to all village schools everywhere, but the figure captures some essential qualities that might be found in small schools in different contexts. Two other visualisations emerging from the same context have earlier been presented in *The Journal of Rural Studies*, focusing on hidden tensions that may exist in small environments (Karlberg-Granlund, 2019). Like a piece of artwork, the figure may inspire different interpretations for different people, depending on their own backgrounds. An interesting question is whether only people coming from a similar cultural environment like the small rural school may grasp the inherent dimensions of the model, or if it has wider associations.

A lit candle has different parts, which in Fig. 4.1 are connected to different meanings. *The heart or wick of the candle* represents a line going from the pupils' homes through the small school in the community to their individual optimal development. *The atmosphere around the candle* symbolises the social environment of the small rural village school. Aspects in the outer sphere around *the bright shining flame* (the pupil) promote aspects in the inner sphere (personal characteristics and competencies that the pupil is fostered into through participation in a multigrade class and a small school and community).

In the interviews, the teachers reflected on what is important in their work and what they would like their pupils to carry with them from the small school into their future lives. Common aims expressed in the teachers' answers are condensed in *the candle holder*. The teachers stressed the importance of caring, and seeing each child's development and well-being holistically; recognising and supporting each child's uniqueness; following and waiting for the child's progress, as well as encouraging meaningful learning, and thus giving a good foundation for the rest of the students' lives. Some short excerpts exemplify the voices of teachers in small village schools (for a more extensive presentation, see Karlberg-Granlund, 2009):

I think it is important that every pupil is recognised every day. And in a small school I have the possibilities for that (Susanne).

In a small school you have an opportunity to support the development of the pupils and give them a good base. I hope this will give them a feeling of security and self-confidence, that "I can". You can also help the pupil to find his or her own strengths, and his or her right way to do things (Petra).

I need to focus also on the fast pupils, supporting their motivation (Pia).

There are so many things, but the most important thing is promoting the child's growth and optimal development, seeing the possibilities of each child, and giving them the self-confidence, that 'I am accepted as I am' (Stina).

These comments suggest that there is a harmony between the teachers' pedagogical purposes and the practical possibilities to realise them. The teachers appreciate that the smallness of the school enables continuity and a closer familiarity with the pupils. Their aims are reachable, while the school and the community are small. The school is close to the pupils' homes both geographically and socially. Sharing common values, establishing continuous formal and informal dialogues between the school and the families, and striving for continuity in the relationships are important in a small school and community (see *the environment under the candle holder*).

The aims and values that the teachers saw as important align well with Bronfenbrenner's views about proximal relations that support children's optimal individual development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). Through cooperating, fostering, and connecting to the surrounding social environment, culture, history, place, and nature, possibilities are created for the pupil's sense of belonging (roots). Individual growth (wings) is promoted by the teachers' possibilities to think and arrange the teaching holistically and to create conditions for meaningful learning. The pupil experiences school as something meaningful and learning as joyful when teaching meets his or her individual needs and actual level, relating to his or her own life and experiences.

The air around the light of a candle is important, as it gives oxygen to the flame. Equally important are the atmosphere and the educational, cultural, social, and structural characteristics of the schools.

I think it is important that they get a feeling of belongingness and community, so that they may come back and settle down, even here in the village (Siv).

The small school may become a community of diversity, promoting co-operation over age boundaries and involving the traditions and competences of the local society (Bruner, 1996; Solstad, 2003). Individual growth, or wings, may be promoted by the teachers' arranging for teaching holistically and creating conditions for meaningful learning. The pupil experiences school as something meaningful and learning as joyful when teaching meets his or her individual needs and actual level and is connected to previous experiences and his or her own life. Through teaching common themes and topics, teaching may give the pupils positive learning experiences and help them find their own place and task in a classroom community although the pupils are of different ages. Involving pupils in planning their own objectives for learning is another important aspect of meaningful and active learning (Sigsworth & Solstad, 2001; National core curriculum for basic education in Finland, 2016).

The candle illustrating small village school pedagogy captures several dimensions of teachers' aims and values, connecting these to both *praxis* and the *practice* of teaching and learning in small schools (cf. Kemmis & Smith, 2008, p. 65). The figure does represent an idealistic view, however. The fact that a teacher is working in a small school does not guarantee that he or she automatically recognises and implements the distinctive educational possibilities of this environment. Neither is a pupil in a small rural school guaranteed the optimal development the idealised image may suggest. But, by becoming aware of idealised views, these can be compared with the actual situations in schools. Identifying gaps between ideals and reality can help and guide the future development of high quality and equal education for all children irrespective of place or background. In line with Hargreaves (2020, p. 7) "examples of rural advantage" need to be brought to the fore.

Recognition of Rural Lifestyles and Futures

The rural backgrounds and values of families and pupils may not be fully acknowledged and recognised in educational policies, steering documents, and curricula. There may be a gap between the rhetoric of the political educational governance and the local and practical situations in the municipalities (Autti & Bæck, 2021; Solstad & Karlberg-Granlund, 2020). Recognition of rural lifestyles and countryside is a matter of sustainability for the future, in a world worth living in for all. In a report of a study of projects of Education for Sustainability in Australia, Kemmis and Mutton (2012) said

Education is a process by which children, young people and adults are initiated into forms of understanding, modes of action and ways of relating to one another and the world, that foster individual and collective self-expression, individual and collective self-development and individual and collective self-determination, and that are, in these senses, oriented towards the good for each person and the good for humankind. (Kemmis & Mutton, 2012, p. 204)

Edwards-Groves et al. (2016, p. 326) draw on Honneth's (1995) idea that "being recognised is a core human need. Mutual recognition (of each other) builds internal self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem in people, which is necessary to become an agent or being agentic in society." Recognition of the uniqueness of the other, which is precisely equivalent to one's own uniqueness is essential in the culture of small rural schools, in learning to live and to work together.

What rurality is in today's world is not an easy question to answer, however. The concept of rurality has been frequently discussed in rural sociology but is not yet so much discussed in research about rural schools (Fargas-Malet & Bagley, 2021). In educational research, recognition and values instead are in focus, while schools educate for uncertain futures with an aim of creating stability and self-confidence, that is, both roots and wings, regardless of where the school is situated. An urgent question is how to help young people to simultaneously and metaphorically both stay and leave (cf. Corbett, 2007). And then also come back, create sustainable futures, respond to challenges, take responsibility, and believe they can make a difference.

Educating for Living Well in a World Worth Living in for All

Capturing the essence of good teaching and good schools despite differences in context is a never-ending endeavour. Studying small contexts provides knowledge about larger issues of how to promote educational quality for each individual child through meaningful learning and holistic development, and local quality of life through community-oriented approaches in teaching.

In his classic work *The Culture of Education*, Bruner (1996) hoped schools would represent countercultures, and promote cultural mutuality, participation, and identity through a balance between the individual and the collective, and the smaller and larger society. Autonomy and solidarity are essential for pupils, for teachers, and for

society in general. According to Rothsbaum and Trommsdorff (2007), all societies have elements of individualism and collectivism, but in Western societies there has been a tendency to value individual autonomy more highly than relatedness, assuming that relatedness and solidarity in some sense reduce autonomy. But cultural research both in Western and non-Western countries shows that trust supports autonomy, self-esteem, and well-being, so that roots and wings complement each other.

As noted earlier, small rural schools have a double function: educational and cultural. It follows, then, that the local school has an extensive role in producing and maintaining social capital (Autti & Hyry-Beihammer, 2014; Edwards, 2019; Karlberg-Granlund, 2019; Putnam & Feldstein, 2003). Furthermore, as Kvalsund (2004) claims, the cultures and structures of schools have implications for the future.

Both educational leadership and teaching in small rural school contexts need to be pedagogical, reflective, and sensitive to context. Reflective leadership includes analysing the school in the broader society and finding and promoting sustainable ways of living together. Leading then promotes the dual purpose of education, “helping people to live well and create a world worth living in” (Edwards-Groves et al., 2020, p. 126).

Education for living well in a world worth living in for all involves teaching as both *praxis* and *practice*, which in the rural small school context includes teaching and lecturing in different groupings, and the management and facilitation of learning, development, and growth in holistic and locally relevant ways, where the pupil is a subject, not an object. According to Biesta (2016, p. 386), quoting Levinas, the freedom of being and becoming a unique person does not mean “freedom of being able to do what one wishes to do but being free as ‘simply [doing] what nobody else can do in my place’”, and finding one’s own place in life.

Having *roots* and *wings* means learning to know one’s own background, culture, and value, while at the same time learning to know and value the background and culture of others, as equals. This intrinsic aim of teachers in small rural village schools is also an aim of education in general. Educational ideas and ideals emerging from small rural school contexts may hopefully have wings into the future. The next task for Finnish educational research may be to focus on children’s voices, documenting their thoughts about their places and futures in different local and rural landscapes of a global world.

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Chapter 5

Leading for Love, Life, Wisdom, and Voice in Steiner Schools: Constraints and Conditions of Possibility



Virginia Moller

Abstract This chapter interweaves two stories: the first is the story of Steiner education as one important voice in keeping focus on what matters in education and its transformative promise through the core pedagogical values of love, life, wisdom, and voice. The second story is based on the author's autoethnographical research on leading practices of Steiner school principals over a period of major change and crisis in a Steiner school's life. This research included the use of the theory of practice architectures to uncover unsustainable contradictions in the way we work in Steiner schools which constrain the full promise of the educational approach as an engine room for social change and renewal. These contradictions include doubt and uncertainty about the role of the principal and of leadership itself; and the depth of the emotional load of the principal and teachers in holding the competing ideological and pedagogical tensions of the Steiner and broader educational policy environment. Maintaining the integrity of the higher purposes of Steiner education involves leading practices which move away from the unsustainable tensions to encompass intentional hierarchy and healthy collaboration, and a repositioning of Steiner education from the margins to a legitimate part of a diverse educational mainstream.

Keywords Pedagogical values · Leading practices · Steiner education · Theory of practice architectures

Introduction

There was energy and excitement in the Australian Steiner primary school where I was principal way back in 2007 as we collectively embraced the pedagogical values of *love, life, wisdom*, and *voice* into our everyday practice. These values, which now

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underpin the ACARA¹—recognised Australian Steiner Curriculum,² are truly a call to action for all who aspire to educate children and offer hope for a revitalisation of what matters in education. I experienced joy leading within this shared understanding. It began, however, to unravel as a series of critical events almost brought the school to its knees. Such was the extent of the effect of those events on my very being, I was compelled to complete a doctoral study on my lived experience to get to the heart of the nature of leading practices in Steiner schools.

This chapter combines two interrelated stories embedded in the above. The first is the story of Steiner education³ as one important voice in keeping focus on what matters in education and the transformative possibilities through pedagogical values of love, life, wisdom, and voice. The second story is based on my autoethnographical doctoral research on leading practices of Steiner school principals, which included the use of the theory of practice architectures to uncover what is enabling and constraining the full potential of the educational approach. What is revealed in the telling of these stories is the force and reach of the ‘systems world’ (Habermas & McCarthy, 1985), into alternative educational contexts and the urgent call to deeply understand our conditions to transform them (Mahon, 2014).

I firstly provide some context on Steiner schools and my role as Steiner school principal. This is followed by a dialogue between two theoretical frames I used in my research: Steiner epistemology (Steiner, 1894/1964) and the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014). This dialogue reveals a rich imaginary of educational purpose. I then provide ‘substance and form’ (Mahon et al., 2020, p. 166) to this educational purpose which finds expression in the core pedagogical values mentioned above and which, I argue, can be realised in everyday practice in schools, not just Steiner schools.

Constraints and enablers of bringing substance and form (Mahon et al., 2020) to those inspiring pedagogical values—love, life, wisdom, and voice—are then discussed, with a focus on my research on leading practices of Steiner school principals. My study reveals the way we work together is an important part of an education which enables agency, health, and well-being for students, teachers, leaders in formal positions, and all members of a school community towards individual and collective renewal and pedagogical creativity. Two significant constraints in the Steiner context are highlighted, namely the extent of doubt and uncertainty not only about the principal role in a school, but about leadership itself, and the depth of the emotional load of the principal and teachers in navigating competing ideological and pedagogical tensions of the Steiner and broader educational policy environment.

¹ Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA) was established by the Australian Labour Government in 2010 to develop a national curriculum—as part of the government’s ‘Education Revolution’.

² For more detail on the Australian Steiner Curriculum and the process of recognition with ACARA see <https://www.steinereducation.edu.au/curriculum/steiner-curriculum/>.

³ In this chapter I use the terms ‘Steiner’ and ‘Waldorf’ interchangeably. In Australia, some schools are called Waldorf Schools but most are called Steiner Schools. Some schools choose to take on the name of the first school in 1919 which started for the children of the factory workers at the Waldorf-Astoria factory in Stuttgart.

The interweaving stories may resonate for other contexts, other lives, as together we confront the reality that our current educational model, including the way we work, is failing to meet this time of ‘multiple, nested, global crises’ (Kaukko et al., 2021a, 2021b, p. 1): a climate catastrophe, destroyed ecosystems, ongoing pandemic threats, the impact of growing artificial intelligence, a youth mental health crisis, and increasing economic and social inequalities. What a world we are handing to our young people.

Background

I was a primary Steiner school principal from 2007 to 2016. This was part of a shift towards establishing school principals in Steiner school settings in the Australian context; this shift has occurred over time to meet contemporary realities of increased regulatory and compliance-driven demands within the global context and a focus on competition, high stakes testing, choice, and standardisation (Sahlberg, 2016). Establishing principals is at odds with traditional Steiner organisational models, where teachers have a large part in running schools, reflecting the educational and social renewal ideals of Steiner’s world view. I had been at the school since 1995 and had enjoyed various teaching roles; I gradually became more involved in both administrative and pedagogical aspects—as a member of the college of teachers⁴, and also as part-time education administrator (serving the college of teachers) in areas of school registration, compliance, and policy development. After an administrative review in 2006, I became Education Director, in effect the principal in all but name, and then officially school principal in 2011. I was one of the first principals in Australian Steiner schools, most of which at the time were run by the college of teachers.

The formal positional role of education director/principal made sense considering the Australian Labour Government’s ‘Education Revolution’ commencing in 2007, which was more of a structural revolution (Vandenberg, 2018). The government was, in effect, ushering in a new era of transparency, accountability, and a subtle change from ‘government to governance’ (Lingard et al., 2017, p. 7). This was through the establishment of a national curriculum, national testing, and transparency to parents through the publication of school data such as performance on national tests. The Steiner primary school was not immune to this, and the school board responded with its own structural changes to meet increasing complexities of accountability.

As principal, however, I deeply experienced the pull of practice traditions which persisted from the first Waldorf School in Stuttgart in 1919: an enduring culture of non-hierarchy and the language of consensus; the power of the ideal of the college

⁴ The college of teachers in a Steiner school has, over time, taken on various roles in Steiner schools and there is no one ‘form’ or function. It can be seen as the spiritual heart of the school, a collective group leading the pedagogical direction, or a collective school management body. It is, no matter what form, a powerful practice tradition in Steiner schools.

of teachers; and the authority of Steiner's texts themselves. Steiner's copious writings gave indications for the methodology and content of the curriculum of the first Waldorf school, but has become fixed and rigid over time—the opposite of the pedagogical creativity Steiner desired in his teachers in the first school. Against this broad backdrop, the teachers' sayings, doings, and relatings in my Steiner school context were bundled up in the complexities of their projects and dispositions: teachers with long tenure used to having strong say in all aspects of school life; the significant authority of the college of teachers given by teachers and many parents due to this body's depth of anthroposophical⁵ knowledge; and the ambivalence I experienced from teachers in giving authority to me in my formal role as principal. I realise I was caught in the crossfire of an ideological divide—between Steiner ideals and ever-increasing regulatory and compliance-driven demands—which was akin to doing the splits. Further in this chapter I detail the consequences of living this divide for bringing Steiner pedagogical values to everyday practice, as the school became subsumed by a series of crises.

This chapter now turns to providing a deeper context, as a backdrop to bring into form the humanistic, ecological values of Steiner education and pedagogy so needed for our times. This deeper context is enabled through a dialogue between the theory of practice architectures and Steiner epistemology to penetrate the question we have collectively lost the ability to ask: education for what purpose?

Getting to the Nature of Education Itself: Dialogue Between Theory of Practice Architectures and Steiner Philosophy

The theory of practice architectures is a contemporary account of social reality that focuses on practice (Mahon & Galloway, 2017). Individual and collective practices are shaped by practice architectures, which are the enabling and constraining preconditions for the conduct of practices. These architectures take form in: *cultural–discursive arrangements* which enable and constrain sayings; *material–economic arrangements*, which enable and constrain doings; and *social–political arrangements* which enable and constrain relatings of the practice (Kemmis, 2018). The underlying impulse and purpose of the theory was to provide a practical understanding of agency within the deepening ill-effects of neo-liberalism, social injustices, and unsustainable living (Kemmis & Mahon, 2017). This, in turn, was informed by an Aristotelean and Marxist orientation (Mahon & Galloway, 2017).

Of significance to my research was the theory of practice architectures standing apart from other practice theories, due to the moral dimension of *educational praxis* underpinning it. Drawing on an Aristotelean perspective, praxis is viewed as 'action

⁵ Anthroposophy means love of wisdom of humanity (anthro = human; sophia = wisdom). Steiner's philosophy aimed to contribute to the wisdom of humanity. Steiner pedagogy is built on anthroposophical principles that aim to connect the spiritual in the human being with the spiritual in the universe.

that is morally committed, and oriented and informed by traditions in a field' (Kemmis & Smith, 2008, p. 4), and, in a Marxist sense, it can be understood as history-making action, with social and ethical implications for emancipation (Kemmis et al., 2014). Emancipation or agency is possible since individuals and communities are both products and producers of history within the Marxist 'historical materialism' perspective. Both perspectives work together to ground the praxis-based educational theory in the development of a young person's agency towards 'the good for each person and the good for humankind' (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 26).

This deeply resonates with Rudolf Steiner's vision of educating children to become healthy, purposeful, and creative adults who can do the good of fostering a healthy, just society. Steiner saw education and schools as the catalyst and engine room for social change and renewal. The social renewal ideal is an imagination for both moral and social development that lives in human freedom, not the imperatives of the state or any religious or scientific materialism (Lamb, 2010). It is this notion of freedom from political or economic interests which is paramount to fostering the human spirit⁶ in young people:

The question should not be: What does a human being need to know and be able to do for the existing social order? but rather: What capacities are latent in this human being, and what lies within that can be developed? Then it will be possible to bring ever new forces into the social order from the rising generations...The rising generation should not be moulded into what the existing social order chooses to make it (Steiner, 1919/1999, p. 71)

Both world views, then, promise a form of self-realisation, balancing collective good and individual expression and self-realisation. Steiner education provides a deepening of this perspective through its well-developed articulation of freedom. For Steiner, to be free is to be capable of thinking one's own thoughts, not merely of the body or of society, but thoughts which are generated by one's deepest, most original, most essential, and spiritual self, one's individuality. This inner freedom does not simply arise but comes about through an education that engenders it (Oberski, 2011). Such an education balances 'not only our thinking but our senses, feelings and our will as well' (Haralambous, 2018, p. 12) and grows an individual's moral capacity to impart purpose and direction to their lives out of free will. This, in turn, has implications for the renewal of society itself, as societal change and individual (spiritual) development are the twin pillars of our social future. In Steiner's view, a free action is connected to world need, and the individual is thus a potential co-creator of an ever-evolving universe (Wolfson, 2013).

Underpinning both Steiner educational philosophy and the theory of practice architectures is the relationship of the learner to practice. This relationship is 'coming to know how to go on in practices' (Kemmis, 2021, p. 3), not just participation in practice, but one of agentially doing things differently for a higher moral purpose. As embedded in the quote from Rudolf Steiner above, there is both a predetermined and emergent nature of practices with acknowledgement of 'individually unique

⁶ Steiner relates 'spirit' to thinking, agency and the 'higher self'. Education thus enables spirit development in young people to enhance moral strength, sharpen faculties of perception and extend thinking capacity and powers of discernment.

contributions... at the interface of social and individual levels of human life and development' (Stetsenko, 2020, p. 10). Within such a view of education, learning is imagined as open-ended, with a focus on a young person's indefinite future rather than striving for pre-defined goals in terms of fixed categories of knowledge (Tjarnstig & Mansikka, 2021).

Further, within an ecological systems frame (Capra, 2015), both worldviews see individual growth, development, and well-being as inseparable from the growth, development, health, and well-being of the whole community and planet. The theory of practice architectures deepens the picture. Distinctive practices of educational leadership, professional learning, teaching, and learning, student social and academic practice, and education policy and administration have also been empirically established as living entities that exist in ecological relationships with one another—as ecologies of practices (Kemmis et al., 2012). There are implications for the way we work as either enabling or constraining ecological health itself, if we also view ecological and leading practices as interconnected (Woods, 2020).

As part of a complex, living web, contemporary education policy can be thus implicated as part of the problem, with its relentless focus on competition, standardisation, 'back to basics' mantra, and high stakes testing within a limiting view of 'intelligence' and success in life that is purely related to the needs of the economy (Lupton & Hayes, 2021). Leading practices need to support a reconnection with core educational purpose to enable a community to move away from such a dominant, economically driven discourse.

For Steiner educators, purpose comes to living form through a dynamic pedagogy of love, life, wisdom, and voice (Gidley, 2016) and it is leading for and through these pedagogical values which can provide the enabling conditions for people to 'live well in a world worth living in' (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 25). As noted above, Steiner education is a practical, living example of bringing substance to form (Mahon et al., 2020), but is not without its own challenges. Building on the brief introduction above, the next section goes deeper into an educational approach which began in Stuttgart in 1919 and can now be considered a post-formal education (Gidley, 2016) appropriate to prepare young people for post-normal times.⁷

A Post-formal Education

Post-formal pedagogy aims to engender in young people intuitive, holistic, integral thinking as a stage beyond Piaget's highest level of cognitive development—formal operations (Rawson, 2021, p. 61). Gidley (2016) proposes that Steiner pedagogy can be placed within educational movements which embody post-formal reason as key pedagogical goals: wisdom education (Sternberg, 2019); spirituality in education

⁷ Post-normal times have been characterised by 'heightened interconnectivity, complexity, chaos, and contradictions, and perhaps most acutely exemplified by the current climate crisis' (Porter, 2021, p. 67).

(De Souza, 2016); holistic education (Caldwell et al., 2011; Miller, 2019; Nielsen, 2006); complexity in education (Wheatley, 2017); and environmental, ecological and sustainability education (Jardine, 1998).

In her research, Gidley (2007, 2016) positioned Steiner education within a growing alternative academy. In this space, deconstruction of Steiner education was possible—away from its essentialist tendencies, and teachers’ craft knowledge—moving towards a renewal for the twenty-first century through the pedagogical values of love, life, wisdom, and voice. The next section begins weaving together my story of leading practices of Steiner principals with an exploration of Gidley’s work.

A Revitalisation of What Matters in Education: Love, Life, Wisdom, and Voice

In the search for truth the only passion that must not be discarded is love. That is the mission of truth: to become the object of increasing love and care and devotion on our part (Steiner, 1930/1983, pp. 37–38)

Gidley was appointed as a research advisor in the writing of the ACARA⁸—recognised Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework (Steiner Education Australia, 2011). Her theorisation of the four pedagogical values that underpin her post-formal education philosophy (Gidley, 2016, p. 181) was integrated into the design of the Steiner curriculum itself. My excitement as a principal entering into this unknown territory only grew with Gidley’s visit to the school to facilitate professional learning on ‘deconstructing and reconstructing Steiner’. This was a wonderfully irreverent title that was created by her as a provocation and spoke to my own mood for ‘disrupting’.

In the workshop sessions, Gidley postulated possibilities of Steiner education for today’s world and the future. She questioned the rigid adherence to methods and even content of the Steiner curriculum, and put to teachers that it is the processes and general indications of Steiner education which are as relevant now as they were when he created his philosophy. Teachers worked with Gidley on unpacking the themes central to a caring, revitalised, and wise education, and, from deep reflection on the underlying pedagogical principles of love, life (living thinking), wisdom, and voice—theorised from Gidley’s research—the school’s core values of *connection*, *imagination*, and *initiative* evolved. This formed the basis of critical reflection on and questioning of traditional teaching practices and further collective work on the school’s strategic direction. It was an enriching, transformative experience with a new relationship to purpose and accountability to our community (Mahon et al., 2020).

A more authentic ‘transformation’ narrative within a post-formal environment must involve such ‘*education-led ways of integrating different evidence in practice*’

⁸ Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority was established in 2010. The Australian Steiner Curriculum Framework was recognised by ACARA as an alternative to the Australian Curriculum in 2012. It is the only government recognised Steiner curriculum in the world.

(McKnight & Morgan, 2020, p. 653, my emphasis). Such inquiry breaks free of the practice architectures privileging an industrial model of education, towards equipping young people with capacities needed to make sense of past complexities, the current chaotic states, and future contradictions (Sardar, 2015). From a Steiner perspective, young people need to be empowered (within a narrative of hope for the future) to embrace paradoxes inherent in chaos and complexity, and place them at the service of growing wisdom; to re-vision solutions and create new narratives in response to multiple challenges of post-normal times (Gidley, 2010).

The pedagogical values of love, life, wisdom, and voice (Gidley, 2016), as they manifest in dynamic interaction in Steiner education as an integral, holistic education, are a gateway for such practices. Firstly, Steiner education supports a pedagogy of love as an evolutionary force. Steiner's picture also encompasses and resonates with Wilkinson and Kauko (2020) who argue that pedagogical love is the one value missing in education today. As an evolutionary and emergent force, pedagogical love is seen in: the care and compassion for the whole child; the integration of head and heart in teaching and learning; the long-term relationship between teacher and child; the developing in children a connection to self, others, and the world; and as a form of 'devotional attention to their well-being' (Kauko, Wilkinson et al., 2021a, 2021b, p. 2).

Love is also an evolutionary force for teachers and leaders who operate at an integral mind level (Wilber, 2000)—a fluid state of thinking, embracing difference, having courage for a higher purpose and where love, not judgement, is the key driver of actions. In this frame, we can understand education as an emergent phenomenon (Osberg & Biesta, 2021). If education is a 'coherent, affective entity in its own right: one that does not serve a pre-existing (external) purpose but which self-generates the purpose it serves' (Osberg & Biesta, 2021, p. 67), we can imagine into an undefined *form of care* for the future. This is not a predetermined 'good' future, but a yet unknowable future. It is through the unpredictable interaction between knowledge, the individual, and collective living that education can address this impossibility (Osberg & Biesta, 2021).

Secondly, the significance of a pedagogy of life as a sustaining force is found in the prime focus on the development of imaginative capacity in the primary years which is the foundation of living, mobile thinking. The focus on ecological awareness, process, movement, and discovery also lays the groundwork for bringing learning to life. Cultivating imagination involves students actively engaging with many kinds of artistic and problem-solving activities. Several modalities are used such as experimentation, creative writing, speech, drama, movement, music, drawing, painting, modelling, and sculpture. For Steiner, thinking is alive, and an active spiritual experience. It is also important for teachers to develop this capacity. The teachers' own capacities in the phenomenology of thinking, through meditative practice as another way of knowing, enable penetration into the nature of a child's development.

Third, the pedagogical value of wisdom as a creative force is enacted through the focus on multi-modal learning, including the arts, development of creativity, and aesthetic sensibilities. It is in dynamic interplay with the pedagogy of love, developing complex, agile thinking and discernment in young people—crucial in a

post-truth⁹ world. As Steiner states: ‘Let us strive after a real understanding of world evolution, let us seek after wisdom—and we shall find without fail that the child of wisdom will be love’ (Steiner, 1912).

Finally, the integration of the values of *love*, *life*, and *wisdom* needs to be enacted in relation to hope for the ecological future of our planet. This hope will be strengthened when we know, through education, a new generation of young people will be empowered through a pedagogy of *voice* (Haralambous, 2018). This pedagogical value supports the development of agency ‘through [a young person’s] deep understanding of the processes of *life*, their caring *love* of people, plants and animal life, and their *wise* understanding of the forces at work—both physical and subtle—in the world at large’ (Haralambous, 2018, p. 24, emphasis in the original). Steiner education continues to prioritise the human voice as a counter-balance to our increasingly technology-mediated society. Voice is strengthened through the narrative-based curriculum, music, rich dialogue, and encouraging reflective views within a curriculum that values diversity and inclusion.

Drawing Together Some Threads: Research and Reflection

Research on young people’s views and visions of their future demonstrate that holistic, artistic, imaginative, and proactive educational input, such as provided by Steiner education, can empower young people to create the futures they desire (Gidley, 2010). This is not a fait accompli future already committed through the past as noted above (Stetsenko, 2020). Crucially, research found that Steiner education enabled in young people critical, decolonising perspectives to global issues and the *agency* to make a difference (Gidley, 2016).

Similarly, Rawson (2017) showed that young people in Steiner schools in Germany can identify what has enabled them to construct clear identities. Steiner graduates also showed the qualities of agency, reflection, narrative empathy, biographical learning that exemplify the notion of subjectification or being called into being through encountering the ‘other’ (Biesta, 2020). As noted above, outcomes are not certain, but teachers can create conditions in which they are more likely to occur. It takes a teacher’s deep reflection on practice to identify what enables and what constrains the ‘coming into being’ of the young person/subject (Rawson, 2017).

A large study of Steiner graduates in the United States (Safit & Gerwin, 2019) has shown that graduates perceive Waldorf education has prepared them for life in an increasingly uncertain future; has instilled capacities of collaboration, creative and critical thinking; and has engendered a sense of obligation to community, the environment, and social justice matters. Researchers found a decoupling of the concept of success from economic gain.

⁹ According to the 2016 Word of the Year Oxford English Dictionaries entry: post-truth is the public burial of “objective facts” by an avalanche of media “appeals to emotion and personal belief”.

A key contribution of Steiner education is its conscious scaffolding of different teaching strategies across the three main stages of schooling to develop a capacity for agency. In the early years, the foundations of moral growth and agency are developed through the children's experience of *goodness* in the world around them; in the primary years, the principle of *beauty* informs teaching methods that guide students towards ethical awareness through the development of aesthetic sensibilities and deep engagement; in high school, teachers are guided by the principle of *truth* in developing multifaceted and ethically tested understandings which underpin moral judgement and discernment. From here young people have the capability for purposeful *action*.

Ashley (2005) surmises from a research study on Steiner education in England that it is Steiner's unique view of child development that lays at the base of young peoples' positive visions for preferred futures. Steiner education might stand alone in its view that children should not be burdened with potential 'adult' worries about the future of the planet, since Steiner education aims to develop confident, free adults through *conserving* childhood (Ashley, 2005). Instead, it is the focus on the development of aesthetic sensibilities in the primary school years that builds later capacities of rational mature judgement. In Steiner's developmental view, the aesthetic stage of the 7–14 years is not a 'less developed' version of the cognitive-rational phase of the 14–21 years. Later forms of rational thought do not displace aesthetic thought but complement it.

The implications of this for sustainability are considerable, for if a childish wonder about the natural world and the place of human beings within it remains into adulthood, it will act as a counterforce to the adult world weariness and the pursuit of happiness through material wealth that stifles action, entrenches social disadvantage, and the continuing degradation of the environment (Ashley, 2005).

In my autoethnographic research, as previously noted, I found that doubt and uncertainty about leadership and the way Steiner schools organise themselves, constrain the powerful underpinning pedagogy of such a dynamic education. The following section tells the story of the promise of leading for love, life, wisdom, and voice in amongst such doubt and uncertainty. It is an important story to tell, as together we confront the reality that our current educational model, including the way we work, is failing to meet the great global challenges of our time.

Leading for Love, Life, Wisdom, and Voice: A Story of Promise, a Story of Doubt, and Uncertainty

My autoethnographic enquiry involved telling the story of three significant 'border crossing' events during my time as a principal in a Steiner school in Australia: namely, a crisis in administration; open questioning of the role of principal through a process of arriving at inclusive decision-making; and issues associated with transforming pedagogical practice within a complex alternative educational philosophy.

In 2013/2014 there was a perfect storm brewing: an expansion of the school about to go very wrong; a job share crisis just about to hit; a left field enrolment crisis; and an impending administration restructure review which nearly brought the school to its knees. Issues around having a principal in a Steiner school surfaced within this perfect storm. Teachers saw my role changing over time without their consultation.

Within practice histories noted previously, undercurrents of doubt about the principalship simmered, but as so many things were going right at the school (from 2007 to 2014)—especially our collective research on pedagogical practices as described above—the simmering heat of doubt was bearable to all, including me. Mistrust by teachers of having a principal role in the school inevitably surfaced through the critical incidents which emerged during 2013. A key issue penetrating all areas of school life was how decisions were made in the school, particularly including land purchase, whether to double stream¹⁰ the school, job shares, and enrolments. Although there was less contestation in pedagogical decision-making as such, the impact of confused expectations, power, and control in the broad areas of school life on teachers' pedagogical practices, was profound. The stresses reached into classrooms, relationships with parents and between staff members.

Despite my desire to collaborate, there were significant constraints in reaching the high cultural expectation of inclusive decision-making practices in the school. In the context of the cultural-discursive arrangements, I was increasingly immersed in and subject to the discourse of accountability, compliance, standards, and expectations of positional leaders improving the school's performance as part of broader system demands. Enabling leading practices that develop inclusive decision-making must involve substantive and sustained critical discussion to strengthen the dialectical relationship between the 'differing imperatives of the formal positional leaders and informal leaders in a school' (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 158). There was not enough time to do this on a practical level, however, and teachers felt shut out of the discourse which was so foreign to their own lived experiences in the classroom as Steiner educators.

In addition to time, other constraining material-economic arrangements (in physical time-space) included the incongruity between the hierarchical management structure and the pedagogical collaboration and joint decision-making expectations of senior teachers and administration staff alike. The procedures, rule-following, paperwork, and compliance within a system framework (Habermas & McCarthy, 1985) to do with, for example, redundancy, render the individual's everyday lived experience invisible. Not only is the individual worker subjected to the redundancy, but all the individuals involved are affected, as the compliance practices associated with the redundancy are significantly constrained and cut across the very legacies of Steiner education itself.

Conflicting and contested understandings were significant constraints in the social-political arrangements (in social space). There were conflicting and contested understandings about the role of a principal in a Steiner school, of the underlying educational philosophy, and of the college of teachers, leading to the formation of

¹⁰ Expand the school from one class per year level to two classes per year level.

subcultures in the social-political arrangements of the school, which operated in silence. What was not said publicly was more powerful than what was said. The series of disruptive events that led up to a major staffing crisis occurred within these trust-eroding undercurrents of split rather than shared narratives and understandings.

It is hard to locate the possibilities of leading for love, life, wisdom, and voice within these overwhelming constraints living in the spaces between what we did, what we said and how we related and where we had such high ideals for social renewal. Beyond the trauma of the critical events, however, and after a sustained period of ‘sitting in the fire’ (Mindell, 1995), an unexpected way forward emerged. This was an outcome of a whole community meeting facilitated by a trusted external consultant. What emerged, as we participated in this enabling space, was a collective will to reflect on practices of decision-making within our own practice traditions and practice landscape (Edwards-Groves & Ronnerman, 2013).

The next section discusses conditions of possibility that grew from this small, unexpected seed for renewal for reimagining decision-making, enabling new ways of working towards individual and collective renewal.

Conditions of Possibility

The potential of sustained, confronting critical reflection on leading practices as a Steiner School principal, which was the focus of my autoethnographical doctoral research, continues to astound me in its ongoing transformative power. Through the power of this lived experience perspective, I discovered the very nature of education itself, and leading practices which enable and constrain the courageous educational transformations necessary to respond to the question of what sort of world we want for our children and grandchildren.

What I found was change starts with self. Above all, self-transformation comes before a leader can transform a community. For me, this move towards a capable praxis-led leadership involved the resilience to, and tolerance of, not knowing, and a willingness to take time to sit in the fire of doubt, uncertainty, vulnerability, and ambiguity. This was beyond the allure of ‘fixing’, and enabled more complex and nuanced ways of making meaning to emerge. The philosophical underpinning of the education, with its constant threat of dogmatism coexisting with its promise, and potential of creative and practical renewal for individuals and society—was both a significant constraint and an enabler for me moving through and out of the fire. As an enabler, the value placed on meeting together in Steiner schools meant I and teachers were prepared to make time, space, and resourcing for meeting together on topics of profound difficulty, bringing historical doubt and uncertainty about positional leadership to the surface.

The key enabler was reimagining time itself. The amount of dialogue that was needed to affect a deeper understanding of each other’s point of view was astounding, as evidenced in the one and a half years it took to arrive at mutual understandings and consensus about how to go about making wise and ethical decisions in the

school. Through this dialogue, collective leadership capacity emerged and, along with this, agency, including my own agency as principal with positional authority. This involved my growing sense of inner personal power and identity as well as an authentic use of positional power. Reclaiming and then balancing positional authority with shared/collective responsibility was at the core of emergent decision-making protocols involving shared understandings of consensus (collective decision-making), consultation, collaboration, and agreement on who makes final decisions. Within a communicative space (Habermas & McCarthy, 1985) we were individually and collectively recasting an understanding of decision-making itself.

Another key breakthrough I had was that capable, praxis-led leading practices involve intentional hierarchy (Woods & Roberts, 2018) and healthy collaboration (Gidley, 2013). This way of working is not only possible within the Steiner context but also crucial in creating the possibility for the educational, social, and sustainability ideals of Steiner education given the right conditions. These right conditions involved understanding that collaborative leadership is enacted by everyone and works for inclusive participation and holistic learning for human growth (Woods & Roberts, 2018). Such learning enables adults to flourish and young people to develop towards healthy, creative purposeful adults. Leadership is a characteristic of the organisation as a whole—not just the actions of those labelled ‘leaders’. Whatever we may think, the reality is that leadership is the outcome of people’s actions and intentions. The power of positional leaders is mediated by what people do, or do not do (Woods & Roberts, 2018).

Acting on that understanding involved several material-economic arrangements I orchestrated, either consciously or as part of emerging complexities of events as they unfolded, which facilitated transformative processes in decision-making. The engagement of the school chaplain in our ongoing issues around decision-making was pivotal in building collective trust and helping the emergence of fledgling, tentative practices towards wise and inclusive decision-making. Other moves, apart from allowing extensive amounts of time for meeting together, were: the choice of a decision-making advisory group from a wide factional base to promote diversity of views; disbanding the existing leadership team; and providing significant teacher release time to allow leading practices to emerge and disperse throughout the school. The re-formation of the college of teachers with a clear role description was a key, if not the key, enabler to rebuild trust and develop common understandings.

What emerged was a move beyond structure, beyond ‘what ought to be’ in a Steiner school, towards a living and dynamic way of working with ‘what is’, based on both intention and emergence (Woods & Roberts, 2018). This emergent gesture belies the simplistic critique of those who would eschew all notions of hierarchy, due to fears of too much power being placed in the hands of those in formal leadership roles. The dualistic view of non-hierarchy versus hierarchy underplays the ‘complex, contested and fluid nature of power’ (Lumby, 2017, p. 4). Along with systemic and persistent doubt about leadership and management, it is a key factor holding back the Steiner movement.

Ultimately, out of the ashes emerged a lemniscate image of how we shape and are shaped by each other, which resonates strongly with the underlying philosophical picture of Steiner's social forms of the future where we are conscious of our individual and collective co-evolution (Gidley, 2016). I presented this lemniscate image at a staff meeting towards the end of 2016, where I announced the new interim leadership team arrangements for 2017. At this point, I saw glimpses of how leading practices for decision-making could emerge from both an intentional hierarchy and a healthy collaboration. In particular, the lemniscate gets to the heart of the relationship between the college of teachers and the principal.

I drew the lemniscate and explained my role as a first amongst equals—no one person is more important than another—and how our way of working together has emerged over time. We have been shaped by and are shaping each other's actions, our sayings, and our doings. In the lemniscate lived the intersection of lifeworld and systems—the 'semantic spaces, the locations in space and time and the social spaces in which we encounter one another as thinking and acting beings' (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 165). This intersubjective space lies beyond structures and discussion about which consumes so much energy in Steiner schools (Fig. 5.1).

Leading practices of principals and teachers in the Steiner context need to involve a deliberate orchestration and scrutiny of these competing tensions of lifeworld and system to 'speak back' to the prevailing instrumental worldview, maintain the integrity of the education and, at the same time, promote its growth and renewal—in effect, bringing education to life. These shared understandings enable us to base decisions on the broader purpose of education rather than in reaction to increased accountabilities and compliance requirements.

Endnote

Steiner education has much to offer in breaking free from a rational, materialist understanding of the human being, nature, and society (Dahlin, 2021) to inform an education for renewal. Never has this offering as part of a broader educational dialogue been more important as we have handed young people a world legacy like no other, ensuring their lives are *qualitatively* different to previous generations. Underpinning this legacy is a crisis of meaning making and thinking itself. We are surely required as a matter of urgency to drastically reform our thinking as educators if we believe that education can also *shape* the transformation of these conditions. This is through equipping young people with the mature reasoning skills, the wisdom, the imagination, and the agency/voice to realise a future they believe they themselves can create.

In this chapter, I have explored whether Steiner schools can sustain high ideals of individual and social renewal through an education for love, life, wisdom, and voice and have suggested this rests on breaking through unsustainable contradictions in the way we work. These include doubt and uncertainty about the way we work, including the practice of leadership; intensification of principal's work and the depth of the

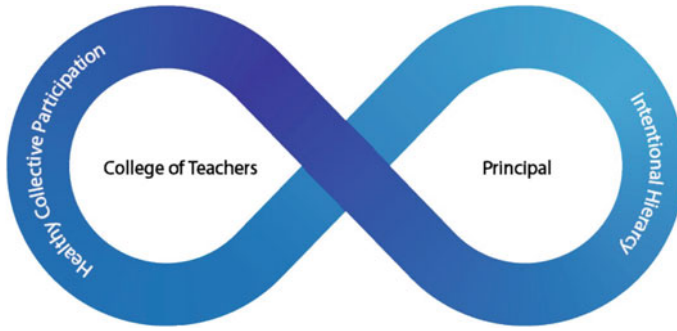


Fig. 5.1 The college of teachers and principal: a ‘reciprocal learning relationship’ (term from Woods & Roberts, 2018)

emotional load of the principal and teachers in holding the competing ideological and pedagogical tensions of the Steiner and broader educational policy environment.

In new contexts, such as my present role as CEO of Steiner Education Australia, I continue to grapple with positioning the humanistic, ecological values of Steiner education and pedagogy at a whole systems level within the contemporary ‘technical-rational view of development, learning and education’ (Tjarnstig & Mansikka, 2021, p. 61). In a parallel between my personal journey and that of the Steiner community, however, I increasingly see the core healing for the Steiner movement as crafting a persuasive narrative that is evidence informed of the work—including the *way* we work—and impact of Steiner schooling (Eacott, 2021). It is not a matter of being calm and accepting the position on the margins, nor is it a ‘call to arms’ to enter into strident politicisation, which can promote dogmatism and restrictive positioning (Walby, 2007). From a Habermasian perspective (Habermas & McCarthy, 1985), therefore, the most effective way Steiner education can have an influence is through indirect means, through dialogue in communicative space—not from an alternative stance but as a legitimate part of a diverse educational mainstream. In the lifeworld space of human communication and interaction, where breaking down of boundaries facilitates transformation for all, where we arrive at a mutual understanding of each other’s point of view, Steiner education has a voice. This chapter has entered that dialogic space and calls for more lived experience accounts of leading practices, of pedagogical practices, which provide the kind and degree of evidence that invites deeper conversations on urgent matters of our time.

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Chapter 6

The Sand Through My Fingers: Finding Aboriginal Cultural Voice, Identity and Agency on Country



Christine Edwards-Groves

Abstract Concerns about supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners to reach their potential endure in contemporary Australian education and society. Moreover, supporting these Aboriginal learners to have a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, cultural, spiritual and physical wellbeing was identified as a key goal of the “Alice Springs (*Mparntwe*) Education Declaration”. This declaration sets out the national vision for education and the commitment of Australian Governments to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal peoples across Australia (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019). This is a critical responsibility for the practices of Australian educators, policymakers and researchers alike. This chapter presents a unique *on-Country* approach to research with young Aboriginal people seeking to understand what a world worth living in means to them as individuals and for the communities they live in. The approach involved multimodal research methods that included poetry composition and photography, as media that revealed their Aboriginal youth voices, cultural sensitivities, identity and agency. For these young Aboriginal people, sitting on their own Country with sand from their Wiradjuri land sifting through their fingers, their words and images emerged as powerful resources for connecting to culture and to self as their Aboriginal identities flourished despite previously being demeaned by racism, ignorance, injustice and inequity. The poetry and photographs produced by these young Aboriginal males serve as a window into how cultural voice and vision expose ways identity and agency are socially-culturally-politically configured—both in their production and deployment. Their words and images demonstrate the kind of resilience needed for these Aboriginal youth to take their place in the world—one that they, too, see as worth living in.

Keywords Creative methodology · Cultural identity · Indigenous · Photointerviews · Youth voice · Multimodal research · Practice architectures · Praxis

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Introduction

On my Country, I sit

The sand trickles through my fingers teaching me
to look, to learn, to listen, to think, to accept my difference

Jimmy (14 Years, Wiradjuri man)

Sitting on one of the logs encircling the Bora ground where Jimmy¹ led me as part of our *walk and talk* to discuss his learning experiences at school, he reached down and scooped up a handful of sand and watched it slowly sift through his fingers like sand through an hourglass. We were silent for a while as Jimmy, then me, repeated the action first with one hand and then with both. All the while Jimmy occasionally looked up and gazed across the Bora ring² past the totem and through the cypress pines into the distance, sometimes glancing at me and my growing pile of sand, comparing it to his. Jimmy was first to break the silence with the words “ya learn lots out here Aunt, not talkin’, just listening to the birds and stuff.” Jimmy called me Aunt this day (a profound sign of respect among Aboriginal people), reminding me of a previous conversation we had had with the other boys, when Adrian asked me “You Aboriginal Miss?”, to which I replied “No, I’m not.” I was challenged and also deeply saddened (as a teacher) by Adrian’s response: “But *you’re* listening to *us*.” ... “Usually only Aboriginal people take any notice of *me* and what *I* have to say.”

I am not Aboriginal. I am a White Anglo-Celtic woman who grew up in rural New South Wales Australia with Aboriginal people as my relations, my neighbours, my best friends, my school peers and after entering the education profession, my colleagues and inspiration to be a better teacher. In their own way, each of these Aboriginal people taught me cultural humility, and the importance of recognising cultural bias and my own latent white privilege. Learning to listen openly and dialogically is a matter of ethics, and critical since it was only in 2017, in the *Uluru statement from the heart*, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples collectively and representatively sought to speak, be listened to and be heard (National Constitutional Convention, 2017). Now as an educational researcher I continue the search for becoming a better teacher and researcher as the educational world grapples with the shifting sands of uncertainty concerning what living well in a world worth living in means—especially for Australian Aboriginal youth.

In this chapter, I explore ways a praxis-orientation informs research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners and what this means for enabling, legitimising

¹ All names in the chapter are pseudonyms to preserve anonymity in line with research ethics protocols.

² The Bora ground (or known as the Bora ring by Tirkandi Inaburra participants) is cleared land designed as an *Aboriginal ceremonial place*. These grounds are important cultural spaces where initiation and celebration ceremonies are performed and are often used as meeting places among Aboriginal people or tribes. A Bora ground most commonly consists of two circles marked by raised earth banks and connected by a pathway. One of the rings would have been for everyone—uninitiated men, women and children (for more details see www.aboriginalheritage.org/sites/identification/).

and centralising cultural voice, identity and agency among Aboriginal youth. The chapter focuses on my own experience as an educational researcher with Aboriginal³ males at risk of entering the juvenile justice system, and shaped by the words from the extract from 14-year-old Jimmy's poem called *Sand Through My Fingers* (presented in full later in the chapter). The chapter aims to draw out two main points: first, to consider what is at stake in education for Australian Aboriginal students through a fresh analysis of research data about schooling gathered in a two-year ethnographic study listening to Aboriginal youth voices and visions; and, second, to consider research methods with vulnerable and marginalised Aboriginal people (here, adolescent Aboriginal males encountering the oppressive structures of institutions such as Western education and the juvenile justice system) and the connection to a taking praxis-oriented stance in educational research.

The chapter returns to previous research studying the perspectives and experiences of school of male Aboriginal youth (see article published with Wiradjuri Elder Colleen Murray: Edwards-Groves with Murray, 2008). I come back to this study (its methods and findings) with a renewed sense of urgency as concerns about supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners to reach their potential endure in contemporary Australian education and society. In Australia, supporting Aboriginal learners to have a strong sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal identity that enable them to manage their emotional, mental, cultural, spiritual, and physical wellbeing was identified as a key goal of the Alice Springs (*Mparntwe*) Education Declaration (Commonwealth of Australia, 2019, p.16). This is a critical remit for the practices of Australian educators, policymakers and researchers alike. As Keddie (2012, pp. 329–330) noted:

Creating culturally inclusive schooling environments for Indigenous students is a fraught and difficult task for educators. Dominant practice continues to deploy cultural reductionism where Indigeneity tends to either be unproblematically celebrated and exalted or denigrated and inferiorised against a white middle class normative frame. The urgency of creating more productive and sophisticated strategies for addressing issues of cultural recognition is clear in the enduring disenfranchisement of Indigenous peoples.

Although public and educational policy⁴ over the years have made varying attempts to redress lower levels of engagement and success of Aboriginal students (compared with all students) in school and in society, issues concerning the voice, identity and agency of young Indigenous people remain as challenges, and even

³ In this chapter, after seeking advice from Wiradjuri woman Sue Green and Barkindji woman Deb Evans, I use the term *Aboriginal* to refer to the First Nations or Indigenous youth participants in the research. This is the term the Aboriginal youth participants used to refer to themselves. I acknowledge that in current contexts across the globe there is a shift towards using 'First Nations Peoples of Australia and the Torres Strait' or 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' in mainstream social, political, educational, and cultural policy, and research literature.

⁴ See for example, Closing the Gap (Council of Australian Governments, 2008; Commonwealth of Australia, 2018); The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (Education Council, 2015); The Alice Springs (*Mparntwe*, pronounced M-ban tua) Education Declaration (2019).

barriers, for participatory equity in schooling. This includes the challenges of Aboriginal youths' participation in research about matters that directly concern them—their heritage, their education and their futures.

It is not the intention here to review the extensive body of literature advocating or critiquing particular pedagogies or policies for the improvement of the educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. Rather, the intention is to draw attention to ways the youth-centred, socially and culturally-responsive research methods (Edwards-Groves & Murray, 2008; Hayton, 2020; Obamehinti, 2010) used in the study facilitated and supported youth participation, where eliciting the voices of these particular Aboriginal people in the research project was valued and prioritised. As Maguire (2005, p. 3) said, young people

... have good social radar for assessing the situations and contexts in which they find themselves. Thus children's perspectives and voices are important signifiers of their conceptualisations of the situatedness of their learning, their interests, needs and perceptions.

Attention to youth voice is not new (Cook-Sather, 2002; Council of Australian Governments (COAG), 2008; Fielding, 2004; Fielding & Bragg, 2003; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2003; Macfarlane, 2004), but in this chapter I shift the focus to what this means for Aboriginal youth. A key purpose is to offer a renewed understanding of the critical importance of listening to and responding to Aboriginal voices as portrayed through the creative media—poetry and photography—employed in this study. In this study, the visual and written modes are anchored in both expressive and receptive modes of communicating (Thomson, 2008). What this multimodality means for the development, conduct and dissemination of the research presented in this chapter, forms an integral touchpoint for making sense of the artefacts—the images and poems—created by the Aboriginal youth participants themselves. Critical in research conducted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, is the matter of ethics involving the negotiation and consultation processes for explicitly preserving Aboriginal knowledge, ownership, cultural integrity, individual agency and autonomy (Barney, 2013; Harrison, 2003; Keddie, 2012; Philip & Trudgett, 2014). In this study, this meant repositioning the youth participants to be the authority of their own experience rather than have them lose their voice to the researcher (Harrison, 2003).

Creative media of poetry composition and photography were employed as participatory practices in the study with the intention to elicit the perspectives and experiences of schooling among the group of young Aboriginal males. The reciprocity between the processes and outcomes of these methods (described subsequently) is highlighted in researcher-participant conversations provoked by, and generative of, these creative media. The multimodal approach positioned the young Aboriginal people as the generators of information, the composers of creative texts and the drivers of conversations. As producers and co-producers of knowledge their voices and visions, cultural sensitivities, identity and agency were privileged, resulting in their creative responses informing understandings about what a world worth living in means to them as individuals and for the communities they live in. For these young

people, this meant understanding their self-worth, self-awareness, culture, personal identity and agency that influences their everyday lives.

The chapter begins with a position statement related to culture and practice; this is followed by a brief overview of the initial study. The next section describes in detail three multimodal creative research practices used in the research: *photointerviews*, the *walk-and-talk* and the poetry composition strategy *think-me-a-poem*. Empirical examples are provided as exemplars of the data gathered in the study. The ideas about multimodality as an intergenerational intercultural bridge are then discussed in relation to conducting youth-centred, culturally site-responsive research as accounting for contemporary textual practices of today's youth. Following this is a brief section on praxis-oriented research, which foregrounds the conclusions for the chapter that propose the research methods used in this study, and described in this chapter, emerged as a positive formative and transformative practice. The final word is expressed in the poetry of 12-year-old Aboriginal male, Adrian.

Culture as Practice: Prefatory Remarks

In a chapter presenting research with Aboriginal youth, care must be given to address the predicament of culture (Clifford, 1988), that is to consider the understanding and use of the term *culture*. This caution is particularly important since its prevalence in much educational professional and research literature represents the term as a noun; that is, more narrowly and statically “as synonymous with *ambience*, *climate* or *spirit*” (Brice Heath & Street, 2008, p. 7). Rather the standpoint taken in this chapter is a more dynamic anthropological view that “culture never just ‘is’, but instead ‘does’” (Thornton, 1988, p. 26; Philip & Trudgett, 2014). Therefore, as a preliminary consideration I turn to Street’s (1993) proposal that culture be treated as a verb rather than as a noun which reflects overtones of culture and so cultural identity, as being a fixed thing. Instead, Street’s “idea of *culture-as-verb*” (Brice Heath & Street, 2008, p. 7) takes as axiomatic the notion that culture as practice—and its associated discourses, activities and interactions—is living, dynamic and moving.

This position aligns closely with the principles of the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) that insists that practices are comprised of what *happens* in places at particular historical times (then and now) through sayings, doings and relating amid influential conditions delineated as cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements. The term “culture” figures prominently in the theory of practice architectures in its consideration of ways *cultural-discursive* arrangements are formative influential conditions that shape how practices happen in the everyday. On this view, culture unfolds in practices, that is, the sayings, doings and relating that happen in every day-to-day activity and experience of people. Culture (in languages, objects, activities and interpersonal and environmental relational architectures) is deeply rooted in history, since practices in their making (their

happeningness then and there at any given time) are always prefigured by practices of the past.

Background: The Study

The initial two-year ethnographic study examined the perceptions and experiences of school by male Aboriginal youth *at risk*⁵ of entering the juvenile justice system. The youths, aged between 12 and 16 years, were from inland rural communities in New South Wales (NSW) Australia, and attended the short-term residential centre Tirkandi Inaburra⁶ Cultural and Development Centre (Tirkandi). With family and community support, Tirkandi participants come voluntarily to the centre. Each participant generally comes with complex family histories and often has experienced exposure to violence, death, abuse, poverty, and drug and alcohol addiction (through personal experience as victims or as witnesses).

Tirkandi was established in 2006 on a culturally relevant site at Coleambally in the Riverina region of NSW as an intervention initiative of local Wiradjuri Elders for Aboriginal youth who show potential for educational and post-school success but are at risk of entering the criminal justice system. At the time, the development of Tirkandi was supported by local Elders, the NSW Attorney General's Department, the NSW Department of Education and NSW Health as a response to the 10-year review of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody (launched in 1987), the statistically significant increase of youth suicide among males, and the documented over-representation of Aboriginal males in the criminal justice system. It was designed to provide at risk Aboriginal adolescent males with an opportunity to participate in strengths-based culturally appropriate educational, cultural, social and personal programmes. Local Aboriginal Elders, along with other members of community, are involved as *teachers* in developing and implementing Tirkandi's programmes, and regular on-site schooling is provided with classroom teachers through the NSW Department of Education and Training. At the time of the study, after "graduation" the young people return to their communities and mainstream school with an exit support programme relying on local Elders, a school sponsor and a community mentor.

⁵ Long before the inception of Tirkandi Inaburra Cultural and Development Centre, local Wiradjuri Elders and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members were concerned about the high numbers of local Aboriginal male youth in their communities participating in or witnessing risky or criminal behaviours—these young people were considered at risk of entering the justice system. It was considered that many of these young people had potential to 'turn their lives around' if some form of cultural and educational intervention was designed as an opportunity for those young people and their families to participate in such a program. The impetus for the program at Tirkandi Inaburra Culture and Development Centre (opened in 2006) was driven and co-designed by local Wiradjuri Elders.

⁶ The name *Tirkandi Inaburra* means "to learn to dream" in the Wiradjuri language.

The Project Design

The initial project design (including data collection, time schedules and analytic approaches), was developed in consultation with Wiradjuri Elder Colleen Murray (also the Centre Manager of Tirkandi at the time). Any variations to the approved processes were negotiated with Colleen Murray and the Aboriginal youth (Tirkandi) participants. Ethics approval was sought and provided by Charles Sturt University in March 2006. An important consideration in this study was the preservation of Aboriginal youth knowledge that was written and articulated through their words (poetry and interview responses); this was prioritised at all stages of the research process (Barney, 2013; Philip & Trudgett, 2014). All data (poetry, interview transcripts and photographs) remained the property of Tirkandi and each respective Aboriginal youth participant and was used with permission. Any manuscripts and presentations for dissemination were negotiated, discussed and confirmed with Tirkandi (Colleen and the participants).⁷

Conducting research *on* people is a common criticism dominating much research involving the young, marginalised and Indigenous people across the world (Brice Heath & Street, 2008). Thus, reinterpreting the value of youth-centred research methods for prioritising participant youth voice and participation is critical in an attempt to diminish generational, social and cultural barriers. This requires deliberate moves to shift the power balance by “respond[ing] to the enduring concern for youth to be more participative in the educational, research and policy decisions that govern the places in which they spend their young lives” (Groundwater-Smith, 2017, p. 119), particularly in research conducted with more vulnerable peoples. With young people, this can be accomplished through the careful and strategic use of creative contemporary methods that intend to “invest them with greater agency” (Rudduck et al., 1996), but at the same time “resist the constant pull for ‘tokenism’, ‘faddism’ or ‘manipulative incorporation’” (Fielding, 2004, p. 296). Such moves have twofold benefits—affording possibilities for enabling and illuminating participant voice in transformative ways, and enabling ethically-considered orientations towards praxis in educational research (Fielding, 2004; Groundwater-Smith, 2017). Furthermore, encouraging voluntary participation through the deliberative employment of youth-centred approaches to data generation, counters and supports the resolution of ethical issues such as harm, power, coercion and a compromised sense of agency (Barney, 2013; Brice Heath & Street, 2008).

⁷ Note, as part of the ethical compliance, consultation was sought with Aboriginal colleagues and family members about aspects of Aboriginal cultural referred to in the writing; drafts were shared and feedback accommodated in revised drafts.

Securing Aboriginal Youth Participation Through Multimodal Data Sources

Creative multimodal research methods, described in the next section, were employed to provide contemporary, socially acceptable and appropriate approaches for promoting youth appeal, and the currency necessary for securing and maintaining youth engagement in the research (Rainford, 2020). Using poetry and prose as important tools for elevating the voices of vulnerable Aboriginal peoples was reported by Keddie (2012), whose case study of girls and women (aged 12–28 years, mostly identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander) at Gamarada High School (Australia) found creative media provided a platform for diverse and marginalised Aboriginal people to respond to hierarchies and asymmetries of power. In her study, Keddie (2012, p. 10) showed the potential of poetry and prose as transformative media for individuals to account for personal experiences of domination and subservience. Responding to oppressive hierarchies through their words positively promoted the girls' cultural integrity, agency and autonomy (Keddie, 2012).

In another example, Hayton's (2020) ethnographic research investigating youth perspectives and experiences of cyberbullying sought to disrupt participatory barriers for research involving youth from a diverse range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds—including migrant, Anglo-Saxon and Aboriginal youth from rural and urban settings. In her study, Hayton found that as well as more typical use of focus groups and interviews, the use of contemporary socially-relevant communicative "multimodal" methods such as blogging, Facebooking[®], videoing, texting, messaging and narrative writing to "share and rewrite their stories of cyberbullying" shifted the power balance towards the youth participants. As she found, these youth-centred youth-driven approaches emerged as important participatory and agentic methods which also provided both formational and transformational outcomes for those involved since the research was conducted *with* and *by* the participants rather than *on* them.

In 3-year longitudinal collective case studies of immigrant children, Compton-Lilly et al. (2017) drew on a range of multimodal data sources including observations, spoken data and student-created artefacts (e.g., writing samples, maps, photographs, drawings) to explore identity construction. Their cases revealed intersectional networks of identity negotiation that entailed positionings relative to various dimensions of self, including language, gender, technological practices, nationality and race. As Compton-Lilly et al. (2017) concluded, multimodal approaches to data gathering and analysis facilitate new possibilities for attending to the identity negotiations on the part of young learners from different cultural backgrounds in ways that revealed sophisticated, agential and strategic identity negotiations. Multimodal data sources, explained next, formed an integral part of the study presented in this chapter.

Data Collection as Multimodal On-Country⁸ Site-Responsive Practice

The approach developed in the study was culturally site-responsive research which recognised culture and Country as central to the research process, and used the cultural standpoint of the researched as a framework for research design, data collection and data interpretation (Obamehinti, 2010). This also meant considering social (including generational and gender implications) and cultural background in terms of the contemporary social positioning of the participants (Ober & Bat, 2007)—that is, that these Aboriginal people were adolescent youth familiar with and immersed in Western schooling, social technologies and contemporary popular culture (including sport, art and music). Importantly the recursiveness of the research process (frequent visits⁹ over the 2-year period), participant agency in the form of young adolescent males taking photographs of their choosing and the conduct of focus groups stimulated by these photographs was an important way not to single out individual students, something about which Aboriginal students are reported to be particularly sensitive (Russell, 1999). In this study, after time, some participants were comfortable to lead a *walk-and-talk* conversation on-Country¹⁰ with the researcher.

Over the 2-year course of the ethnography, a range of qualitative data-gathering methods were employed involving 17 Aboriginal male youth (aged 12–15 years) participants. These data included participant-generated photographs that informed audio-recorded semi-structured focus group *photointerviews* (also described as photovoice or photo-elicitation interviews); co-produced poetry (processes described subsequently); video-recorded classroom lesson observations, leisure activities and cultural programmes; anecdotal field notes recording informal *walk-and-talk* conversations and discussions with participants during researcher observations of classroom lessons; and interviews with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal classroom teachers. The data sources formed multiple modes of communicating participant meanings including oral, written and visual media, creating varying and widened the semantic scope for intersubjective meaning-making.

⁸ The use of the hyphen in the phrase ‘on-Country’ is a deliberate linguistic device to represent the important connections between individuals and place—Aboriginal people and the lands upon which they live and pass through; this is a significant feature of Wiradjuri Aboriginal culture.

⁹ The frequency of visits varied depending on the stage of the research and other cultural and school-related activities at Tirkandi; this meant at times there might have been a month between visits or a day. During the first few weeks of the study, visits were made more regularly (at least 3 days per week) in the effort to build familiarity and trust – particularly since I am a White older female in a position of power (a teacher and researcher). No data were collected during this time.

¹⁰ In this chapter, the term ‘on-Country’ was coined to refer to ways place in the research (after Tuck & McKenzie, 2015) was informed by the youth participants (then and there). As such the research practices were derived of as ‘on-Country’ and the term tightly connects to a site-ontological (site-based) approach necessary for recognising and understanding in critical ways the experiences of these young Aboriginal males. Each participant was on their own Indigenous lands—here Wiradjuri country in New South Wales, Australia, and so on-Country (their country).

In this chapter, I focus on three of these interrelated data-collection methods which formed the unique on-Country approach to data collection: *photointerviews*, the *walk-and-talk* and poetry composition using the strategy called *think-me-a-poem*.

Multimodal Intersubjective Meaning-Making

Photointerviews

Photointerviews is a qualitative participatory visual method developed to facilitate participant agency and engagement in research among this vulnerable group of Aboriginal youth (Edwards-Groves, 2006; Edwards-Groves & Murray, 2008). In the study each participant was provided with a disposable camera (24 exposures) for the purposes of taking photographs—over a period of about a week—of objects, places, activities and people that captured what they considered to be supportive of and important to their learning. The sets of participant-generated photos (totalling over 300 images, some shown in this chapter) were printed for use in focus groups as a stimulus for conversations about their meaning(s) as seen through the eyes of the individual *photographers*. Photos were kept by participants unless permission for additional use by the researcher was approved by them.¹¹

Participants selected up to five of their favourite photos to bring stimulus and direction to the focus group conversations. In the focus group, participants were invited to select and then talk about one of their photos, describing what it meant to them, and why they thought what was happening in the photo helped them, supported them, they liked doing, and so on. General non-evaluative prompts were offered by the researcher; for example—tell us more about that idea; say some more about this part; you said (this), can you talk about that some more; does what (name) said remind you of a photo you took (and then others looked at their photo array and if one was similar, they could add in their thoughts). For instance, when Adrian presented a photo (Fig. 6.1) from his collection, he spoke about how good it was to be trusted with the saw to cut his branch for the didge-making as referred to by the participants (making didgeridoos, a richly resonating traditional Aboriginal musical instrument); then added:

...at school we are not given responsibilities—jobs like the other kids, those things always go to the others... anyway I think I am dumb and stupid ‘coz I am not as good as the others, I’m not even trusted with taking notes to the office...

Jimmy added (as he got out a similar photo that he had taken in the Mallee lands cutting a branch for making his own didgeridoo):

¹¹ Permission was given by participants to use all images in this chapter.

Fig. 6.1 Adrian's photograph of cutting a branch for didge-making



I learn best when I am doing practical stuff like this [*pointing to his own photo taken in the Mallee*], I like it when we are ‘doing’ things, like art and D&T and PE.¹² I like going and looking at things, doing it that way, and then talking about them].

Jimmy continued (as he sorted through his set of photos to find Fig. 6.2 of fishing in the Murrumbidgee River with the youth workers):

Here at Tirkandi, the teachers recognise our abilities and take the time to show us how to do things and we talk about things more; I can go slower, then I can get it.

Dally then interrupted to add:

Back at school, teachers only teach the kids who already can do it; not me, I have trouble with reading and maths. They always tell me “We’ve done that already, why weren’t you listening”, or “I’ve already told you.”

Adrian, at this point, took back the floor to continue speaking, as he sorted through to find a photo (Fig. 6.3) of him playing the didgeridoo he had made and painted:

I like learning that I was good at something like art, playing the guitar and the didgeridoo... I am gonna keep trying and keep going as I want to be a teacher of my culture and tradition to all people even the teachers...

It is important to note that the substance of the photographs mainly captured images of the young people doing activities together—such as sitting by the fire, playing basketball, cooking, fishing at the river, on excursions to find Mallee or Box Tree eucalyptus branches hollowed by termites for their didgeridoo-making, their totems (Fig. 6.4), on the Tirkandi Bora ring, with the youth workers and Elders, with a few images taken of me, Auntie Liz and of one of the teachers.

The method was adapted from *photovoice* or *photo novella*, an approach developed and predominantly used in community-based participatory health research seeking to

¹² D & T is a common abbreviation for a high school subject Design and Technology; PE refers to the school subject Physical Education.

Fig. 6.2 Jimmy's photograph of fishing in the Murrumbidgee River



Fig. 6.3 Adrian's photograph of playing the didgeridoo



document and reflect the realities of marginalised, vulnerable or troubled participants, and generally used as standalone data for digital storytelling and/or analysis (e.g., Strack et al., 2004; Wang & Burris, 1997). It has been modified for participatory research within Canadian First Nation communities (Castelton et al., 2008) and refugee communities in rural Australia (Major et al., 2013). In this study, photo taking was a technique that accompanied the photo-elicitation interviews that allowed

Fig. 6.4 Photograph of totems designed and painted by Tirkandi participants



participants more control of the conversation as they spoke about their own individual perspectives and meanings of the images they captured (Edwards-Groves & Murray, 2008).

Walk-and-Talk

Walk-and-talk was developed in this study as an unstructured interactive research practice also intended to facilitate participant agency and engagement through creating practice architectures for *small openings* for more informal, casual conversational spaces with individual participants if they choose. My researcher/educator intuition at the time of the study, sensed the need for a *shift in scenery* in a responsive and principled move to support some individual's hesitancy (including at times Adrian, Dally and Jimmy), who, although they indicated their willingness and desire to participate, seemed to be holding reservedly onto their perspectives/comments. The shift of scene and activity ultimately afforded a dynamic yet finely calibrated technology for participation.



Fig. 6.5 Photograph of the Bora ground at Tirkandi

As Kral (2007) argued, it is the researcher's role to create responsive conditions for their research participants to feel comfortable and secure, so children and youth are able to, in their oral tellings, comfortably convey personal and interpersonal stresses and tensions. The rationale was that by opening less official communicative spaces (here outside the regular focus group interview) through this activity I described as a *walk-and-talk* (talking while walking) in/around/to a location selected by the participant, a *safe* space for them to open-up and speak more freely about delicate, sensitive and private issues was created (see e.g., Russell, 1999). Its general intention emerged as responsive to the circumstances at the time and illustrates the need for research practices, in their enactment, to overtly signal, establish, demonstrate and preserve respect for each individual's vulnerabilities, and personal and cultural sensitivities. For example, after some time (weeks) Jimmy took me on-Country to sit on one of the logs that surrounded the Bora ground at Tirkandi (Fig. 6.5).

Metaphorically, one door closed and another one opened—since these localised, spontaneous and more personal conversational walk-and-talk interviews generated an *accidental* creative benefit—the generation of poetry. The substance and discursive nature of the walk-and-talk became the inspiration for the production of jointly constructed poetry described next.

Think-me-a-Poem

Think-me-A-poem¹³ is a literacy strategy used to facilitate poetry composition about aspects of nature, the senses, memories, or sensitive experiences. In this research, the idea to co-opt the *think-me-a-poem* strategy emerged spontaneously during a *walk-and-talk* conversation (with Jimmy), as a way to integrate ideas, information and insights individuals had generated in the *photointerviews* (which had been audio-recorded and transcribed) and the *walk-and-talk* (Edwards-Groves, 2006). Through the prism of my experiences as a literacy educator, I quickly realised the potential for adapting the strategy for use with these young Aboriginal males (who generally did not consider they were “good at school, or reading and writing” as said by both Jimmy and Adrian) as a strategic approach to promote their confidence and a sense of accomplishment (in literacy). I also capitalised on knowing that this group of youth liked the poetry of rap music (its rhythm, delivery and beat) and related to the discourses and sentiments it typified (particularly among marginalised groups analogous to their own). Therefore, as a responsive move the creative medium of poetry-making arose as a participatory agentic research practice that solidified the formation and acceptance of their Aboriginal youth voices, cultural sensitivities, identity and agency.

The interactive writing process involved working with individual participants to:

1. discuss the specific key ideas they had spoken about in the *photointerviews* (each looking at the transcript excerpts I had made of their comments) and recorded in field notes during the *walk-and-talk*;
2. use a coloured highlighter to mark and emphasise particular words or isolate phrases to which they assigned particular relevance, major significance or special interest;
3. organise the ideas into themes or coherently linked messages through further discussion, for example: racism, their desires, being at Tirkandi, school, Elders, cultural practices, learning, respect, etc.;
4. settle on a focus and structure as together we wrote a draft of a poem aligned with a theme/idea they preferred (my role at this point depended on the individual and shifted between advisor, scribe, editor and typist);
5. to decide which words, phrases and lines in a draft poem could/should be repeated in the stanza to evoke effect—these decisions were largely determined by the individuals (care was taken not to take control of the texts); and

¹³ *Think-me-a-poem* is a free verse approach to composing poetry using the written form familiar to me as a literacy teacher; it:

- does not usually rhyme,
- does not have a set structure,
- makes strategic use of repetition of words, imagery, phrases or lines,
- is usually written about aspects of nature, the senses, memories or sensitive experiences, and
- may have rhythm to appeal to its readers. (Adapted from Wing Jan, 2009, p. 268).

6. to “publish” final drafts of the pieces of poetry (at this stage I typed up some of the poems for convenience); these were then read, shared and displayed.

This poem, “Sand through my fingers” is one example of a final published text.

The sand through my fingers

By Jimmy (14 years)

On my Country, I sit

The sand trickles through my fingers teaching me to look, to learn, to listen, to think, to accept my difference

I learn and I want to learn
 I listen and I want to listen
 I think and I want to think
 I am different and I want to be different
 I succeed and I want to succeed
 I paint and I want to paint.

I learn
 I learn my culture,
 I learn the music, the rhythm and the sounds.

I listen
 I listen to my Elders,
 I learn to listen, listen to my Country.

I think
 I think about things
 I just sit in my quiet place and think back.

I succeed
 I succeed because I can do it and I know it
 My abilities are recognised.

I paint;
 I paint Wiradjuri, x-ray and lines,
 I paint my totem, my place.

I am different
 Difference is mad,
 I am different and I am Aboriginal.

On my Country, I sit

The sand trickles through my fingers teaching me to look, to learn, to listen, to think, to accept my difference

I learn and I want to learn
 I listen and I want to listen
 I think and I want to think
 I am different and I want to be different
 I succeed and I want to succeed
 I paint and I want to paint.

So, as the sand trickles through my fingers I look, I learn, I listen, I think, I accept my difference

On my Country, I sit

Jimmy's words in this poem convey an important message of positivity and hope gained from being on Country at Tirkandi and being with and learning from Elders and recognisably shaping his identity, agency and culture. These words are set in contrast to the words he spoke about in the focus group which gave him the forum to speak about racism and difference (highlighted words were marked by Jimmy as we were engaged in the drafting process):

I hate racism... that's when people don't respect you, they swear at ya' and make fun of ya' because you are black, because you're Aboriginal... people swearing at me all the time, fighting with me... I hate it...

people don't understand what I have got to go through, my family stuff, and that I have had to look after myself, live with violence, drugs and alcohol and abuse all my life...

it will take courage to say 'no' to the kids that always try to get us into trouble, but I think I can do it...

it was good to learn about the importance of the land...

learning about our culture and traditions helps us to understand ourselves more; what it was like for our family years ago and why Aboriginal people did some things like the dances to tell a story and that it was good to learn about the art, it is mad...

and symbolised in his poem "Difference".

Difference

By Jimmy

Difference

I am different
 Everything is different
 Everything changes
 Everyone's not supposed to be the same
 Difference is 'gnarly'

Racism

It is hard
 Growing up with racism
 It is hard

People swear, swear at you
 Try to get us into trouble
 It is because I am Aboriginal

Darkness

It is dark
 There is anger, violence, sadness
 They don't know what it is like.

It is angry, red and dark
 Serious, dull and black;
 Grey, indigo and purple

I am sad for them; they don't know what it is like.

Happiness

It is bright, it is here and now

Learning;

Learning traditional things, my culture
 sharing with my Nan and Pop

Exciting;

Bubbling in my stomach
 It is fun; green, blue and scarlet

Courage;

Walking away;
 going to a quiet place inside
 It is gently and smooth, calm and relaxing

Difference

I am different
 Everything is different
 Everything changes
 Everyone's not supposed to be the same
 Difference is 'gnarly'

It seemed evident that the methods described in this section—the *photointerviews*, the *walk-and-talk* conversations and the *think-me-a-poem* strategy—when integrated as they were in this study formed grounds for the kind of relationship building necessary for conducting research with more vulnerable, marginalised people. At the same time, the use of contemporary creative approaches shifted the power balance between the researcher and the participants in ways that privileged their visions and their voices—their ideas, information and insights—displayed in creative multimodal representations. The approaches positioned these Aboriginal youth as resourceful, confident participants (Moje, 2002), reframing the possibilities for intersubjective meaning-making in positive and generative ways.

Shifting Sands: Multimodality as an Intergenerational, Intercultural Bridge

Scholars Shirley Brice Heath and Brian Street (2008) in their book discussing ethnographic approaches for studying language, culture and learning, present reports from Aboriginal Elders who recognise that “although old sand-stories are still alive, the young ‘know different’, for their sense of what is ‘alive’ and ‘relevant’ for them is not the same as that of their parents and grandparents” (Brice Heath & Street, 2008, p. 16). In the central desert of Australia, for example, telling stories while drawing in the sand is a traditional cultural practice (Eickelkamp, 1999; Kral, 2007). Stories in this context have long centred on ancient creation stories, hunting and gathering practices, and family and land connections. Yet, the contemporary realities for the young—like those in this study—along with rapid and far-reaching disruptions to traditional patterns and family structures, have come new representational mediums and modes of communicating.

In a recent study, Hayton (2020) suggested that simply advocating for and valorising youth voice is not enough to promote cultural recognition, preservation of cultural identity and knowledge and change. Such approaches fall short of ethical conduct of research with Aboriginal, culturally diverse or marginalised people. A researcher’s *good* intentions, perspectives, practices and analyses are always subject to cultural bias, ethical oversights, and latent agendas, and must rightly be questioned to avoid being considered highly tokenistic and unethical (Trudgett, 2013). As Thomson (2008, p. 4) recognised,

voice is not only about having a say, but also refers to the language, emotional components and non-verbal means used to express opinions. Undertaking research which attends to voice thus means listening to things that are unsaid and/or not what we expect.

Recruiting youth voice in research means “breaking down the traditional barriers for those denied power” (Groundwater-Smith, 2017, p. 119). On this view, youth agency through voice and advocacy in the development, conduct and dissemination of culturally *and* socially appropriate research is a praxis-oriented imperative for the ethical conduct of youth research.

In new times, as Kral (2007) demonstrated, there is a distinctive shift in how Australian Aboriginal children and youth use new media technologies to communicate their messages and to tell their stories, and in doing so, “Elders see the children as continuing the ancient practice of storytelling and sand-drawing and therefore believe ‘the tradition’ remains” (Brice Heath & Street, 2008, p. 16). This suggests that multimodal data-collection methods with Aboriginal youth create a promising intergenerational, intercultural, interpersonal bridging space. This space makes possible the formation of relational architectures which disrupt power differentials and the interactive barriers that continue to restrict participatory equity for young Aboriginal people (Edwards-Groves & Murray, 2008). Supporting these youth to successfully negotiate the ties between traditional and contemporary practices and across generational, cultural and social spaces amidst ever-shifting sands of society is critical. This requires the genuine and honest access to their ideas, information and insights that

are afforded by the kinds of multimodal technologies available to the youth of today, making some inroads into ultimately changing the experiences and perspectives of the racialised marginalised other (Burnett, 2004).

Poetry composition, photography and walking on Country formed participatory agentic research practices that brought together Aboriginal youth voices, cultural sensitivities, identity and agency through valuing “collaborative conversations” (Njkinja woman and scholar Jeannie Herbert, personal communication) and these creative mediums. The multimodal research methods widened the affordances for the participants to engage in the processes and amplified sure-footedness for the participants. The visual and voice focus formed creative methods for contemporary youth-centred research at the same time as recognising the ways dynamic, creative, sensory modes form representations important for illuminating youth voice. Although the communication mode may have changed with new practices, the substance and message may not have. Simply put by Hutchins (1995), “humans, more than any other species, spend their time producing symbolic structures and representations for making sense of and sharing meanings with one another” (p. 370). By creating conditions or practice architectures for a rich process of joint meaning-making, an intergenerational, intercultural bridging space was established to support these young men to locate, negotiate and mediate their Aboriginal identity in intersectional, intergenerational and intercultural ways (Chisholm & Olinger, 2017; Commonwealth of Australia 2019; Compton-Lilly et al., 2017). The opportunities for listening, talking, viewing, composing and sensing emerged as practices that responded to and recognised the human needs of this group of participants. This, I argue, is praxis-oriented research.

Living Praxis in and for Research

Research practice does not occur in a vacuum, but within social, cultural, political and material conditions and circumstances influenced by practice architectures that enable and constrain what happens. Thus, it is inescapable that matters of research ethics attend, in principled praxis-oriented ways, to how researchers and research participants engage in the practices of research. This means considering matters from informed consent to the actual research practices unfolding temporally. In reality, research practices can always reciprocally enable and constrain practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014), and so the question of research praxis arises, alerting us to a researcher’s ethical responsibility to be responsive to the individual needs and site-based circumstances at the time (Groundwater-Smith, 2017; Kral, 2007; Obamehinti, 2010).

Understanding research from a praxis stance considers the theoretical, ethical, technical and practical perspectives of research which simultaneously shapes the language, activity and relationships in the conduct of the study itself (Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2015). In this study, it was evident that changing the practice architectures in response to the circumstances at the time changed the researcher’s

and participants' practices in the research. For example, the change of physical space to include the walk-and-talk as a response to some participants' hesitation to speak openly in the focus group made it possible for the co-production and publication of poetry. This material-economic condition simultaneously influenced the social-political and cultural-discursive arrangements that influenced how this research unfolded in real time. It was a move which made different sayings (words expressed in poetry, thinking and communicating experiences), doings (walking and talking, using cameras to take photos, co-writing) and relating (researcher-participant collaborating in poetry writing, stronger relationships developing) come into being. This shift in practice was the right thing to do at the time—it could be described as being reflective of a praxis stance. As Groundwater-Smith (2017, p. 18) reflected,

In effect, praxis becomes a form of communicative action through which participants seek to read common understanding and form their actions through which reason, argument, consensus and cooperation as opposed to forms of strategic action that satisfies personal goals and aspirations (Habermas, 1984). Praxis is this necessarily achieved through public dialogue rather than as an individual and often implicit exercise of power.

The methods employed with this particular group of Aboriginal male youth reflected a praxis stance, where “the moral disposition to act wisely in the interests of the wellbeing of humanity and the good life and informed by long-standing traditions meant being sensitive to the needs and rights of all who participate in a particular research study” (Groundwater-Smith, 2017, p. 17). The particular research methods were adjusted and varied to emerge as site-based culturally-responsive practices. The moves described in earlier sections reflect the kind of disposition, judgment and action enacted in educational circumstances which can be evaluated only in the light of their consequences (this is, in terms of how things actually turn out) (Kemmis, et al., 2014)—here that the research became a transformative practice for those participants involved. Such a view insists that research practice is more than knowledge and technique but that it necessarily locates educational research as a human, and therefore social, endeavour with enduring ethical, moral, political and historical dimensions and consequences (Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2015; Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2008). Thus, in seeking to conduct research that balances academic rigour and political agendas with improving conditions for all people, responsiveness in research practice is crucial. This is necessary for preserving participant respect and agency set amidst the impediments of everyday realities of the human condition.

Research as Transformative Practice

In this study, participant words and images form powerful insights into the situated construction of agency and identity in everyday life, culture and learning among Aboriginal youth. Specifically, they show the complexity and deeply problematic

nature of how an individuals' lived experiences collide across social, political, material, linguistic, educational and cultural contexts. The use of the contemporary multi-modal research methods described in this chapter was found to afford practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) or enabling conditions for opening the communicative space between this group of vulnerable at-risk ordinarily less-than-confident Aboriginal young males to create and share, and the confidence to express their perspectives with me (the researcher). For these young people this experience was transformative, as 14-year-old Jimmy's comments illustrate:

I hated poetry, I didn't even think I could do it anyway, but when we did the 'think-me-a-poem' it was mad, coz' we talked about it, it was so good, I felt so proud that I could do something like that... it was like rapping.

The methods employed in the study were practice architectures that not only enabled and constrained the Aboriginal youth participants, but also signposted broader oppressive conditions that they navigated on a daily basis. The photointerviews, the walk-and-talk and the think-me-a-poem emerged as methods that facilitated opportunities for a genuine engagement and participation in the research in informative and transformative ways for both the participants and the researcher. The strong connection and generative reciprocity between testimony and creativity, and the methods that stimulated these, is illustrative of the ways the youth voices—through the power of their poetry (for example) flipped deficit discourses from their own perspectives (Dyson, 2015). Consequently, the cultural-discursive and social-political practices that influenced the possibilities and potentialities of these Aboriginal youth were transformed. Participant engagement through the production of creative artefacts (as data) leads to research lessons that reframe, for researchers, what should be accounted for in securing and supporting genuine open participation in youth-centred research. As such, not only must the research seek out genuine ways for youth voice to be centralised beyond tokenistic representations, but research must “be able to stand up to the scrutiny of both the field of practice and the academic community's expectation that it will be systematically undertaken and theoretically robust” (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2008, p. 81).

Considering the processes of generating and sharing meanings as a core motivation in educational research, the unique on-Country approach used in the study and reported in the chapter facilitated an openly dialogic, collaborative and agentic process for youth participation in research specifically concerning their worlds. As a priority, the research responded genuinely to “the need to build transparent and collaborative procedures that are justifiable and transformative in the making” (Groundwater-Smith, 2017, p. 14), research which was both formative and transformative for participants and researcher alike. Edwards-Groves and Murray (2008, p. 174) concluded that, to be transformative.

research must provide a genuine communicative space between researchers, educators and Aboriginal learners, a space which enables the student to be treated as a vital resource for knowledge building; this has the potential to create far-reaching changes to social relations with people in mainstream communities (p. 174).

This is nothing if not a critical move towards living well in a world worth living in.

To conclude, research of this kind with youth must be considered to be a socially constructed intergenerational, intercultural endeavour. The results of this study offer a new yardstick for repositioning these more vulnerable at-risk youth participants as knowledgeable co-producers in research by learning to listen and represent differently, as my colleague and friend, Njkinja woman Jeannie Herbert, consistently argued (personal communication). This is incontestably pressing for progressing education for Australian Aboriginal youth. Additionally, educational research practices whereby facilitating intersubjective meaning-making between young research participants like the Aboriginal youth in this study and the researcher is most desirable. Finally, if we are serious about understanding what living well in a world worth living in means from Aboriginal youth perspectives, then there is the irrefutable need to closely examine the methods and the opportunities that particular research methods enable and constrain.

The Final Words

...being here on Country we learn to listen and appreciate and respect our Elders and teachers...we learn by using our senses, by looking and talking about it, as well as listening...we go out to the scrub and learn about our culture and the land and the geography stuff and how they all relate to each other... then we can understand it, it makes sense when we have to read it in the books back at school. (Jimmy, 14 years)

For Jimmy, being on Country in the scrub makes sense—teaching him about the connections between land, self, culture and schooling—all held together by listening and respect by the Wiradjuri notion of *Yindyamarra*. His words show culture as practice in acknowledging the juxtaposition between voice, identity and agency and the situational and historical imaginings of Aboriginal culture and heritage—bringing to life Keith Basso’s words “wisdom sits in places” (1996). As Adrian, 12-year-old Tirkandi participant, told me “being here” (at Tirkandi on Wiradjuri land) is where “I was on the journey to respect, I journeyed to respect.” In many ways, Adrian’s comments, like Jimmy’s above, teaches us about *Yindyamarra Winhanganha*—in the Wiradjuri language, meaning “*the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in.*” As Wiradjuri Elder, Dr. Uncle Stan Grant Sr AM (Grant, cited in Sullivan & Grant, 2016, p. 91) said:

Yindyamarra has a big meaning for a little word, and it means so many different things. Not just respect other people, respect yourself, that’s what I keep wanting to push, you must respect yourself.

For these young Aboriginal people sitting on Wiradjuri Country where Tirkandi is situated, with sand sifting through their fingers, the power of their words, cultural artefacts and images emerged as powerful transformative resources for connecting to culture and to self, and to flourish, despite backgrounds of suppressed Aboriginal

identities previously demeaned by racism, ignorance, injustice and inequity. Their poetry, artworks and photographs—and the processes of creating and sharing enabled by the research—served as windows into how their cultural voice, identity and agency are socially-culturally-politically formed and transformed. The words in their poetry and photo-stimulated interview transcript excerpts are theirs alone. Their meanings are unique, authoritative, situated and given prominence (Harrison, 2003) in ways not clouded by a researcher’s (sometimes biased, sometimes uninformed) (mis)hearings or (mis)interpretations.

The present research study, through its praxis-oriented processes, became a transformative learning and participation practice for these young Aboriginal males as they opened up about their lives and experiences. Not only that, but they were listened to by a teacher who was taught by them. Implications of poetry and photography as tools for personal and collective activism, moved these Aboriginal youth into a resolutely transformative position. Opening up spaces for their Aboriginal youth voices to be communicated in a range of multimodal expressions afforded the opportunity for their voices to be raised, be heard, be appreciated—and show insight and vision, as Dally’s comment here reflects:

they [teachers and kids] don’t know about us and our culture so they ignore us...and anyway I think everyone should know more about Aboriginal people, even the teachers and the other kids...that’d make it better for everyone. (Dally)

The words of these Aboriginal youth form a collective voice to be taken account of in a world where their struggle for identity is real, as Dally (15 years) expressed:

I am too black to be white and too white to be black.

The poetry is a powerful testimony to the kind of cultural and social resilience needed for young Aboriginal people to take their place in the world—one that these Aboriginal youth, too, see as one worth living in.

It is fitting to finish with poetry from Adrian, a young man who in our first meeting said he “couldn’t do school, couldn’t read or write properly”, and wasn’t “trusted by teachers because they wouldn’t ask him to do a job like the other kids.” Adrian’s poem directs us to the hopeful and hope filled vision for *his* world—described in the video *Yindyamarra Yambuwan* by Sullivan (2016)—a world where his Aboriginality, his culture and his humanity is treated with acceptance and a deep sense of shared responsibility, honour and respect. This really would be a world worth living in.

An extract from My Voice: There and Here

by Adrian, 12 years

There...

You didn’t see me,

Look at me; really look me in the eyes

To listen, really listen

My hand went up,
 But you didn't see it and I got tired
 My hand got tired, my heart got tired
 and it hurt

When you gave up on me,
 I gave up on you and your teaching
 You ignored me,
 I was there but I was invisible

Here...

I journeyed to respect.
 I learnt to respect my Elders, my grandparents and my parents
 I learnt to respect myself. I am Aboriginal and I like it because I am.
 I will continue to learn, to respect

It will take strength and courage, but I don't want trouble;
 I will respect.

*mandaang guwu ngaagirri-dhu-nyal guwayu.*¹⁴

Acknowledgements I respectfully acknowledge the Aboriginal youth, now young men, involved in composing these stories through poetry and photographs in this project, and who taught me about perspective taking and listening differently to their stories about their educational experiences. To these young men I met at Tirkandi Inaburra on Wiradjuri lands I extend my deepest gratitude. Thanks to my gorgeous niece, Hannah Carroll, young Wiradjuri woman, who helped me out at times during the preparation of this chapter when I rang “to run something by her.” I also acknowledge and thank my Aboriginal friends and colleagues Jeannie Herbert AM, Njkinja woman, from Kimberly region in Western Australia, Wiradjuri woman Sue Green and Barkindji woman Deb Evans. I owe each of them a great intellectual, professional and personal debt.

Dedication

I dedicate the writing and sentiment of this chapter to my Wiradjuri family members (my lovely, kind and funny nephews and nieces); my best and long-time friend at school and next-door neighbour (in our schooling years) Wiradjuri woman Leonie Jones (along with her family where their Aboriginality was understood but not spoken about); and most of all my dad—who because of who he was, his actions and his spirit taught me to respect Aboriginal people in whatever I did and where ever I went.

¹⁴ *Mandaangu* is the Wiradjuri word meaning *thank you*. *ngaagirri-dhu-nyal guwayu* means *I will meet you in a little while, later or after some time*. Rather than “goodbye”, as in many Aboriginal languages there’s no simple way of saying goodbye in Wiradjuri. Traditionally, there was little use for such a term. The nearest word like that in Wiradjuri is *guwayu*.

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Chapter 7

Leading by Listening: Why Aboriginal Voices Matter in Creating a World Worth Living in



Catherine Burgess, Christine Grice, and Julian Wood

Abstract To live well in a world worth living in for all Australians, Aboriginal voices should be central to Australian schooling. This is a radical shift from the current education policy, where Aboriginal-informed knowledge, leadership, and practices are peripheral. Through the lens of the theory of practice architectures, this chapter proposes that Aboriginal leading practices differ from many taken-for-granted Western leadership practices. Aboriginal leading practices—founded on deep listening, reciprocity, and respect are key to creating a world worth living in for all in Australian schools. Our findings are supported by the Aboriginal Voices Project systematic review that discovered that intercultural, collective approaches to leading in schools are more effective than transformational leadership models, bringing shared power and authority through trusting collaborations with local Aboriginal communities. The Culturally Nourishing Schooling Project, emerging from this research, prioritises relationship-building practices grounded in Aboriginal community-led practices that support cultural identity, curriculum, pedagogy, and whole-school reform.

Keywords Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education · Aboriginal perspectives · educational leadership · culturally nourishing schooling · learning from Country

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Introduction

Leadership values,¹ understandings, and practices are not universal across cultures and contexts. Western notions of educational leadership pervade Australian schooling, where leadership is hierarchical and earned, and role-based respect is expected. By contrast, Aboriginal notions of leadership often focus on collective practice, and community visions of self-determination, governance, and agency that are inclusive of all. We believe that, to move towards a world worth living in for all, Australian schools need to be founded on deep listening and engagement with Aboriginal voices, and in a relationship with Country.² If school is a microcosm of society, to live well in the world of school is to create a world worth living in for all children, their families, and communities. An integral part of creating this is proposing an alternative view of leading practices and gathering empirical evidence that contests Western transformational leadership research.

This chapter uses the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014; for a brief introduction, see Chap. 2 in this volume) to explore how different kinds of arrangements in a site, which together form practice architectures, shape people's practices. We see leading as a practice. This perspective contrasts with a distanced systems approach to leadership, and with individualist and instrumentalist approaches. No longer focussed upon the subjective attributes of leaders, a focus on the practices of leading explores the "happeningness" of leading within a site (Wilkinson, 2020, p. 1). A practice perspective enables us to make sense of social interactions in schools and to understand what makes new practices possible. While we acknowledge that leaders in schools have role titles, these roles also bring with them a responsibility to learn and to work with community. At the same time, we see it as necessary that leading be a shared and respectful practice between students, teachers, Aboriginal Elders, and role-titled leaders. This is part of an essential practice of respecting and connecting with community. Aboriginal voice is enabled through these deep listening practices.

The theory of practice architectures also suggests how changed arrangements, in changed practice architectures, can transform practices. The literature of transformational leadership research has some merit in its determination to change circumstances and is often touted as a key factor in educational reform (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1999). The fundamental issue with transformational leadership that limits its capacity for success in Aboriginal contexts and therefore in Australian education contexts more broadly, is its emphasis on the leader being transformational, with their followers merely following, and on speaking over listening. Adjectival leadership theories inadequately describe the practices within and between people by ignoring the practices expected of followers and by assuming that individuals can be

¹ The term Aboriginal used in this chapter includes Torres Strait Islander peoples in line with the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Policy. This is also the preferred term of our local Aboriginal community.

² *Country* is an Aboriginal English term that describes land as a living entity, the essence of Aboriginality and includes the human and non-human.

transformational in isolation from the involvement of others who play a key role in the transformation. Further, leadership attribution theory relies on interpretations of dispositions, environment, and human behaviours which often reveal personal and cultural biases (Martinko et al., 2007). In a systematic review on leadership in Aboriginal settings, Trimmer et al. (2019) note that principals who worked collaboratively with their local Aboriginal community in relationships of trust were more likely to improve the educational learning experiences and outcomes of their students. Moreover, they observe that intercultural and collective approaches to leadership are more effective than adjectival, transformational models, because of the need to listen to Aboriginal voices and share power and authority.

This chapter explores the role of listening as a leading practice from an Indigenous standpoint within the holistic nature of working with Aboriginal peoples and communities in Country. Indigenous leading practices focus on ways of being—ontologies—where values and respect must come before knowing and doing. An ontological approach can align with the ‘being’ of practices in the theory of practice architectures. This chapter begins an exploration of how leadership practices and ontologies can be recast. Since the theory of practice architectures has previously been researched largely from a non-Indigenous perspective in Australia, we hope this exploration will also contribute an Indigenous ontological approach to the theory.

We also draw upon The Culturally Nourishing Schooling Project (CNS). This provides an empirical dimension of innovation and change. In the CNS project, the process of authentic collaboration and co-leading with Aboriginal families supports cultural identity and uses relational curriculum and pedagogical practices through Aboriginal-led teacher professional learning. The CNS research referred to in this chapter emerged from the Aboriginal Voices Project (Lowe et al., 2019a) that involved interviews and focus groups about effective schooling for Aboriginal students with Aboriginal students, parents, community members, Aboriginal Education Officers, and teachers/principals. Eleven systematic reviews analysing over 13,000 research studies in various aspects of Aboriginal education informed the CNS Project, which involves six case study schools. These schools are currently implementing whole-school reform by listening to Aboriginal community voices to develop a localised culturally nourishing schooling model focussed on Aboriginal students, families, and their communities through the project. Its purpose is to deliver improved educational, cultural, and social outcomes for all students that come from new leading practices and alternative social-political and cultural-discursive arrangements in the school sites.

The theory of practice architectures offers an avenue for exploring leadership in Aboriginal contexts that moves away from inadequate adjectival theories of leadership. It might also combat the cultural biases of attribution theory by viewing leading as a practice that happens in the intersubjective spaces between people, not just within those holding school leadership roles and titles. This opens up new possibilities for solidarity, identity, and purpose, which feature in the CNS conceptual model where Aboriginal cultural mentors, for instance, will lead culturally responsive teaching practices in classrooms. Asking what leading practices are culturally nourishing,

and for whom (who leads and who participates), and what the possibilities can be in Australian schools in ongoing relationships of respect, is leading by listening.

When we mention leading practices, we are referring to practices that we see as quite distinct from the routine practices of school leaders today: where leading practices change from speaking to listening and from directing to reflecting. When we think of leading, we are exploring possibilities for turn taking by people with knowledge and cultural authority in the social spaces of the school, thus adjusting the social-political and cultural-discursive arrangements between people. Repositioning leading as practice, with listening foregrounded as an essential element, enables multiple participants in a school site to lead respectfully, including students, teachers, titled leaders, and community members. Collaborative school-community meetings that occurred prior to implementing the CNS project discussed leading practices as shared, power-equal, and informed by Aboriginal community educational aspirations for their children. Listening, respect, and reciprocity are integral to this process, and these enabling elements continue throughout the project.

Educational leadership theory and practice need to resonate with Aboriginal peoples' understandings, aspirations, experiences, and respectful connections to community, place, and space. The ontological basis for this book project comes from the language of the Wiradjuri Australian Aboriginal people of central New South Wales: *Yindyamarra Winhanga-nha*, a Wiradjuri phrase meaning, *the wisdom of respectfully knowing how to live well in a world worth living in*. This phrase, creating a world worth living in, is at the heart of research, teaching, and community collaborations at Charles Sturt University (Charles Sturt University, 2021), in a spirit of respect for the knowledge of the Wiradjuri Elders. Connecting the work of the Pedagogy, Education and Praxis international research network to the CNS project provides an opportunity to listen to Aboriginal voices to lead change, acknowledging that, in general, Australian schooling practices have not recognised the potential of Indigenous practices. The purpose of this chapter is to suggest ways in which leading practices in Australian schools can reflect *Yindyamarra Winhanganha* not as tokenism, but through leading by listening practices that enable respect for Aboriginal language and voices. We believe that learning from these Indigenous practices can strengthen the practice of leading at every level in Australian schooling, as well as the relationships between schools and Indigenous communities.

Author Positioning

We are non-Aboriginal academics/researchers committed to reshaping power relationships through collaborating with local Aboriginal communities to improve Aboriginal student learning experiences, community engagement, and teacher effectiveness. Catherine Burgess is a non-Aboriginal educator involved in Aboriginal education for over 35 years, as well as a parent of Aboriginal children involved in local Aboriginal community activities where this project is situated. Christine Grice is also a non-Aboriginal educator who has worked with Aboriginal colleagues on

two research projects, and who also has distant Aboriginal family connections and appreciates that she is a learner and a listener in this space. Julian Wood has taught in Indigenous Education for over a decade and has also worked with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal colleagues on research into various areas in schooling and curriculum.

We are aware of our White privilege and cultural biases and so are guided by Aboriginal family, colleagues, and friends in this lifelong commitment to social justice. Positioning ourselves in research contexts is important as it acknowledges the power dynamics inherent in research settings (Shay, 2019). We acknowledge that Aboriginal sovereignty has never been ceded. As we work on Gadigal land, we believe that this *place* should be the focus of our efforts to reshape power relations by listening to and acknowledging that Country itself can teach us in our role as learners.

Some Contrasts Between Western and Aboriginal Perspectives on Leading

A Western View of Leadership and Leading

Western views of leadership and leading are frequently supported by a discourse of ‘hierarchy’, ‘roles’, ‘authority’, and the like. As such, the institutions of schooling reflect and operate within Western hegemonic values based on a hierarchical organisational philosophy (Ma Rhea, 2018). Western practices of leading are shaped by these cultural-discursive arrangements and by material-economic arrangements and set-ups of material objects. Material set-ups include such things as the principal’s office, the offices—frequently shared—of other staff, a shared staffroom, and the array of classrooms in which much of teaching practice occurs. These material-economic arrangements prefigure the ways different kinds of work are done, when, where, and by whom, in the school. Various kinds of social-political arrangements also shape Western practices of leading, like the hierarchical role relationships between leaders and those they are intended to lead; these role relationships are expressed in patterns of relationships of power and solidarity which prefigure the ways people relate to one another in the school.

Such arrangements together form practice architectures which prefigure the way practices of leading will be enacted in a school. They shape what people speak and think about in relation to leading (sayings), what they do in their work (doings), and how they relate to one another (relatings). Practice architectures of this kind prefigure practices of leading as reciprocal practices of *directing* by leaders and *being directed* by those who are meant to be ‘led’ (although these people who are meant to follow directions may also contest or resist or oppose directions).

School structures are organised via an alignment of power that has consistently privileged principals, teachers, and school practices over the aspirations of Aboriginal

students and their communities (Burgess & Lowe, 2020). This is amplified through current policies dominated by neoliberal values of individualism, competition, and market forces which have manifested in increasing standardisation, regulation, and accountability in a culture of surveillance (Lingard et al., 2012; Reid, 2019; Stacey, 2016). This view of leading as directing is also underpinned by Western individualism. It embodies implicit expectations that leadership is performed through oratory skill, a commanding style, and a directing presence. But these expectations are not left to chance or to the fragile performances of individual leaders. They are bolstered by extensive measures formulated by governments and educational policymakers. For example, it is implicitly understood that all Australian principals are expected to have managerial oversight of government education policy, or as the Australian Professional Standard for Principals states, specifically “influencing, developing and delivering on community expectations and government policy” (AITSL, 2011, p. 6). These imperatives are not without tensions and contradictions, however. Part of the community expectation of Australian principals includes working with “members of the school community to ensure a knowledge and understanding of the traditional rights, beliefs and culture of Australia’s Indigenous peoples” (AITSL, 2011, p. 9). ‘Delivering’ policy, in this case, does not mean directing. Instead, it invites practices that are quite different from Western leadership expectations, where Indigenous knowledge and understanding are central, not peripheral.

The tendency of Western leadership to a one-size-fits-all approach often adopts vague rhetorical statements acknowledging diversity, equity, and justice. It assumes that institutional policies, structures, and practices (including leading and school decision-making) benefit all schools and all students. Yet this assumption is problematic for culturally diverse, marginalised, and ‘othered’ students (Trimmer et al., 2019) like Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Ma Rhea (2018, p. 120) identifies the concept of the “colonial mind” as a way in which to examine educational leadership in terms of how leaders envision, plan, enact, and reflect on their work. This hierarchical, ‘done to’, colonial approach urgently needs to be supplemented with an alternative approach to educational leadership in Australia. What is needed is an approach that prioritises the needs of *all* communities to achieve intended goals. This can be achieved through approaches to leading that enable others—and *leading with others*—through listening and respect.

An Aboriginal View of Leadership and Leading

In Aboriginal contexts, leadership is often a collaborative process of leading by listening rather than a Western meritocratic privileging of individual attributes and notions of success. In this chapter, we use the theory of practice architectures to explore *leading by listening* as a practice. The theory of practice architectures has already been used to explore *leading as a practice* (e.g., Kemmis et al., 2014; Wilkinson & Kemmis, 2015). It explores how practices of leading are shaped by

practice architectures found in or brought to a site; that is, by the particular combinations of cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements that enable and constrain the way that practices can unfold there.

Importantly, the theory of practice architectures asserts that practices are enacted in three-dimensional *intersubjective space*. This is the space in which people encounter one another, through their sayings, as interlocutors in *semantic space*; through their doings, as embodied persons in *physical space-time*, and, through their relating, as social beings in *social space*. The theory rejects the individualist presupposition that individuals encounter one another and the world across an empty void; on the contrary, it takes the view that people encounter one another and the world in intersubjective spaces that are always already preformed to some extent, in each of these three dimensions. The theory of practice architectures does away with the dualistic opposition of the individual and the social, or the individual and the collective, and instead sees those poles in dialectical terms, in which each is bound to the other in a relationship of mutual constitution: the individual is a product of the collective, and the collective is a product of the actions of individuals.

It is a particular strength of most Aboriginal worldviews that they do not privilege the individual over the collective, or even the collective over the individual. These two poles are held together in *collective practice*, for example in community visions of self-determination, governance, and agency that are inclusive of all. We believe that, to move towards a *world worth living in for all*, Australian schools need to be founded on deep listening and engagement with Aboriginal voices, and in a relationship with Country. If school is a microcosm of society, to live well in the world of school is to create a world worth living in for all children, their families, and communities. An integral part of creating this is proposing an alternative view of leading practices and gathering empirical evidence that contests Western transformational leadership research. We will return to this perspective below, but to show that this perspective is urgently needed in Australian schooling, we first examine some consequences of *not* attending to Aboriginal ways of being, namely, the failure of Australia's 'Closing the Gap' policy, which aims to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes in education, life expectancy, health, incarceration, and other measures.

The Failure of the 'Closing the Gap' Policy: The Failure of a Deficit Discourse

The Australian Government's 'Closing the Gap' strategy is aimed at reducing the disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal outcomes. Its ongoing failure highlights the limitations of mainstream policies and practices for addressing Aboriginal student underachievement, and signposts the urgent need for another approach (Moodie et al., in press). Whilst governments continue to prioritise Aboriginal education largely via literacy, numeracy, and attendance strategies to close the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, the underlying beliefs

of Aboriginal families and communities about the purpose of schooling, and their views of what counts as success, continue to be ignored. The long running Closing the Gap policy narrative influences what knowledge and values become important. However, the values themselves, once established, are rarely questioned and this itself can stymie government-led reform (Burgess & Lowe, 2020). Leading needs to look different in schools if we are to make a difference for Aboriginal students and their communities. This can then align with the stated policy aim that “all students in all communities, including Indigenous...communities, across metropolitan, rural, regional, and remote Australia, have the right to an education that ensures they become creative, confident, active, informed learners and citizens” (AITSL, 2011, p. 9). Educators need to start leading by listening in order to close their own knowledge gaps. Changes in practice that demonstrate a different model of collaboration and success could in turn influence education policy. This is the purpose of the Culturally Nourishing School project.

As research has already shown, old deficit notions in the Aboriginal policy space continue to infect the framework. Deficit discourses about Aboriginal students' cultures and communities are infused through the assimilatory nature of neoliberal policy contexts, and they continue to marginalise and disengage people (Buxton, 2017; Lingard et al., 2012; Patrick & Moodie, 2016). For example, cultural-discursive arrangements in schools can manifest low expectations by positioning Aboriginal students and their cultures as ‘problems to be fixed’. Consequently, emerging discourses of responsabilisation deem Aboriginal peoples as largely culpable for their circumstances rather than the institutions that create the circumstances in the first place. Vass (2012) suggests that the discursive positioning of Aboriginal students as disadvantaged renders them as a special interest group and consequently they become objects of policy in a disrespectful way. This policy approach of embedding and legitimatising deficit discourses within the school underpins community mistrust of, and resistance to, schooling, creating significant challenges for principals and schools attempting to make a difference for Aboriginal students and their families (Burgess & Lowe, 2020).

By contrast, where school principals have employed local Elders to deliver language and cultural programs that were well resourced, supported, and advocated for in the wider school community, deeper connections between the school and community ensued. This fostered a sense of belonging for Aboriginal students (Trimmer et al., 2019). For example, in the Principals as Literacy Leaders with Indigenous Communities (PALLIC) project, research found that when positive working relationships and shared leadership between principals and Indigenous community leaders occurred, student engagement increased and literacy rates improved (Riley & Webster, 2016). Moreover, the positive impact of affirming Aboriginal identity increased confidence and engagement in their learning (Lowe et al., 2019b). These open and welcoming listening practices by leaders enable shared leadership responsibilities between school leaders and Elders which benefits Aboriginal students.

The Theory of Practice Architectures and Indigenous Methodology

The theory of practice architectures has informed Indigenous research in Canada (Blue et al., 2015), research on race and racism in Australia and Finland (Wilkinson & Kauko, 2020), and the Culturally Nourishing Schools project (Lowe et al., 2020), which examines the ontology and epistemology of the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) in relation to critical and Indigenous methodologies used to date. Theorists exploring leading practices in education globally have considered democratic forms of leading to be an important part of improved conceptions of leadership work (Edwards-Groves, 2020). Democracy is a noble ideal perhaps but also one that comes freighted with certain Western assumptions, at least in the domain of politics. Indigenous ways of leading are not reducible to Western conceptions of democracy (to say nothing of the fact that White Australia has not always been democratic about including Aboriginal people) in the education project.

The theory of practice architectures recognises that people are formed and transformed in action in history (in practice). Their thoughts and talk (sayings) are shaped among the cultural-discursive arrangements they encounter in the various sites they inhabit. Their actions (doings) are shaped among the material-economic arrangements in those sites. And their relationships with others and the world (relatings) are shaped by the social-political arrangements they encounter. Practice architectures formed by combinations of these arrangements shape people's practices. Thus, for example, practices of speaking and listening—who speaks (and who does not), when, and how often, and to whom (and who listens)—are shaped very differently by the practice architectures of Western institutional settings like schools than by the practice architectures familiar in many Aboriginal communities.

In sites shaped by the practice architectures of Western institutions like the school, the content of language—what is talked about—is shaped by the discourses of schools and schooling. The content of the activities undertaken in those settings is shaped by Western arrangements for the work of schools and schooling. The content of the relationships people endure or enjoy in those settings is shaped by Western patterns of (for example) expectations about appropriate role relationships between the people involved (e.g., teachers, leaders, students). These practice architectures influence such things as the way leading is practised in a school, the ways its relationships with its community are practised, and the ways teaching is practised. Site-based research acknowledges cultural context and is integral to understanding education in diverse Aboriginal contexts where the place is central.

Schools are specific sites, but they are not siloed from society at large. The practice traditions of a school are enabled and constrained by the practice architectures inside and outside of schools, such as policy, leadership structures, school decisions, and the actions of individuals. Leading practices are also influenced by happenings inside and outside the control of educators such as accreditation and standards regimes, system-wide role descriptions, infrastructure requirements and community

incidents. Awareness of these factors through the analysis of practices and the practice architectures that make them possible can help leaders understand the *what* and the *how* of change.

Aboriginal practices of listening to Country, Elders, and community may enable a change in leading practices in schools. Practices of leading in Aboriginal communities are generally collective practices, not matters for an individual leader alone. Leading as a collective practice privileges collective Aboriginal voices through cultural and historical narratives of place. Leading as a collective practice is enabled by practices of listening, respecting, and connecting. This marks a significant shift from Western knowledge and practices of leading and paves the way for decolonising schooling by questioning and disrupting the taken-for-granted Western power dynamics of schooling. The focus on practice helps us identify what needs to be mobilised to create contexts for further decolonisation.

Leading Concepts and Practices in Indigenous Contexts

Relationships and Respect

In a comprehensive systematic review on school leadership in Indigenous contexts, Trimmer et al. (2019) found that principals and schools who divested power to other stakeholders, such as their local Aboriginal communities, were more likely to affect significant within-school change. While most educational leadership research inevitably focuses on non-Aboriginal principals, given the very small number of Aboriginal principals in Australian schools, Kamara's (2009) study of five female Indigenous principals found that they were more attuned to Indigenous epistemologies, beliefs, and value systems and therefore purposefully advocated for their communities through shared leadership arrangements. Regardless of principal identity, building strong relationships with parents and key local Indigenous organisations deepens trust and builds a higher level of respect between teachers and the community (Burgess & Lowe, 2020). Therefore, leading in these contexts requires a collective, co-constructed effort to empower community leaders (Trimmer et al., 2019).

Where Aboriginal community members are provided opportunities to lead through school-initiated projects, authentic engagement through shared relationships leads to 'both-ways' leadership (Keddie, 2014) between principals and Aboriginal communities, often referred to as shared or collaborative leadership. This is noted by Priest et al. (2008) as an "ideal 'both ways' environment (which) places equal value and respect on *quality practices* from both ... non-Aboriginal and ... Aboriginal cultures" (p. 118, emphasis in original). In such 'both ways' intercultural settings, participants construct intersubjective spaces in which members of both cultures listen and learn from each other. This is critical for culturally relevant conversations and the development of collaborative trusting community relationships (Lovett et al., 2014). Where principals demonstrate a deep knowledge of the local cultural context, make

visible efforts to meet community needs and aspirations, and include Aboriginal people in decision-making collaborations, trusting community relationships result in Aboriginal family's willingness to engage with the school (Lowe et al., 2019b). This demonstrates how the situated role of the principal as a leader enables or constrains leading practices within the community. We argue that if leading was conceptualised differently in Australian schools, and community responsibilities were shared among teams of educators, many existing barriers and deficits to intercultural understanding, interaction, and solidarity could be reduced. Through cultural contiguity, leading practices can change, and participants can change the practice architectures that make practices possible, so schools and schooling can change to represent a place worth *learning* in for all.

The leading practices of principals in engaging students and influencing participation and achievement are not only critical for student outcomes but also for gaining local Aboriginal community trust. In the Trimmer et al. (2019) systematic review, most studies described targeted approaches in remote Australian settings, noting that the more successful programs acknowledged the importance of culturally respectful environments in promoting positive cultural identity to increase student potential for achievement (Keddie, 2014). Thus, key levers for principals aiming to make a difference for Aboriginal students' learning experiences include acknowledging and understanding the surrounding social-political arrangements, including the role of colonial contexts in excluding Aboriginal students from educational success, and preparedness to embark upon a shared, 'both ways' (Lovett & Fluckiger, 2014) leadership journey. This also requires changing cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements to put in place programs, policies, and processes that will fulfil Aboriginal family and community perceptions, aspirations, and expectations for the success of Aboriginal students in and beyond school. To achieve these aims, school leaders need to change their practices of leading to include school communities, to model and enact shared leadership that recognises and respects people's own cultural positioning, lived experiences, and identities.

Solidarity and Decolonisation

Given the subjective nature of experiences of leadership, and the different contexts we are connected to, a focus on practices rather than individuals or roles opens possibilities to consider new forms of leadership and leading. The theory of practice architectures focuses on leading, not leadership (Edwards-Groves, 2020). Despite the hierarchical nature of many Western systems, organisations, and institutions, the theory recognises that lifeworld relationships of recognition and respect always exist alongside such hierarchies. The theory thus acknowledges the complementarity of, and the tensions between, power and solidarity, between power *over* and power *with*. It opens possibilities for the co-construction and sharing of practices of leading grounded in the promise of solidarity: power *with*. The literature of educational leadership in Australia and elsewhere has too often been limited by Western beliefs

and schooling structures, in both policy and practice. Despite references to language and respect for a world worth living in for all, Aboriginal ways of leading have not been adequately explored in an Australian empirical research project using the theory of practice architectures.

There are, however, examples of research recognising the co-constructed nature of leadership and opposing normative hierarchical notions of leadership (Edwards-Groves, 2020). This alternative strand of research advocates enabling solidarity and emancipation from the limitations of the hierarchical worldview. In this view, leading is a political act and links to the social and relational nature of leading for solidarity, and, as some researchers put it, to perceived subversive acts of pedagogical love (Wilkinson & Kaukko, 2020). This aligns with Aboriginal ways and possibilities for living in *both-ways* worlds of schooling. However, many Aboriginal people view solidarity as both resistance to colonisation and resilience against oppression, and as a way of maintaining identity and standing together against assimilatory educational policies and practices that continue to be racist, ignorant, and profoundly damaging to them. This form of solidarity is a form of protection against the undemocratic and damaging practices of schooling in Australia over many years, including high rates of suspensions, expulsions, and unequal access to educational opportunities. Establishing a genuine solidarity with Aboriginal peoples will take a seismic shift in practices of leading in Australian schools if schools are to play a part in addressing the historical wrongs of the past, including the harms done by Western schooling itself.

Analysing practices may support educators to reimagine what leading is for, and for whom. Laying bare the practices and their contradictions, and the influences and influencers of practice, enables the potential for practice to change in context, where leading practices are influential. The following suggestions are drawn from the literature on Aboriginal leading practices in the Culturally Nourishing Schools project. The four inseparable arrangements of practices central to the Culturally Nourishing Schools project are: community and family, language and culture, Country and kinship, and Indigenous identity. These all connect with the notion of leading by listening.

Listening as a Leading Practice

Listening in Aboriginal contexts is an essential reflexive practice that evokes cultural humility, critical personal positioning, and openness. When working with Aboriginal people and communities, listening is an essential methodological approach that foregrounds axiology (values) and ontology (a sense of being) over epistemology (cognitive knowledge). This signifies a significant shift from Western hierarchical processes that focus on knowledge [re]production (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020). Emmanouil (2017) describes this as an ontological openness which enables “recognition of Indigenous forms of knowledge production” (p. 88) through learning with Country. Patience, non-judgemental observation, cultural humility, deference,

and a willingness to decentre humans as primary knowledge holders, sustains connections between Country and people. This larger repositioning leads to “relationships of care where mutual recognition and communicative engagement [are] ... also being performed” (Emmanouil, 2017, p. 90).

This reminds us of Freire’s (2000) assertion of the importance of educators having critical consciousness and a willingness to unlearn, challenge, and destabilise oppressive education and political practices. Aboriginal communication protocols such as deep listening, non-judgemental observation, yarning and open-mindedness (Atkinson, 2002) are ways of enacting and achieving conscientisation. Freire (2000) also notes the importance of liberatory educational praxis for social justice, which is also drawn on by Gruenewald (2003). Freire’s seminal work integrated the fields of critical pedagogy, ‘reinhabitation’, decolonisation, and place-based pedagogies into a critical pedagogy of place (Scully, 2012). ‘Reinhabitation’ involves identifying, recovering, and creating “material spaces and places that teach us how to live well in our total environments” (Gruenewald, 2003, p. 9). This occurs alongside decolonisation processes which challenge hegemonic Western educational practices that exploit and harm Aboriginal peoples. Concurrently, processes for centring Aboriginal communities’ social, ecological, cultural and political contexts are embarked upon to effect educational change. Listening to Aboriginal voices and building Country-centred relationships are therefore key practices for creating contexts and leading decolonisation.

Conscientisation inevitably involves processing and embracing uncomfortable, often difficult, knowledge as Aboriginal counternarratives of tragedy, trauma, and colonised lived experiences become fully heard. For members of the dominant system responsible for these experiences, a loss of agency and identity dissonance can occur, hindering ontological openness and calls to action. In response, the idea of conscientisation can be mobilised to aid in challenging and rejecting deficit discourses. Eley and Berryman (2018) see this as the key to developing culturally responsive and sustainable teaching and leadership practices in Indigenous communities. Persistent deficit stereotyping and positioning of Aboriginal peoples have been evident in government policies and practices. These are also often reinforced through media representations (Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2014). Consequently, where Aboriginal students are excluded from gaining the cultural capital required to achieve in Western education systems, it becomes the case that their cultural background and associated identity itself are held responsible for failure. Rejecting previous deficit discourses through deep listening to counternarratives is one way to embark upon critically analysing a personal position.

Deep Listening, Contemplation, and Reflection as Leading Practices

Deep listening is an increasingly respected methodological concept in Indigenous research and in education practices when working with and for Aboriginal peoples and communities. Referred to as Dadirri in the Daly River region of Australia's Northern Territory, it is described by its author, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann (Healing Foundation, 2014) as:

A special quality. A unique gift of the Aboriginal people is inner deep listening and quiet still awareness. Dadirri recognises the deep spring that is inside us. It is something like what you call contemplation. The contemplative way of Dadirri spreads over our whole life. It renews us and brings us peace. It makes us feel whole again (p. 139).

In applying Dadirri in their research, West et al. (2012) also draw on the work of Freire who positions the wisdom and reality of oppressed peoples' lives as impetus for credible and ethically real actions to empower individuals and communities. They use Dadirri as a methodological approach to prioritise deep listening, acceptance, humanising Aboriginal experiences and therefore engaging in change together. Atkinson (2002) also highlights the role of Dadirri in consciousness raising which requires responsibility to "get the story—the information—right and to be in the right relationship" (p. 16). Dadirri is therefore a process of listening, reflecting, observing feelings and actions, reflecting and learning; processes which involve re-listening at deeper levels of understanding and knowledge-building. Furthermore, Atkinson (2002) notes that knowledge changes over time through the cyclical and reciprocal relationship between listening and storying, so that pain can be acknowledged and healing begin.

The practices of deep listening that lead to connecting and reflecting enable a change in leading practices for school leaders. To see a change in practices, leading involves modelling the practices that build relationships with the community. However, Western educators need to learn new, possibly uncomfortable, practices that are a way of life for Aboriginal people. As Atkinson (2002, p. 17) notes, "*dadirri* is not a research methodology in the traditional Western scientific tradition, but a *way of life*. It gathers information in quiet observation and deep listening, builds knowledge through awareness and contemplation or reflection, which informs action" (emphasis in the original). This encompasses practices that recognise the crucial role of the community and reciprocity where participants share with each other something of themselves to build trust; as Atkinson (2002) notes, "Dadirri means listening to and observing the self as well as, and in relationship with, others" (p. 19). Therefore, this involves both practice and praxis in deeply considering self and others.

Distinct from other practice theories, the theory of practice architectures is a praxis-based ontology where belief and action are intertwined, and being *is* simultaneously saying, doing, and relating. The way you lead is not only who you are, but who your school is in terms of the associated practice architectures that shape people's sayings, doings, and relating in and around the school. Deeply analysing both individual and collective practices using the theory of practice architectures

could in part connect with notions of Dadirri in its commitment to an ontology where analysis is conscious and Dadirri is implicit.

Reciprocal Leading Practices in Country

Reciprocal leading suggests a range of possibilities for listening, contemplation, and reflection as key methodological tools for leading, such as knowing when to listen, engage, observe, be quiet, and be in the moment. McMahon and McKnight (2021) articulate this in terms of reciprocal interdependencies using the metaphor of a community of trees. Here, knowing when to lead, when to follow, and when to be in-between is required for effective functioning as a community of Country-connected leaders, aligned with a shared philosophy of leading and leading as practice. Notably, Yunkaporta and Shillingsworth's (2020) metaphors for understanding and practising from an Indigenous standpoint invert the common Western methodological process of leading from an epistemological standpoint with a predetermined agenda. Rather, they identify ethical protocols or *values* (axiology) as the starting point for engaging with Aboriginal peoples, communities, and Country. Respecting Aboriginal values and protocols are critical before further engagement can take place and so deep listening, critical consciousness, and reflexivity are essential skills to begin this journey if a world worth living in is to commence in our schools.

Yunkaporta and Shillingsworth (2020) emphasise the roles of the ethical process of respecting, the relational process of connecting, the intellectual process of reflecting, and the operational process of directing in Aboriginal values and protocols. They say:

... Respect is aligned with values and protocols of introduction, setting rules and boundaries. This is the work of your spirit, your gut.

... Connect, is about establishing strong relationships and routines of exchange that are equal for all involved. Your way of being is your way of relating, because all things only exist in relationship to other things. This is the work of your heart.

... Reflect, is about thinking as part of the group and collectively establishing a shared body of knowledge to inform what you will do. This is the work of the head.

... Direct, is about acting on that shared knowledge in ways that are negotiated by all. This is the work of the hands. (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020, p. 11–12)

Consequently, listening is about regard for the other through practices of respecting, connecting, and reflecting, and it is only when regard for the other is demonstrated, that directing can occur. Leading from this standpoint also requires genuine power sharing and employing a shared knowledge approach to leading (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020). This takes time and an adjustment of expectations with less emphasis on the product and more on the process. This invokes ontology as a way of being and connecting; a relational process for building relationships and belonging that creates the potential for a more grounded Indigenous-conscious knowledge [re]production.

Listening Practices on Country Through the Lens of Practice Architectures

The theory of practice architecture provides an opportunity for making visible the taken-for-granted or invisible arrangements in the intersubjective spaces between people at the cultural interface in a school site. By analysing people's practices in terms of the sayings, doings, and relating that compose them, along with the practice architectures to be found in school sites, we are able to explore the effects of various leading practices in schools, providing empirical evidence of policy-practice gaps in particular sites and the reasons for these gaps. This unmasking may then open possibilities "for participants to demonstrate forms of agency that are more radical or emphatic" (Kemmis et al., 2017, p. 249).

The cultural-discursive arrangements that exist in a site may result in *sayings* and, importantly, *listenings*, where participants encounter ongoing moments of silence, yarning conversations, and non-linear and counter narratives. There may be true listening from the heart and the spirit, which is the core of Aboriginal spirituality (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020). These sayings and listenings may increase agency and replace deficit discourses about Aboriginal people and enable shared deep knowledge of trauma and tragedy, and cultural practices and healing through humour and storytelling.

At the same time, listening is a form of relating. Deep listening involves a cyclical process of listening, re-listening, reflecting and re-reflecting, thus moving towards deeper levels of understanding and knowledge-building, for example through storying. These ontological, epistemological, and axiological practices enable respecting and connecting. As Phillips et al. (2018) note,

For Aboriginal peoples, story and storytelling commenced at the beginning. Stories are embodied acts of intertextualised, transgenerational law and life spoken across and through time and place. In and of the everyday and everytime, stories—whether those that told of our origin or of our being now—all carry meaning: a theorised understanding that communicates the world. (p. 8)

Truth telling seeks to alter the social-political arrangements in a site and invite new forms of relating between schools and communities, which is central to leading schooling in connecting, building solidarity, reciprocity, agency, and trust both within Aboriginal communities and in schooling and society. These things also need to be supported by adequate material-economic arrangements and conditions that will in turn support cultural humility, contemplation, and consciousness raising (Atkinson, 2002). As Australian educators respect and honour Aboriginal world views, values, and beliefs, redress poor practices, and move towards decolonising schooling by co-producing knowledge, reclaiming epistemology, and mediating social, political, and cultural concepts through Indigenous knowledge (Welsh & Burgess, 2021), we can move towards healing. Healing can only occur through deep listening to and respect for Aboriginal counternarratives about the reality of lived experiences through colonisation. When pain is acknowledged, healing can occur.

Leading that comes from reciprocal relationships creates reciprocal interdependencies as mentioned in McMahon and McKnight's (2021) community of trees. As such, we suggest that reconceptualising leading practices may enable a greater understanding about leading, following, and being in-between in the intersubjective spaces of people, community, and Country. Therefore, we need to approach established (Western) traditions of leadership and social theory with epistemological caution, including our approach to the theory of practice architectures. For example, Western and Aboriginal conceptions of leadership and leading often presuppose different arrangements (practice architectures) for leadership and power sharing, including differing cultural assumptions about individuals and groups, collectivity, and mutual responsibility. Western and Aboriginal standpoints might yield different critiques of claims about leadership, social change, and social justice, for example. Without clearly acknowledging cultural bias and assumptions, there is more scope for error or for a colonial overwriting of Indigenous views, and less chance of a mutually beneficial dialogue and theoretical/political advance. Connecting Indigenous ontology with the theory of practice architectures deeply connects Aboriginal voice and purpose to imagining new and equitable leading practices. The theory of ecologies of practices (Kemmis et al., 2012) which displays how arrangements are like interconnected living systems that hang together in symbiotic relationships, illustrates how praxis and practice enable connectedness, materiality, subjectivity and morally informed action that is deeply embedded in context (Kemmis & Smith, 2008). This bears some resemblances to Indigenous onto-epistemological foundations in Country which include human and non-human ecologies of practice, providing relational connections between leading, learning, teaching, and pedagogy.

The Culturally Nourishing Schooling Project: An Example of Leading by Listening

The Culturally Nourishing Schools (CNS) project (Lowe et al., 2020) seeks to examine the beliefs, understandings, artefacts, and actions that influence leading in schools and support school leaders in specific sites to do likewise. In this project teachers and leaders have committed to leading culturally nourishing practices with their students and communities. This project maps the symbiotic relationships between such leading practices in the site of the social and explores the practices and arrangements that enable connectedness through listening, the deep connections between space and place in Indigenous knowledge. This praxis-oriented perspective for understanding Aboriginal aspirations, experiences, and learning is essential given that the suppression of cultural practices and languages have long been integral to the denial of Indigenous sovereignty. Laying bare the enablers and constrainers of leading practices, and the complexities and contradictions that arise within sites, is critical to understanding the extent to which colonisation has excluded or, at best, tolerated, Aboriginal voices.

This project provides opportunities to challenge the arrangements that have in the past marginalised Aboriginal students. For instance, by shifting cultural-discursive practices from problem-focussed discussions about Aboriginal student underachievement, to respecting and listening to Country through Aboriginal voices and acknowledging community cultural wealth, new strength-based commitments to leading Aboriginal student success emerge. This requires new social-political arrangements as leading practices become two-way exchanges between the school and community, enacted in a shared space between the teachers, Aboriginal cultural mentors, Aboriginal school staff, local Elders, and community members. Material-economic structures support these arrangements by embedding the CNS project into participating schools' three-year strategic plans, thus committing significant policy and financial resources to the project. These arrangements demonstrate how practices that place Aboriginal voices front and centre of schooling can effect change for Aboriginal students and their families' educational aspirations.

Voice from, and within, Country is an integral purpose of the CNS project. We address the question of Country as an entity itself by analysing the intersubjective spaces within and between people and Country. From an Indigenous standpoint, mobilising Indigenous knowledge, language and culture learning, identity affirmation, shared decision-making, and Country-informed quality teaching are 'common sense' responses to the dominant Western system (Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020).

In 2021, the six NSW high schools currently involved in the CNS project represent diverse demographic populations in the inner city, regional, and remote areas. All schools serve substantial numbers of Aboriginal students and are situated within resilient local Aboriginal communities that have long-established—though not necessarily productive—relationships with these schools. To privilege and operationalise Aboriginal voices, the four pillars identified in the culturally nourishing model: learning from Country, cultural inclusion, epistemic mentoring, and teacher professional change (Lowe et al., 2020) are embedded into each school's strategic plan, centring their local community, Country, and culture as integral to the school's identity and practices. Here, a targeted group of schoolteachers and leaders participate in Aboriginal community-led learning from Country place-based experiences in their local community and apply this new knowledge and learning to their curriculum, pedagogy, and daily school practices. They are supported in the classroom by Aboriginal cultural mentors and pedagogical coaches to observe and reflect on culturally responsive teaching and learning practices to improve student engagement and learning experiences. These practices are supported by a structured program of professional reading and conversations about how these may apply to their current context.

Analysing practices (Kemmis et al., 2014) enables researchers, community members, teachers, and leaders to see more clearly the practices and arrangements that silence, exclude, or privilege voice from the sayings, doings, and relatings and facilitate the arrangements that connect collective actions to individual ones. This analysis will provide evidence of actual practice over intended practice within each CNS school site over the next four years. In recognising what enables and constrains

leading practices (by revealing and understanding the practice arrangements), those arrangements can be strengthened and/or restructured to ensure Aboriginal voices and Country continue to inform culturally nourishing schooling practices.

Conclusion

As suggested above, the practices outlined in leading through listening are about *being* more than *doing*. Practices that help us to be in the moment, taking the time to attend and to listen deeply demonstrate what we truly value. If leading is a practice for all, then participants in sites can do better at leading by listening and learning to listen through contemplation and reflection on Country. The profound silence of listening is in stark contrast to our current educational leadership practices that are driven by rapid performativity, the noisiness of policy and speech delivery, and an administrative leadership entwined with bureaucracy. This often means that leaders are too busy to develop the deep relationships needed to enact a shared leadership approach. Educational leading with praxis is not about rescuing or defending, but consciously *changing practices* to enable Aboriginal Elders and community members to lead their communities.

In Australian education today, we need to stop and ask to whom we are listening and why. Listening is a changing practice that will bring us closer to our praxis intentions and to policy goals for all young Australians. This is a different conception of *closing the gap*. It will be seen in our hearing and understanding and in our openness to real change. It will be characterised by slow, careful, listening, by contemplation and reflection, and by practices that sustain the Country that sustains us all.

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Chapter 8

Practices and Experiences in Educational Researcher Training: Reflections from Research Students Exploring the Theme, Living Well in a World Worth Living in During the Covid-19 Pandemic



Sally Windsor and Amoni Kitooke

Abstract This chapter is a case study which describes and reflects on the first steps into research practice for a group of international Masters students who were soon to embark on writing educational research theses when the COVID-19 pandemic started in early 2020. Because of a sudden transition to online learning and cancellation of in-person fieldwork opportunities, this group of fledgling researchers conducted a small research project that sought answers to the question—*What does it mean to live well in a world worth living in?* The purpose of the project was to find out how this particular group of people, in a certain time and place, would respond to this question. Four themes emerged: political engagement; connection and basic needs; social stratification and access; living slow and in ‘flow’. This chapter outlines this project from the perspective of a research student and the teacher, and illuminates the various student groups’ understandings of what it means to live well in a world worth living in. Using the theories of ‘communities of practice’ and ‘practice architectures’, the chapter reflects on the dynamics and processes through which the research student groups engaged with the subject; and what their experience might mean for educational researcher training.

Keywords Research training · International masters education research · Communities of practice · Theory of practice architectures

Introduction

This chapter presents the case of a novel in-class educational research project from the perspectives of a research student and the teacher. The reflections presented here

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are at two levels. The first one concerns the student groups' research processes and conclusions on the question, *What does it mean to live well in a world worth living in?* In the first part of the chapter, two narrative vignettes are used to describe the course in which the students engaged when they carried out their research project and how it was undertaken. The reflections and conclusions of each group are summarised and discussed.

The second part of the chapter includes a theoretically informed critical reflection on the processes through which the research students and their teacher executed the research projects, and what that might imply for other such engagements in educational research training programmes. The concepts and theories of 'practice architectures' and 'communities of practice' are used to frame the reflection on how the group research projects were conducted.

The Research Course, Students' Projects, and Reflections

Teacher Vignette—Sally

In March, 2020, a 'new' course in Gothenburg University's International Master Programme in Educational Research (IMER) began, designed to introduce students to the practicalities of planning and conducting research in educational and other social sciences. Previous iterations of the course had focused on research environments in which students would study how current and different research groups in the Education faculty practically conducted education-based research projects. However, for a number of years, the students had expressed frustrations. The source of frustration was that research project teams differed greatly in how open they were to the student researchers. Sometimes project teams welcomed students warmly, including them in project meetings (which required them to run the meetings in English), sharing texts and seeking student involvement in various ways. Other project groups were not so open to students observing, let alone participating. At the same time the students were actively seeking opportunities to get started researching in the educational sciences, "to roll up our sleeves and get our hands dirty" (IMER student evaluation, 2019).

The course textbook—the seminal *Communities of Practice* by Etienne Wenger (1998)—informed the notion that educational research is an endeavour of mutual engagement where group members rely not only on their own competence, but also the competence of others. And so, rather than providing opportunities to just observe research project groups, I redesigned the course in the hope that the class itself would begin participating in educational research collaboratively.

The class of IMER students came from different parts of the world and had taken more traditional qualitative and quantitative research methods classes. So, this class was conceived to build on that learning and provide a chance to see the possibilities brought about when using different methods to conduct research in

educational contexts at a very practical level. It was planned that the IMER students would conduct fieldwork on two occasions where the educational, artistic civics and citizenship workshop called “Make your own passport” (MYOP: Wulia, 2014) would be facilitated and studied by the IMER students. The first planned occasion was in a senior secondary school, and the second would be during the Gothenburg Science Festival (Vetenskapsfestivalen) where the participatory workshops would be conducted.

However, as we know, the COVID-19 pandemic arrived and with it the closing of senior secondary schools in Sweden, the move to distance learning for the IMER students, and the widespread cancellation of public events—all of which stifled those plans. In light of these circumstances, it became an opportunity to conduct a small research project, using the class themselves as research participants seeking answers to the overarching research question—‘What does it mean to live well in a world worth living in?’ This question was posed as the overarching idea for this particular class because it is a question the Pedagogy, Education and Praxis (PEP) international network, to which I belong, had been discussing for some time and I was interested in how the unique and varied cohort of students, from all over the world, might answer it.

The purpose of the class and the overall project then became to find out how the group of international students as a particular group of people in a certain time and place responded to this question. As a broad and multifaceted question seeking (at least partial) answers, research could have had any number of foci, and so a smaller number of angles with which to frame (and limit) our research were agreed upon by the IMER students. This was a process that was undertaken in two steps. I posted the question in a discussion board on Canvas, which is the learning management software we were using, and asked the students to respond personally to it. That is, every student was asked to say what they thought living well in a world worth living in was. The question was then discussed in a number of in-class activities and common thoughts, understandings, and interests were noted. Based on how the conversation evolved, four sub-groups were formed, each with four or five members who asked different question(s) to research together that would contribute to the big question. These four themes were:

- political engagement
- connection and basic needs
- social stratification and access
- flow and slow

Student Vignette—Amoni

My class started the ‘PDA185: Introduction to Educational Research Practice’ course on 12 March 2020. My classmates and I were excited at the prospect of conducting a hands-on field research project. Our task was to ideate on the question, ‘What does it mean to live well in a world worth living in?’, using field data from two ‘Make Your Own Passports’ (MYOP) events in Gothenburg.

This planned hands-on field research prospect was shattered when, on 17 March 2020, the University of Gothenburg announced the closure of onsite classes, like all other universities across Sweden in response to the national guidelines on slowing down the spread of the coronavirus. The shattered opportunity for field-based research was not the only disorientation we received: we also suddenly became a digital community, rather than our usual physically interactive selves. The cliché that humans are social animals had become true of us; the months of physical interaction had lent us a level of intimacy we could hardly sustain as a now purely digital group.

In proceeding with our planned research activities, our tutor engaged us in discussions that culminated in a research project we could execute online with the students ourselves as both researchers and participants. The compromise was to split into groups of up to five students each, and explore one dimension of the overarching question on 'living well in a world worth living in'. Four sub-themes were created: 'flow and slow', 'political participation', 'connection and basic needs' and 'social stratification and access to resources'.

My colleagues chose their groups based on their respective knowledge, but I chose to work with the 'social stratification and access to resources' group because the subject speaks to my personal experiences growing up, past professional encounters, and future career ambitions. My participation, therefore, would reflect my own understanding of social stratification and access to resources, as an important dimension of how to live well.

In the immediate mental environment of my participation in answering the assignment were two 'off-the-record' endeavours. Firstly, I personally held the ambitions of leaning my research career towards education for sustainable development (ESD). Secondly, at that time I was reading, aside from my study coursework, Thomas Hobbes' philosophical text *Leviathan*. Thomas Hobbes describes a 'state of nature' as one where all resources belong to everyone and to no one; basically, to whoever can access them, typically by strife, with other contenders interested in the same resources. Birthing what is known as the 'social contract theory', Hobbes justifies the existence of some form of governing power, which he calls 'the sovereign', as an arbitrating remedy to the potentially constant strife for resources by regulating their distribution and performing other such duties in governance.

I think both of these leanings influenced my suggestion to my working group to include an environmental aspect and conduct our research under the subject, *Mapping Awareness about Plants as Mirrors of Social Stratification and (In)equitable Access to Resources among Humans*. The idea was to simulate, for our online participants, a visit to a botanical garden (or other plant habitation) and ask them to discuss what relationships they observe among plants in terms of access to essential resources, like light, that can apply to the human world. It was anticipated that discussions would include how some trees canopy others and deprive them of essential resources, how strongly rooted plants consume nutrients and starve those neighbouring them, and how some plants find some livelihood by creeping on others; and then appropriate the patterns to what can be observed among humans in terms of social stratification and access to resources. The group was largely in agreement with the plan, but when

my team members discovered it was quite ambitious to have to learn, in the available time, some botanical jargon relevant, for example, to plant nutrition so that we could apply and find their parallels in the human world, the plan was completely rethought.

I sulked to myself for not pursuing a project that would include an environmental aspect of ESD, but one can only do so much in pursuing their personal desire if the task ahead requires collective action. I was later happy that the renegotiated project, *Disparities in Experiencing Turbulent Times: Reflections on Education-Related COVID-19 Response Strategies*, was both temporally relevant to the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic, and answers to the social justice aspect of ESD, while mirroring in some way my imaginations from reading the *Leviathan*.

Our deliverables were two: a research report and an individual auto-ethnographical reflection on the processes of engagement, considering our research group as what Lave and Wenger (1991) call a ‘community of practice’. The current vignette encompasses the core of what I reported in the autoethnography paper. An autoethnographic submission gave me the opportunity to reflect closely on my own participation in the research process which was collectively undertaken. For our collective research report, we sought to answer the question, ‘How is socioeconomic status determining access and the experiencing of education across the world during the COVID-19 pandemic?’. We conducted two group interviews of about one hour each with our student colleagues whom we divided, according to country of origin, into developed and developing country groups. We used the World Bank Country and Lending Groups classification (World Bank, n.d.) to make the distinction. The countries from which participating students come include Belarus, Cambodia, Ghana, Greece, Malawi, the Netherlands, Nigeria, Sweden, and the United States of America (Table 8.1). In my research team, students came from Uganda (myself), Rwanda, Cameroon, Nigeria, and The Gambia.

Group Reflections and Conclusions

The students’ group submissions included reflections on what it means to live well in a world worth living in, tailored to their respective thematic foci. The groups’ conclusions all viewed different aspects of education as important, even necessary, for a world worth living in; and their views can be broadly categorised into two main themes: connection and equality/access.

The ‘social stratification and access’ group research identified varying intensities of stratified access to the educational resources demanded by distance education during the COVID-19 pandemic in both developing and developed countries. They found that in contrast with their initial assumption that developed countries would have less inequalities in access to resources amongst their citizens. Of course, the comparison between countries revealed that developed countries reported more general equitable access to resources than developing countries, but this group’s

Table 8.1 Student research project foci

Group	Countries represented in the group	Key research question	Method of enquiry
Social stratification and access	Uganda, Nigeria, Rwanda, Cameroon and The Gambia	How is socioeconomic status determining access and the experiencing of education across the world during the COVID-19 pandemic?	A qualitative thematic analysis of group interview data; public health guidelines by the World Health Organisation and various countries; and the education strategies by UNESCO
Slow and flow	Greece, Sweden, Iran, Belarus	What are the different ways in which graduate students perceive the pace of the world before and during the COVID-19 pandemic? What are the different ways in which graduate students perceive slowing down as a possible indicator for quality of life and well-being?	This group used a photo elicitation method to generate discussions with participants. Interviews conducted on zoom and recorded, then transcribed. Transcripts thematically analysed
Connection and basic needs'	Cambodia, Netherlands, Ghana/Sweden, Malawi	What are the lived experiences of IMER students with regard to various forms of connection and disconnection in times of the Corona pandemic?	Data were collected through online self-administered questionnaires which were sent via email. All participants were first year IMER students and a total of 16 participants took part in the study (9 female and 7 male students); they came from 13 different countries across Europe, Africa and Asia
Political engagement	Ghana, USA, Greece, Nigeria	What is the connection between political engagement, education, and well-being?	A descriptive correlational research design, a survey chosen to understand and access the relationship among the variables of interest

research focused more on in-country access. The study was premised on the assumption that a world worth living in is one with resources; but left a question as to whether and how an equitable distribution of these resources could be achieved.

The ‘slow and flow’ group considered the pace of life as a measure of living well. In their view, moderation is needed in the pace in which life is lived—not so fast that one harms their mental health, and not so slow that one lives ‘a lazy life’ which does not aim to achieve anything. The temporal context of COVID-19 provided a good bedrock for their argument, where most of the group and their research participants observed that the pandemic had halted or slowed down many of the ambitions of individuals and institutions by, for example, causing the closure of businesses, educational institutions, and public transport. This, they reasoned, has given people “more time to focus on both their own mental and physical health through de-stressing activities such as exercise, reading, art activities and spending time with nature” (quote from group report, ‘slow and flow’ group). Nature, as they pointed out, has been found to benefit both the psychological and physical health needs of humans (Bitterman & Simonov, 2017).

Another key finding of this group was that slowing down provides an opportunity for pondering and reading, which they considered a dimension of a good life. The majority of their participants indicated that staying home during the COVID-19 times had afforded them “time for self-reflection, wondering about their goals, their dreams, and to reconnect with their values of a good life. Some participants had the time to wonder about the principles of society and the importance of sustainable values on a global level” (quote from group report, ‘Slow and flow’ group). It was this finding, the feeling of being given time to think properly, and having the tools in which to do that thinking, that for this group clearly linked education and living well.

The ‘connection and basic needs’ group considered the life aspects of individualism, interdependence, and community. Over three quarters of their respondents indicated that they had been raised in environments (cultures) that valued collective living and interdependence as members of communities and families. This group reported that human interdependence is considered a basic need, while individualism is preferred in only a few aspects of life. From their reflections on connecting with both oneself and others, it can be summed up that the student research group considers a world worth living in as one where both possibilities are available for one to choose from or balance depending on the need at a certain time and place. This group concluded that education, whether it be at school, university, or more informal settings could provide a space and place that could foster the connection and a sense of community necessary for well-being.

Finally, the ‘political engagement’ group considered civic action as a dimension of living well. Using a participant survey adapted from two tools, the European Social Survey (ESS) and Civic Education Survey (CIVED), they explored with their classmates cum research participants the relationships between political engagement, education and a meaningful life in a world worth living in. Recognising the limitations of this kind of survey research with such a small number of participants this group were unable to see clear patterns in the kinds of political engagement reported by

their classmates. They concluded that there were many more variables to consider when seeking an understanding of the correlation between political engagement and education. Therefore, this group critically reflected more on the process of their research than on any findings or conclusions about political engagement, education, and living well, that their research could make.

Critical Reflections on Processes and Practices

In this second section, we reflect on the processes that went into conceiving and implementing the group research projects; and suggest how these might inform further research and teaching in a similar manner.

Methodology

As mentioned earlier, this is a case study of situated learning as experienced by the IMER students and their teachers in which we hope to “gain an in-depth understanding of situation and meaning for those involved” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017, p. 10). The case study approach “is viewed as a valid form of inquiry to explore a broad scope of complex issues, particularly when human behaviour and social interactions are central” (Harrison et al., 2017, pp. 5–6). Thus, in the following section we consider the larger project as the case, that is, all groups participating in the course designed to engage them practically in research methods.

Our reflections were guided by the following questions:

1. How did the student researcher groups negotiate the meanings and approaches to their task and the research topic?
2. How can the reflections on this case inform similar educational researcher training programmes and projects?

Data

Our reflections utilise a number of data sources. Firstly, we use the narrative vignettes presented earlier to illustrate both processes and social interactions in this course. By using vignettes, we aim to “bring forth the virtual thought of... what could happen... [and show] there is an investment in reading, reading the world and self” (Masny, 2013, p. 343). Secondly, data are drawn from posts in a discussion forum that the students contributed to throughout the course. Finally, data are drawn from the groups’ submitted research reports and individual autoethnographic paper submissions. Permission to use these second and third data was received from the students, and their views were de-identified.

Theories

The theories of ‘communities of practice’ and ‘practice architectures’ are used to frame our reflections in this section. The theory of communities of practice is used to reflect on what happened during the course in which international students began to develop their research practices, while the theory of practice architectures is used to reflect on doings, sayings, and relatings to draw conclusions and suggestions for practice in educational researcher training.

Situated Learning in ‘Communities of Practice’

Concepts from communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) were utilised, primarily because this was the course textbook. Communities of practice are defined as particular kinds of networks of people who engage in situated learning processes (Wenger, 1998) where members depend on each other for learning, mutual support, constructive critiques, and collective thinking. Lave and Wenger (1991) emphasise the need to participate in and contribute to the learning community for membership to be effective, and refer to the importance of such communities to enable an individual’s transition to future practices. Learning experiences in communities provide opportunities to understand the notion of praxis (Kemmis & Smith, 2008), with an inquiry approach to action and learning.

The development of the situated learning theory evolved over time. Initially, a community of practice was viewed as a layered environment in which novices form the periphery while experts engaged in what the authors called “full participation” (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 37) form some sort of nucleus to which one made their way with time and progress at perfecting the knowledge and skill. In his later publication, Wenger (1998) conceptualises the trajectory to expertise as a co-creative process where both expert and novice contribute to meaning-making and thereby shape their respective but consistently changing practice and identities (Wenger, 2013). What happens with learning in communities of practice is that “theory and practice inform each other, but also includes aspects that apply at a personal level” (Blackmore, 2010, p. xi).

The Theory of Practice Architectures

Developed by Stephen Kemmis and colleagues, the theory of practice architectures outlines the belief that what an individual does, and is indeed able to do, is shaped by a wide variety of discourses, social and political relationships, and the resources or materials available. Learning in any context is never a solitary affair but rather a shared, communal, and intersubjective process that is influenced and formed by local

histories. And although the theory of practice architectures emphasises engagement with different learning practices, the theory ultimately questions “what people do in a particular place and time” (Kemmis, 2009, p. 23).

A practice is comprised of actions that have social, political and, importantly, moral consequences and might be considered ‘good’ when it forms and transforms the individuals that participate in it, and the world in which the practices occur (Kemmis, 2009; Kemmis et al., 2014). Kemmis and colleagues explain that

A practice is a form of socially established cooperative human activity in which characteristic arrangements of actions and activities (doings) are comprehensible in terms of arrangements of relevant ideas in characteristic discourses (sayings), and when the people and objects involved are distributed in characteristic arrangements of relationships (relatings), and when this complex of sayings, doings and relatings ‘hangs together’ in a distinctive project. This quality of ‘hanging together’ in a project is crucial for identifying what makes particular kinds of practices distinctive. (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 31)

The arrangements that prefigure practices can fall into three different types: *cultural-discursive arrangements*; *material-economic arrangements*; and, *social-political arrangements* (Kemmis et al., 2014). The theory of practice architectures has been chosen here because it offers useful perspectives on the different practices that the students and teachers involved in this case learn in order to embark on educational research and what arrangements enabled and constrained that learning. The reflections on the group research project in the current case are used to draw conclusions and recommendations for practice in educational researcher training, broadly.

Reflections

In this section, we use concepts from the theory of communities of practice to reflect on the interactions students had when conducting their research assignment, and the theory of practice architectures to draw conclusions for educational research practice beyond the case described in this chapter.

How Did the Student Researcher Groups Negotiate the Meanings and Approaches to Their Task and the Research Topic?

In defining the concept of ‘practice’, Wenger (1998) suggests that the pursuit of a collective enterprise involves defining the enterprise while the individuals involved interact with one another and with the world, a situation that, over time, results in “practices that reflect both the pursuit of the enterprise and the attendant social relations” (p. 45). Wenger notes, however, that when the individuals come together,

their intention is not to create a community of practice, but rather to pursue their respective ends known to themselves and, of course, to realise the collective enterprise. It is the interactions they engage in that shape their practices, with each of the individuals contributing a part of their behaviour, ideas, identity, and other ingredients. They learn together how to execute their respective tasks to accomplish the joint enterprise, but also create social relations beyond the enterprise itself. In other words, they create a community, negotiate meaning, and learn together. Despite the research task explained in the vignettes only having a short duration, the students' engagement in the activity demonstrated many aspects that relate to the concept of 'communities of practice'.

In relation to creating and sustaining a community, the drastic transition from a physical class to digital interactions formed the context of recreating social interactions. Working on a collective task required that the participants co-create acceptable practices. Group interviews occurred online (i.e., Zoom), and questionnaires were administered through digital forms such as Google Forms, while they might have been administered differently if the class were meeting physically. In addition to the within and between group interactions occurring online in various ways, discussion spaces were created on the learning management platform, Canvas.

Each of the groups engaged in collective meaning-making, as they defined their task and devised ways of approaching it. Wenger (1998) suggests that meaning, in the sense of practice, is an "experience of everyday life", located in the way it is "negotiated"; involving the processes of "participation" and "reification"; processes which are "fundamental to human experience of meaning and thus to the nature of practice" (p. 52). Wenger portrays the negotiation of meaning to be both a productive and receptive process through which one impacts and is impacted by the phenomena they engage with, and the other participants involved in the process. Negotiation is viewed beyond just coming to an agreement but to include overcoming hurdles that may be involved, which one could argue is a process of coming to an intended and satisfactory end. Participation in negotiating meaning requires the bringing together of the individuals' perspectives, with mutual recognition of the roles and levels of engagement. Participation, in this sense, does not necessarily mean collaboration; it can take other forms such as conflict, competition, and intimacy. The nature of participation shapes the kind of community that culminates from their social interaction. Participation also extends beyond the individuals' engagement in the collective enterprise to their involvement in other aspects of society. Reification is the process and act through which "a certain understanding is given form" (p. 59). It refers to giving something abstract attributes that make it feel real or concrete.

The student vignette presented earlier demonstrates how meaning in that particular group was 'negotiated', and the practices that went into 'participation' and 'reification'. In defining the task at hand, each student brought their world view, informed by their experiences and individual pursuits. Amoni's worldview, for example, was partly informed by his reading of Thomas Hobbes' *Leviathan*, a text which was unrelated to the group task but which he used to ideate on a world worth living well as one with a 'social contract' that guarantees everyone equitable access to the resources available. His pursuit of a research career in education for sustainable development

(ESD) informed his suggestion that the group approaches the task with an environment component incorporated. If he were working on the assignment alone, he might have succeeded in approaching the task this way. As part of a group, however, many other considerations were present. The group members considered that they did not have the language and expertise required to pursue a project related, in part, to botany; and that the time available would not allow for acquainting themselves adequately. With all the individuals' worldviews considered, the group's negotiated topic—to which every one of them could relate—the disparities in accessing and experiencing education during the COVID-19 pandemic, as determined by people's levels of socioeconomic affluence between and within communities and countries.

In considering the 'practice as learning', Wenger theorises communities of practice as "shared histories of learning" (p. 86), as defined by the associated temporal elements such as the length of time and the context in which the community is working. What, in the case of the example we are discussing now, relates to learning in a temporal and contextual sense is the transition from being a physical learning group to an online one. The cancelling of the field research projects, which themselves were conceived in light of the reflections of the previous IMER students on their experience working with and researching on researcher groups, was an experience that required that both the student researchers and their teacher find an alternative. The entire online research experience with learners as both researchers and participants, therefore, was a temporally orchestrated moment of learning to which each individual in the respective research groups and in the entire class contributed. The COVID-19 experience, which the 'social stratification and access' group reported both intensified and exposed inequalities within and among individuals, communities, and countries of different socioeconomic levels, was itself a backdrop for the groups to reflect on a world worth living in. Certainly, COVID-19, in their view, was not desirable but even in its undesirability, some individuals, communities, and countries were seen to live better than others.

It can be observed, therefore, that the student researchers who participated in the activity perceived their collective task as defining a world worth living in; and their individual task as contributing ideas and approaches to how this definition is shaped and researched. It should be noted, however, that the students' group research reports and individual autoethnographic papers did not explicitly reflect that the groups considered disaggregation of tasks to individuals as an important aspect of their approach to the assignment. Rather, their reports indicated more collectively generated ideas.

How Can the Reflections on This Case Inform Similar Educational Researcher Training Programmes and Projects?

This case and more specifically the course itself was premised on the notion that "people 'learn' practices, not only knowledge, concepts or values ... [and that]

learning a practice entails entering—joining in—the kinds of sayings, doings and relatings characteristic of different practices” (Kemmis et al., 2017, p. 45). The IMER students had vast and often very deep knowledge of different aspects of education and were aware that although they had been taught about research methods, they had not been able to ‘join in’ the practice of research in an authentic way. It was the idea of ‘joining in’ as the best way to learn a practice that underpinned the case. This account of learning practices, described by Kemmis et al. (2014, 2017) as a process of being *stirred in*, more clearly articulates the processes, and activities (in this case educational research) and highlights the importance of “sociality associated with coming to do something new” (Kemmis et al., 2017, p. 47). In this recognition of the intrinsically social aspect of engaging in practice Kemmis et al. “come to the view that learning is no more than coming to know how to go on in practices, and that it occurs by being ‘stirred in’ to practices (including by stirring oneself into them by joining in)” (2017, p. 53).

The research practices that this group of students and their teacher were engaging in were made possible and constrained by practice architectures—the different arrangements that prefigured what was possible yet were swiftly changing due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Most obviously, at first, the *material-economic arrangements* in which the research practices could be learned were drastically altered. The activities could only be conducted digitally, which required not just a computer, but a stable internet connection at home. Up to this point, many of the IMER students, in Sweden just to study, had relied on the University internet connection, and so not being able to connect to the internet constrained the learning of practices in some ways. On the other hand, once access to the digital space was sorted out, conducting research online enabled the students to interact in different, more frequent and interesting ways that were no longer dictated by being physically in one place.

The *cultural-discursive arrangements* that enabled and constrained the practices of research were also altered in the online environment. This cohort had developed a strong bond in attending classes together, where they had practised with each other and a range of teachers how to speak a particular kind of discourse, a language of educational research. The opportunities to debate and discuss, while not completely extinguished, were curtailed by the online environment. For some, it was impossible to spontaneously contribute to in-class discussions. A discussion forum was provided to enable more (asynchronous) contributions, and became the initial space that the IMER students could begin talking about a world worth living in. As the discussions grew, and moved into how to conduct research on the ideas being discussed it was possible for everyone to observe (read) the new ways of saying things about the practices of research.

The *social-political arrangements* that prefigured and were influenced by participation in the research practices were obviously changed by the pandemic as well. These kinds of arrangements affect the *relatings* (that is how we might relate to one another and organisations) that are possible in the project of the practices. These can be student–teacher relations, teaching modes (face to face or online), and recognition of social solidarities and hierarchies. In this case, each group of students was acutely aware of the broader social-political arrangements occurring at the time and

were enthusiastic to understand them. The concepts of social justice, in/equality, care and community, and the arrangements that enabled and constrained these were commonly discussed as important educational research topics. Each group to some extent felt that the social-political arrangements of the world at that time constrained many groups from being able to live well in a world worth living in.

Being cognisant of all such arrangements is, or should be, important in research training programmes such as the one described. This case study showed that attending to the arrangements in such a way ensured the initial engagement of students with the class and more specifically the research practices.

The enrichment provided by pedagogical arrangements, in this case, educational researcher training programmes which involve projects, needs to be reflected on at both collective and individual levels. The IMER group research reports and the individual autoethnographic paper submissions served this purpose. The group reports reflected the group conceptualisation of the subject at hand, while the autoethnographic papers provided a more individualised reflection on the processes, including a reference to the individuals' demographic characteristics such as the communities in which they grew up and how these influenced their worldview, such as on communalism and individualism as measures of living well. The discussion board on Canvas reflected the collective and individual thought evolutions over the course duration, which was an important pointer to what adjustments needed to be made in the trajectory of the learning process.

Mahon et al. (2017) suggest the theory of practice architectures is a theoretical and analytical resource that can be a transformational resource for education, and extend this transformational aim to define research for *praxis* as a special form of practice and one that is morally committed to the good of humankind. They explain the value of research “for *praxis* in the personal sense of helping participants in, or responding to, untoward situations decide how they might act *morally*, for the good of the persons concerned, and also *politically*, in the interests of the good for humankind” (Mahon et al., 2017, p. 2, emphasis in original). It is here, ensuring educational research practices are morally and politically committed to the good of humankind, that this case can be an exemplar for educational research training programs.

This case study is one that aimed for transformation to change on two levels: a) where the teacher consciously sought to change how research practices were practised (and learned), and, b) where the students without exception sought to change an aspect of education that had led them to enrol in the program in the first place. The case as a whole, and each of the research projects conducted, could be considered as research for praxis. It is a case of research “enacted by people ... acting in ways that are morally, ethically, and politically responsible, and acting with awareness that when we act, we are acting in history, changing the world around us, even if only in small ways” (Mahon et al., 2017, p. 14).

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Chapter 9

Partnering for Hope: Agentic Narrative Practices Shaping a World Worth Living in



Sally Morgan

Abstract People seeking asylum in Australia remain subject to restrictive policies and punitive government practices, constraining their opportunities to live well. In this chapter, I focus on conversations that took place within the early stages of a critical participatory action research (CPAR) project involving members of the asylum-seeker owned Hope Co-operative. I posit a hybrid theoretical lens locating human subjectivity and agency in practice, layering the theory of practice architectures, Stetsenko’s transformative activist stance, and Emirbayer and Mische’s temporally embedded agency with past, future, and present orientations. Drawing on conversations between eight Hope Co-Operative asylum-seeking members and me, I trace some of these conversations’ *cultural-discursive*, *material-economic*, and *social-political* arrangements. I identify three types of talking—mapping solidarities, reminiscing and talking-up—and discuss these particular types of talking as agentic narrative practice comprising people’s mutual becoming. The study speaks to how particular relational arrangements and types of talking might counter systemic exclusion of people seeking asylum through the inherent radical agency of iterative and dialogic self- and world-making in practice.

Keywords Asylum seekers · Agency · Critical praxis · Talk · Agentic narrative practices

Introduction

“Frail and fallible though it may be, all we have, and all we will ever have, is the conversation” (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014a, 2014b, p. 129).

“I’m learning from our conversation, and actually I’m very excited. I’m looking forward to the next steps” (Milad, 2020).

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Around 30,000 people who fled their homes for safety arrived by boat in Australia during 2012–2013. They are among more than 25 million asylum seekers worldwide. Their search for refuge coincides with a global trend towards securitisation of the state and the demise of many nations' commitment to the 1951 Refugee Convention (Betts & Collier, 2017). Those who reached Australia between 13 August 2012 and 1 January 2014 are referred to as the 'legacy caseload' by the Australian government (Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law, 2019) and are subject to policies designed to deter others from seeking asylum in Australia. These policies drive protracted refugee status determination processes, the barring of applications for permanent residency, and visa conditions that significantly restrict their social, economic, and educational participation. International research has found students who are asylum seekers or refugees with temporary protection to be "super-disadvantaged" (Lambrechts, 2020). In Australia, scholars deem them as subject to a "deliberate political tactic [that] ... manufactures precarity" (Van Kooy & Bowman, 2019, p. 695) and to comprise "one of the most maligned and demonised populations in contemporary Australian politics" (Vogl & Methven, 2020, p. 62).

In 2019, a small co-operative—the Hope Co-Op—was registered in the Australian state of Victoria, mostly comprised of tertiary students in the legacy caseload and a small number of Australian citizens, including me. All but one of its almost 20 founding members had graduated from an asylum-seeker specific program at St Bede's school¹ within the previous four years. I had been their final secondary class teacher and had initiated a pathway program to try to address the barriers these young people faced in accessing decent work and higher education opportunities. After this program closed down, I sought other avenues through which to continue to facilitate educational access for people seeking asylum. At the end of 2018, eleven tertiary students of asylum-seeker background, with myself and three other Australian educators, founded the Hope Co-Op, which aims to support people of asylum-seeker backgrounds into and through higher education (Hope Co-Operative, 2018).

¹ St Bede's is an alternative school in Melbourne. In response to mainstream educational exclusion of young adult asylum seekers, from 2014 to 2017 it initiated a Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning program, focussed on English learning, negotiated curriculum and inclusive community. This program entailed daily shared meals, community connections, camps and excursions, and an integrated curriculum taught by the same teacher and youth-worker for 80% of the time. Currently, 21 of Hope Co-Op's 55 asylum-seeking members were St Bede's students, 16 of these having been in my final secondary year class for at least one year. As such, the relationships and communicative practices prioritised at St Bede's have significantly helped to shape the Hope Co-Op, and the study discussed below.

Hope Co-Op's vision is for "full access to socio-economic participation and inclusion of people who have sought asylum in Australia, through equal and well-supported education, employment opportunities and holistic settlement outcomes." Its practical mission is "to help asylum-seeker background students to achieve sustainable education and employment outcomes" (Hope Co-Operative, 2018). The Co-Op currently has 70 members, 57 of whom are currently enrolled or recently graduated tertiary students in Australian universities, all of whom are still living the experience of seeking a safe and secure life in a country they can call home.

In 2020, 26 Hope Co-Op members began a critical participatory action research (CPAR) project, connected to my doctoral studies, called Partnering for Hope. This chapter draws on conversations that occurred within the context of that project. In the initial sections of the chapter, I introduce three of the young people involved, and describe the project's historical context and my role in it. I then summarise what the project entailed, including the methodological implications of ethical practice concerns. The chapter then provides an overview of the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014a, 2014b) and of two related conceptualisations of agency: Stetsenko's (2019a, 2019b, 2020) and Emirbayer and Mische's (1998). I entwine these into a hybrid theoretical lens, before discussing some excerpts of conversations with young people who participated in the project. This discussion is in three sections, focusing on talk that (1) maps solidary connections that enable agency, (2) reminisces about past shared experiences and (3) talks-up people's own future oriented agency. I argue for an understanding of human agency as located in practices and for the ontological significance of this understanding in terms of human beings' mutual shaping of themselves and their world.

Living Well? Constraints on the Legacy Caseload

The concept of living well is only realised in daily practices that human beings participate in. One way to define living well is in terms of what people—who are *doing* the living—are seeking in their lives. In terms of people who are seeking *asylum*, the opportunity to live safely as equal and contributing human beings is the basic condition under which they can live well (United Nations High Commission for Refugees [UNHCR], 2018). Furthermore, being subject to punitive deterrence policies (Van Kooy & Bowman, 2019) is in stark contrast to being able to live well.

People in the legacy caseload live under restrictive conditions that, research shows, damage their wellbeing. They face multiple barriers in accessing tertiary education (Dunwoodie et al., 2020), are kept in limbo regarding their long-term safety and security (Hirsch & Maylea, 2016), must re-assert their claims for protection every three to five years even after they are determined to be genuine refugees, and have no rights to family reunion (UNHCR, 2018). They live under a strict Code of Conduct that provides exceptional grounds for authorities to re-detain them and potentially deport them to the countries they fled (Vogl & Methven, 2020). These arrangements

constrain their opportunities for building a good life. They also constrain opportunities for citizens to act in a morally informed way, or according to their conscience: for example, for educators to teach according to a morally informed and socially just pedagogy. Kemmis (2019, p. 95) defines critical praxis as “acting for the good for humankind, but also interrogating and transforming existing ways of doing things that currently have untoward consequences”. Restrictive and exclusionary conditions imposed on people in the legacy caseload constrain individuals, whether citizens or people seeking asylum, from living well and contributing to a world worth living in. As such, these restrictive and exclusionary conditions provide a provocation for practices that critique and counter their impacts.

Participants: The People Experiencing the Constraints of Australian Policies

I aim to locate this discussion in primary relation to particular “people’s bodies and biographies” (Kemmis et al., 2014a, 2014b, p. 77). This aim is in recognition that people seeking asylum are often essentialised within heavily politicised landscapes (Fox et al., 2020) and in recognition of human wholeness and the diversity of people with whom I am researching. I experienced Partnering for Hope participants as often funny, warm and interesting, often strong and determined, and sometimes as challenging, sad or feeling defeated by systemic injustice. I selected these particular three young people not for their biographical details—all the young people in this project, while unique, have experienced similarly difficult histories—but for the sense of individuality that Abbas, Aliah, and Salar’s words convey.

Abbas arrived in Australia as an unaccompanied minor. Like him, his siblings fled Afghanistan and now live as permanent refugees in various countries around the world. Abbas lived for several years in a regional town in Victoria where he made many strong connections. He later moved to Melbourne to enrol at St Bede’s school, then gained a two-year traineeship as a regional fire-fighter. He has been in Australia for nine years and is still waiting for the government to assess his asylum claim. The following exchange occurred between us on WhatsApp and is typical of Abbas’ sense of humour and determination:

Sally: [4:44 pm, 11/08/2020] I was wondering if you would each choose a research-name that you would like me to use for you. Please send me a message with the name you want.

Abbas: [4:51 pm, 11/08/2020] How about ‘Action for tomorrow’ or, ‘Battle for tomorrow’?

Aliah grew up as a refugee in Iran. With no educational rights and a constant threat of deportation, she was home-schooled by a neighbour. When her family returned to Afghanistan, looking for a safer life, as a Hazara girl she was under threat if she attended school. After fleeing again, travelling by boat to Australia at fourteen years old, she was detained on Christmas Island and then in a detention centre in remote outback Australia. Finally in Melbourne, she commenced Year 10 and went on to

gain a rare asylum-seeker scholarship to a prestigious university in 2017. She works to support her parents and her pharmaceutical studies. She explains:

I need to TALK to people... they just came to the pharmacy [for] advice about their cough, or their sneezing... and yeah, I need to like make connection with them, talk to them, like ask them "What happened? What did you experience?"... [These questions] make me more connected with people. I feel like I am part of this community, it doesn't matter who, which colour, which language, which accent they have. They need my help and advice. It makes me feel much better, like I am a useful person to this community.

I don't ask them about their visa, look at their race, their level of English, but I look at what their symptoms are and what they need. I do not want to act like people I faced in my life. I have faced a lot of racism and discrimination. I have faced a lot of humiliation and I do not want to be that sort of person.

Salar completed Year 12 twice: once in Pakistan, which he fled days before his final exams, and again at St Bede's school in Melbourne. While searching for an Australian university entrance score, he was offered a scholarship into Year 10 by a private school, after which his depression increased. Thanks to advocacy with a nearby university, he gained an Engineering scholarship and in Semester One, gained 95%. Here, he explains his curiosity, connectedness, and active lifestyle.

Salar: I am adventurous, yeah... I *became* adventurous. Now I go camping, I go fishing, I go hiking. Like everywhere, literally. I've got a few friends with whom I go fishing a lot, and a group of friends that I go camping with and a group of friends that I cycling with. And they're [all] different friends. [laughter]

Sally: Wow! Were you always that adventurous as a child?

Salar: Ummm, not really. I used to go cycling, but ... I wasn't THIS adventurous. Like I am now. And plus, I watched a lot of YouTube videos as well. You know how I started spear fishing? Well, I was watching YouTube videos and I thought 'Oh well, I want to do this one day'. And then the next year, I bought myself the gear, a spear gun and wetsuits... and then the next year I was in the water! Yeah. [laughter]

Sally: And could you swim before you had swimming lessons at St Bede's?

Salar: Not really, nah. When I was in Indonesia, I drowned in the swimming pool!... [So] for the first days, when I went out, my mum, my dad, they didn't let me to go, you know. It was too dangerous. Yeah. Well, we do the rock jumping as well, the cliff jumping and they tell us not to do that! That's a real Aussie thing, you know, that cliff jumping!

As well as the range of liveliness and seriousness across these three snapshots, they encapsulate a sense of self that was changing in response to their lived experiences of seeking asylum. Each articulates their own counter-cultural becoming: Abbas as an action hero, humorous and ready to battle for tomorrow; Aliah as a worker for social justice deliberately counteracting discrimination and humiliation for herself and her community, and Salar as an adventurer irrepressibly embedding himself across a wide range of social and physical landscapes. These snapshots offer glimpses of Abbas, Aliah, and Salar's embodied ordinariness, made remarkable in part by the very arrangements designed to make a deterrent example of the lives of people in the legacy caseload.

The Partnering for Hope CPAR project involved 21 participants seeking asylum, including Abbas, Aliah, and Salar, and six Australian citizens. Of these, 20 had requested Australia's protection nine years prior to writing. Only one, arriving by plane, has gained permanent protection, with nine so far being granted temporary protection. Another 11 are still waiting for resolution of their refugee status, through determination processes deemed as lacking procedural fairness and reliable judgments (UNHCR, 2018). Before taking up an analysis of excerpts of conversations that took place during the Partnering for Hope project with Abbas, Aliah, and Salar (above) and another five participants—Milad, Kalim, Ali, Reza, and Ali Sina—I lay out a hybrid theoretical framework for considering talk as agentic practice.

A Hybrid Theoretical Lens: The Theory of Practice Architectures and Agency as Practice

My intent in this chapter is to trace evidence of arrangements that enable agency in the lives and accounts of the young people involved in the Partnering for Hope project. This tracing, I argue, is best served by adopting an analytical lens made up of the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014a, 2014b) and two differing but—as I contend below—complimentary accounts of agency.

Theory of Practice Architectures

The theory of practice architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014a) is useful in generating a critical account of social reality. A theory of practice architectures (TPA) account focuses firstly on *what happens* in practices and “the ways in which people encounter one another in interaction as it happens” (Kemmis et al., 2017, p. 251), elaborated in the first paragraph below. Secondly—critically—a theory of practice architectures account focuses on how particular arrangements hold practices in place within three-dimensional “intersubjective” space of particular sites, elaborated in the second paragraph below.

Firstly, the theory of practice architectures can be used to describe and understand a practice, conceptualised as sayings, doings, and relatings hanging together, and to trace three dimensions of arrangements that pre-figure that practice, enabling and/or constraining it in ways specific to the site in which it happens. These arrangements are described in the theory of practice architectures as resources—or lack of resources—of various types that shape the sayings, doings, and relatings comprising a practice (Kemmis et al., 2014a, p. 32). The three dimensions are designated as cultural-discursive (resources such as discourse, language, beliefs and policies), material-economic (resources such as staffing, money, material objects and buildings), and social-political arrangements (resources involving power and solidarity, such as rules

and organisational roles, relationships, human connections, and loyalties) (Kemmis et al., 2014a). These dimensions are understood as only and always bundled together, only separable theoretically in order to describe and understand a practice and its arrangements, but as inseparable in social reality.

Secondly, the theory of practice architectures can and is designed to be used to generate informed transformative action—or to enable praxis (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008)—through clarifying how arrangements might be *changed* in order to enable more socially just practices. In other words, if human beings are indeed not only made by history, but also make history (Marx, 1999, as cited in Kemmis & Smith, 2008), then the theory of practice architectures can be used to understand which practice-changing-practices might help to make history as we *want* it to be made. Or to direct our living—our sayings, our doings, our relating—towards a world that we believe is more worth living in. The theory of practice architectures is not a values-neutral conceptualisation of how practices work, but rather, as Kemmis (2019, p. vii) puts it, “not just to understand the world, but to help save it”. The theory of practice architectures’s concern with critical praxis aims to simultaneously politicise and humanise practice (Mahon et al., 2017), making it an appropriate and potentially transformative tool for people involved in Partnering for Hope, most being people seeking asylum and all being people seeking justice.

Agency as Practice

The social exclusions that constitute the super-disadvantage asylum seekers face are infused with a deficit discourse (Dunwoodie et al., 2020). Research in this context, then, ethically necessitates a focus on agency. To this end, I propose a hybrid theoretical lens, drawing on the theory of practice architectures, and on two practice-related conceptualisations of agency: firstly, Stetsenko’s (2020, p. 74) “transformative activist stance”, and secondly, Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998, p. 963) account of agency as “a temporally embedded process of social engagement”.

The theory of practice architectures, although not focused on practitioners so much as practices, draws attention to how people develop through and inhere in their sayings, doings, and relating. As Kemmis (2019, p. 33) contends “I am a confluence of practices ... in interaction with other minds... with the material world ... with communities ... in webs of relationships of power and solidarity”. From a theory of practice architectures’ perspective, the human self—as a confluence of practices—is pre-figured by bundled-together and person-shaping arrangements. These include the materiality of places, other people’s practice-shaping-practices and our own historical practices (for example, experiences, habits, self-narratives, construction of beliefs, nurturing of loyalties) which shape practices as they happen “in the breaking wave of the present” (Kemmis, 2019, p. 87). This notion of human beingness in practice has profound implications for the understanding and enabling of agency. Kemmis and Grootenboer (2008, p. 38) argue that “as human beings and especially as *persons* with *human agency*, we are constituted through our relationship

with others—culturally, socially and economically...and in this sense, those others are part of us and we are a part of them”. This account points to human agency as ontologically relational/intersubjective.

Similarly, although independently of the theory of practice architectures, Stetsenko (2019a) echoes this perspective, articulating an even more radical self- and world-making agency, also located in practices. She conceptualises “human development ...as fully immersed in collaborative practices and constituted by agentic contributions to these practices” (p. 735). Further, she articulates the radically agentic mutuality of people in practices and what the theory of practice architectures calls arrangements as “about us being shaped (and more strongly, realized) by ways in which we shape the shaping (realizing) of us by the social forces of the world” (2020, p. 74). Her further claim is that “most critically, the *agentic self* is not the result of these processes but rather *the very process itself*—the making of the world and ourselves out of the world-making us” (p. 74, emphasis added). Stetsenko, then, takes the notion of human identity as ontologically wrapped up in practices to an even more radical point.

The ontological implications of this practice-architectures-transformative-activist-stance are significant for conceptualising the nature of human beings and the nature of agency. It is a stance with particular relevance for understanding practices of people who are super-disadvantaged and often viewed in deficit terms. However, to my mind this stance does not provide a fine-grained enough account to explain how agency happens *in* or *as* particular practices. I turn, then, to Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) account of agency to add a third layer to my hybrid theoretical lens.

Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argue for agency as comprised of three enmeshed but distinct orientations, towards the past, the future, and the present. They explain agency as:

A temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its “iterational” or habitual aspect) but also oriented toward the future (as a “projective” capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a “practical-evaluative” capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment).” (p. 963, emphasis added)

Stetsenko (2019a) holds Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) conception as wrongly characterising agency as a mere capacity. She critiques their explanation as infused with a “residue of passivity” (2019a, p. 1) and thereby, assuming by default a disempowered human self, separate from and subject to a world beyond and different to human practices, and which humans can only encounter and respond to. While I share her objection to agency as a capacity, I still read Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) albeit less radical account of agency as offering a tool for critical analyses of practices and as aligning with a transformative stance. They focus on:

The reconstructive, (self-) transformative potentialities of human agency [which] interpenetrates with and impacts upon the temporal-relational contexts of action... [They further describe agency as] a pre-eminently dialogic and communicative process, which unfolds in perpetual interaction with the social universe... the temporal-relational contexts within which [people] are embedded. (pp. 1012–13)

These words posit agency as practical, interactive, relational, and reconstructive of the world. They embolden me to proffer a slight adaptation of Emirbayer and Mische's definition of agency, informed by Stetsenko's (2019a) critique. This adaptation focuses on the aspects of their account of agency that define it as constituted by practice, rather than as a capacity. Using mostly their words, agency, then, can be understood as:

a temporally embedded process of social engagement [shaped] by the *past* [in practices of] selective reactivation... of past patterns of thought and action, as routinely incorporated in practical activity...

but also oriented toward the *future* (as imaginative generation ...of possible future trajectories of action, in which received structures of thought and action may be creatively reconfigured in relation to actors' hopes, fears, and desires for the future)...

and toward the *present* (as [contextualisation of] past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment) entailing the making of] practical and normative judgements among alternative possible trajectories of action. (adapted from Emirbayer & Mische, 1998, p. 971)

This shift—from a *capacity* to imagine or contextualise, to a *practice* of imagining, of creatively reconfiguring and of making judgements—offers an analytical lens for tracing these orientations of agency-as-practice. I argue it reflects the practice-leaning aspects of Emirbayer and Mische's thinking and maintains a more radical conception of agency without abandoning the finer-grained insight they offer into how agency happens.

In the remainder of the chapter, I use this hybrid analytical lens to interpret talk between me and others as co-participants in Partnering for Hope. I call this talk *agentic narrative practice* by which I mean talk that in itself comprises self- and world-shaping narrativising (Cavarero & Roncalli, 2015). I undertake a detailed analysis of some excerpts of conversation transcripts, examining evidence of social practice *as* agency, with an orientation towards the past, the future, and the present. I also trace some of the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements that shape this agentic narrative practice.

Partnering for Hope: A Critical Participatory Action Project

As explained in this chapter's introduction, the site of the Partnering for Hope project is the Hope Co-Op, a community organisation established through a "bottom-up approach" (Jungblut et al., 2018, p. 329) by people who are largely members of Australia's legacy caseload.

Given the super-disadvantage these people face (Lambrechts, 2020), including their need for sustainable educational access, research with them has particular ethical and methodological implications, including that of long-term commitment to the field and to authentic relationships (Fox et al., 2020; Pittaway & Bartolomei, 2013). The pre-existing relationships I have with many Hope Co-Op members, which include

my involvement in many of their educational or employment pathways, demand constant reflexivity and ethical critique. They carry unavoidable risks of coercion arising from substantial power differences, and limitations associated with potential smoothing of the data and analyses (Webster & Mertova, 2007), by both myself and other participants. As one participant, Reza, reminded me “You know, Sally, [we] might just tell you what [we] think you want to hear!”. His comment is one example of conversations in which these risks and limitations were explicitly problematised, and conversely, of the honesty (about dishonesty) that longer term relationships might enable.

Embarking on a project with tangible benefits planned, generated, and enjoyed by its participants was ethically imperative for this study and best served by adopting a Critical Participatory Action Research (CPAR) methodology (Fine, 2016; Kemmis et al., 2014a, 2014b). This approach comprises “practice-changing practice, [and] a self-reflective process by which [participants] remake their practice for themselves” (Kemmis et al., 2014a, 2014b, p. 26). Moreover, it enables participants to co-create action projects with the aim of practically contributing to a world more worth living in.

Space limitations preclude descriptions of the enterprises that were the co-designed actions within the Partnering for Hope project.² However, here I explore some fine details of the talking we did within wide ranging one-to-one conversations that comprised CPAR early design-focused activities.

Arrangements for Talking

While the discussion below focuses particularly on sayings, these were just one element of the conversations. Talking, as a practice, is not only sayings, but is also comprised by enmeshed doings and relatings, all hanging together in a particular site. That is, sayings hang in practice with the physicality of conversational doings (such as sitting in a warm or cold room at a computer, or in a vehicle pulled over by the side of the road using the Zoom app on a smartphone) and the conversational relatings (including affective elements) between us as co-participants.

Like all practices, the talking which provided the excerpts discussed below was enmeshed with the web of arrangements that pre-figured and shaped them. The talking is also practice that is ontologically inseparable from Hope Co-Op as a site. This site is pre-figured by historical arrangements comprised by St Bede’s and subsequent founding of the Hope Co-Op, including the future-oriented cultural-discursive arrangements formed by its founding vision and mission statements. It is talking also shaped by the arrangements of the CPAR project, which incorporate a focus on possibilities for future collaborative action.

² The Partnering for Hope CPAR project will be further described and discussed in a range of forthcoming publications, including my upcoming doctoral thesis, journal articles, a Hope Co-Op book entitled *The Shape of Hope*, and diverse publications associated with the World Worth Living In project (for example, website, podcasts and social media posts).

Other arrangements that shaped the talking include Melbourne's prolonged COVID-19 lockdown during 2020, the use of Zoom software and technological enablements such as laptop computers, internet access, and people's capabilities. These arrangements intersected with numerous others comprising the political context of the 'legacy caseload' and contributed to a conglomeration of arrangements that pre-figured—but did not determine—our conversations.

Another key social-political arrangement of these conversations was authentic and ongoing relationships. These relationships remain and frame the discussion below. In this discussion I use the hybrid theoretical lens proposed earlier to understand particular talking as exemplifying 'agentic narrative practice'. I explore this talking to understand how it (1) positioned agency within solidarities, (2) re-iterated connections through reminiscing and (3) generated agency through what I refer to as 'talking-up' collaborative possibilities.

Agency in Solidarities: “Without Any Connection, We Can't Do Anything”. (Ali)

A key theme emerging in Partnering for Hope conversations was of agency inhering in solidarity networks. Below, I examine excerpts of Ali Sina's talk of solidarities rooted in shared immigration detention experiences, Abbas and Kalim's accounts of solidarities grounded in St Bede's school, and Ali's depiction of ordinary relational practice as conditioning human agency.

When I asked Ali Sina about his social connections, he talked about the people with whom he experienced mandatory detention:

Those people who I've been with in detention centre, we were always together. You know, except those 7 or 8 hours sleep time, most of the time we have been together. We have been playing together, we've been eating together, we've been doing a lot of stuff together... sports, fun, playing, soccer, everything we've been doing together! ... we know each other's habit. We know what kind of person this person is. And you know... I always feel good when I interact with them, when I catch up with them. Because I know they are the people, you know, like we have come from the same start point in Australia. We started together.
(Ali Sina)

Here he embeds his solidarity with these people in the shared practices wherein they have “been together...like a family for a year and a half” (Ali Sina). His re-telling evokes and reiterates this solidarity: “they are the people...We started together”. This solidarity is temporally embedded (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998), flowing from the intimacy of shared past practices within enforced detention, to “always feel[ing] good when interact[ing] with them” to the present happening of our conversation, where his re-telling weaves further solidarity beyond his personal thoughts, shaping a present practice whereby I, in conversation with him, also 'know': “And you know...I always feel good... when I catch up with them”.

Abbas also revives past connections in re-telling his very peopled memories of enrolling at St Bede's school. He reveals an enduring sense of enjoyment in remembering staff, in remembering unexpectedly meeting people he knew from detention (Salar and Jawad), and in longterm friendship (with Ali Sina).

Abbas: I got to St Bede's [to enrol], and then... who was there? Jen was there! And I can't quite remember...

Sally: Jo maybe? David?

Abbas: You know, you know, that woman? She was all the time in that office...??

Sally: Hmmmm... Coral? Rachael?

Abbas: Yeah...? Who was our teacher who went to Adelaide....?

Sally: Oh! Patsy!

Abbas: Yes! Patsy! She was there too. And yeah, so they did my enrolment, and I think they said, "Come back next week?!" ...I can't remember exactly, but then I went, and I came back, and I saw Salar and Jawad! [laughter] They enrolled too! And then I brought back Ali Sina with myself and I introduced Ali Sina!

The people Abbas mentions here are all Hope Co-Op members and my ex-students. The sayings involved in this brief co-constructed recount, including the saying of people's names, strengthen our mutual solidarities in that moment. Further, given St Bede's defining ethos of radically inclusive education, in highlighting his recruitment of Ali Sina, Abbas also aligns himself with this ethos. Viewed through Stetsenko's (2019b) transformative activist stance lens, Abbas' re-telling these past practices, and inviting me to contribute to the re-telling, constitutes agentic and self-constituting practice in the present.

I turn now to Ali, who alongside Reza, another Hope Co-Op member, has been working fulltime for four years at the company where he completed a traineeship through St Bede's. He explains:

I make a good connection with everyone, I believe. When I have lunch with Reza, other guys, always other guys, you can ask Reza, when I'm sitting in the kitchen, always people are waving at me. [laughter] To say hi! You know, I try to be friendly with other guys... they know me as, like not joker, but...good person! I try to be very friendly with other guys. I know this is a workplace but without any connection we can't do anything. (Ali)

Here Ali connects me into his relational network, not only referring to Reza, who we both know well, but also suggesting that I "can ask Reza", assuming our mutual participation in a network of living relational practices (Edward-Groves et al., 2010). He focusses on relatings between him and "other guys, always other guys", and their reciprocal effort to "wave at me...to say hi!". He explicitly links social connectedness and agency, articulating routine relational practice—sayings ("to say hi!"), doings ("sitting in the kitchen") and relatings ("try to be very friendly") bundled together in practice—as a condition of agency, whereby "without any connection we can't do anything".

Similarly, Kalim speaks of solitary relationships as intrinsic to agency and as able to counter the exclusionary impacts of government discourse:

I never like *felt* like ... being in this county I never felt like, um ...? Apart from what government said, but I never felt from the community, I never felt, like ... excluded. Because I have lots of people that support me. (Kalim)

He also evidences his own agency as arranged by solitary connections—social-political arrangements of practice—threaded through with relational effect:

You know? Like, [people who] *know* me, and I know them. When you have that kind of relationship, like, um, then you feel like you can, you know, you can *do* things! (Kalim)

Kalim's "feel[ing] like you can do things" speaks to the self- and world- making practice of imagining future possibilities. While feelings might not be commonly understood as self- or world-making, I posit that they are ontologically shaped-by and shaping-of practices. As such, feelings are also involved in agency-in-practice.

Kalim further elaborates how his and others' agency is enmeshed with solidarity formed by particular kinds of relatings:

St Bede's was different... It was not just about our studies. It was about welcoming people from different backgrounds, and respecting each other's customs and beliefs and thoughts ... I would see everyone not just being as teacher-students. But being like close, you know, like listening to each other. We were given opportunities to prove ourselves that we can do something. And most of the people, they did, you know. (Kalim)

Like Ali Sina, Abbas and Ali above, Kalim here depicts particular kinds of solidarities shaping spaces of opportunity for people to "do something". This "something" people were enabled to do is to "prove"—to evidence, to substantiate—themselves through the adoption of their own educational practices that carried them into future and ongoing shaping of themselves and the world.

This account of these conversations speaks to the theory of practice architectures' social-political dimension of arrangements, whereby particular sorts of solitary relationships characterised by practices such as "welcoming... respecting ... being close... listening" (Kalim) and "making good connection" (Ali), constitute conditions of agency-in-practice.

Reminiscence–Re-Telling as Agentic Narrative Practice

A further theme emerging from analysis of Partnering for Hope conversations is that of the agency inhering the narrative practice of reminiscing. This reminiscing constituted a shared practice of reaffirming the emotional and practical significance of past experiences, through the sayings transcribed below. There are also relatings intertwined with these sayings, evident in the emotion, warmth, and enthusiasm permeating the talk.

When I asked Abbas about times of significant connection for him, he talked about a soccer competition he had helped initiate four years before. He also connected the

story with a number of other people that we both still know, some of whom are part of this study.

Abbas: The soccer! Oh, it was so good! I really liked it. I think I was the only person who was really excited about it and enthusiastic [at the start]. We started it! Yeah! Like we started it!

Sally: I remember! I remember putting the announcements over on a Wednesday afternoon.

Abbas: I remember one time, I was there... Ahwaz was there. I think Ali Sina and the other guy... I forgot his name; he was from Yemen... You would remember him... Ebby! Yeah!... That day, there were only four people!

Later, Abbas talked more broadly about his time at St Bede's:

Abbas: Oh, it was SO good! I remember it still.

Sally: Yeah!! Remember the dinners, the lunches...?

Abbas: Yeah! Everything! Everything about St Bede's was fun! Yeah. Memorable! I can say that.

Sally: Yeah, for me too.

Through such reminiscing, interviews that were formally arranged for research purposes served additional and informal relational purposes, reifying our connection in the present through the talk's orientation towards the past.

The sayings involved in another conversation, with Milad, can also be seen through Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) lens of past (iterational), future (projective), and present (practical-evaluative) orientations of agency. Our reminiscing—bringing to mind thoughts and actions we had engaged in the past—is entwined with imagining future possibilities:

Sally: So, if you get [that job], where will you live?

Milad: I will live in Leyton.

Sally: Oh yeah, you could visit Tallangoori [outdoor education centre]!

Milad: Oh, yeah, I remember you saying it was close to there... Yeah, I'm probably going to go there for the weekend. I... we had a really good time. Like, I always remember Tallangoori. Like I always want to go again.

Sally: Hey, remember "Wake up baby, wake up"?

Milad: [laughter] You know, the memories... you know I'll never forget that. Especially that four days that we went from school. That was actually really really good!

Sally: Yeah. It was amazing, wasn't it?! [poignant tone]

Milad: Yeah. That was good, yeah.

Sally: It was you and Ali, yeah, going around waking us all up in the morning?

Milad: No, first of all, themselves, the people working there. They were like, waking us up, And I was like, can we do that too? And they're like, yeah go for it! And they gave it [the guitar] to us. Ali, myself, and someone else too. I can't remember, but it was really fun!

This conversation was energetic and emotionally rich. Like Abbas' concerted efforts to remember exactly who was involved in the soccer competition, Milad and my shared re-telling entailed fine details: "they're like, 'yeah, go for it! And they gave it to us", and "Hey, remember 'Wake up, baby...'"? and recalling particular people: "Ali, myself and someone else too".

These reminiscences, as talking, did not belong to Abbas or Milad only as individuals: they were *our* memories, relived in the mutual re-telling within our conversations. As sayings, they hung together with relatings as they happened were infused with our aligned and interplaying emotions. They not only reflect but *comprise* the agency that, in Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) terms, is in part oriented towards past habits of social engagement.

Understood through a theory of practice architectures lens, these reminiscences are an agentic narrative practice enabled by the social-political dimension of practice architectures of long-term relationships. Moreover, our shared past experiences were also, of course, embodied. They happened in particular places, enabled by particular material-economic arrangements embedded as part of schools, outdoor education centres and indoor soccer competitions, such as public address (PA) systems, buses, staffing, football clubs, soccer balls, trees, tents, and guitars. Our mutual re-telling of enjoyable experiences agentially carried our past practices into current ones, reproduced as sayings (Kemmis et al., 2014a, 2014b). This re-telling, as a practice in itself, is not an example of participating in something that already exists but rather, in its happeningness (Kemmis et al., 2014a, 2014b), is an example of Milad, Abbas, and me co-creating ourselves, and our present world in our practices (Stetsenko, 2020). Re-telling and reminiscing comprise then, one clear example of agentic narrative practice.

Talking-Up: Sayings for Transformative Future Practice (Praxis)

This section focuses on what I call 'talking-up' as a third example of agentic-narrative-practice. Talking-up, I argue, acts as a practice that shapes people's own and each other's future praxis. Here I examine 'talking-up' as demonstrating people's awareness of how relationships and future-oriented agency are enmeshed—not in terms of a *capacity* to imagine alternative possibilities, but rather a *practice* of imagining alternative possibilities. Talking-up is, I suggest, the saying together, the agentic narrative practice, that in itself contributes to making a world more worth living in. More than that, these conversations are threaded through with a radical conceptualisation of agency as commingling past, present, and future orientations of social engagement (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) that are simultaneously self- and world-making in practice (Stetsenko, 2019a, 2019b).

Firstly, I return to Aliah, first introduced in Sect. 1.2, who had attended a high school where there were no other asylum-seeking students. Through a Hope Co-Op

weekend trip to the beach prior to our conversation, she had made contact with other young asylum seekers and talks here about the impact of these solidary relationships on her self-identity and agency.

That journey we had [to the beach]... it was a very good experience. And it was a good connection with asylum seekers, like Milad, or like Ali and Asha, because I didn't know that that they're doing an amazing job in Fire Fighting. It was very good to know that people who came into this country as an asylum-seeker are now helping society. And it gives me like a kind of feeling much better about *my* status. We are not always a disgrace for the Australian community! (Aliah)

Making connections like this with asylum seekers gives us a better sense of identity. And makes us to be more confident and to walk forward and to make progress. And prove to the Australian community and the government that we can be helpful...we can do something good in this community. (Aliah)

Aliah's talk here drew energy from past experiences and solidarities forward into her current feeling about herself and so positioned herself as agentic within the broader community. She cast her agency as flowing from relationality in the past, through to relationality in the future. Put another way, her agency flowed over time from the collective to the individual and back out to the collective. Further, her talking-up was not just talking *about* her own thinking; her talking-up comprised agentic self-narrativising practice in itself. Thus, in talking about the world, Aliah reframed and remade herself in the world. Moreover, like Kalim's sayings mentioned earlier, Aliah's talking-up consciously remade the world counter to the dominant public discursive construction (or making) of asylum seekers as a 'disgrace'.

Another example of this talking-up, practised by Abbas, is not only about the sayings it entails; it also has an important affective element. He spoke energetically about the emerging plans of his advocacy action group, talking-up his enthusiasm for the impacts of future collaboration.

Abbas: Ok... I mean... I mean... I really like this! I really like to see the outcome! Ha! ...Ha!!...

Sally: Yeah!

Abbas: I mean, I know, Sally, I know the outcome is gonna be good. But I'm more excited, I'm *very* excited about the *outcome*. I mean... I don't know who else is participating, but if more people are participating and if more people are showing interest, it's gonna be good.

In a separate conversation about the same action project, Milad talked-up the same plans, connecting them to the relational networks comprised by Hope Co-Op and by the various regional government work-centres in which he, Abbas, and another man, Asha, were employed.

I think that will be great! There's nothing to stop us. Like I was saying, from work, from my side, we've got Asha as well. Like every time I ask for something, [my colleagues and bosses] have been very supportive for me. I think that will be really good, from my side, from Rothendon, from Dorrigo.³ (Milad)

³ Rothendon and Dorrigo are regional work-centres.

Here Milad talked-up the power of connection with other people and other work-centres, to the point where his talking-up served to conjure-up, inspire, breathe life into future possibilities. The energy and enthusiastic effect of his talk was such that he viewed potential barriers as ‘nothing’, grounding his confidence in past relational experience of support.

The practice of talking-up examined here, in conversations with Aliah, Abbas, and Milad, further illustrates the relationally conditioned agency discussed in the previous sections. This talking-up as an agentic narrative practice oriented Aliah’s, Abbas’ and Milad’s past experiences and future possibilities towards their practice-woven and agentially self-weaving present. They talked-up their own selves and the world as inextricably relational and pregnant with purpose. In doing so they agentially projected the world as more worth living in, for themselves, and others.

Conclusion

The conversations drawn on in this chapter were shaped by historical and ongoing relationships and by collaborative action projects planned for the future. I have argued that all these conversations constituted and enacted what I call agentic narrative practice. I have also posited a hybridised theoretical lens that layers Stetsenko’s (2020) transformative agentic stance, Emirbayer and Mische’s (1998) conception of agency as entailing past (iterational), future (projective) and present (practical-evaluative) orientations, and a practice architectures account of all practice as enabled and constrained by complex but changeable pre-figuring arrangements (Kemmis et al., 2014a, 2014b). This hybrid theorisation is intended to generate an understanding of these conversations that contributes to a broader notion of human agency as comprised by practices. In this chapter, I have focused on how agency inheres in and is generated and experienced through solidary relationships, and how practices of reminiscing about past shared experiences, and of talking-up future collaborative action are ontologically significant as self- and world-shaping agentic narrative practices.

Understanding agentic narrative practices as they happen in particular sites speaks to the ethical and methodological concerns of critical praxis, for both research and practice, in the areas of forced migration, educational equity, and beyond. The accounts provided in this chapter posit agentic narrative practice wherein people shape and nourish the connections that weave the world by simultaneously, in talk, connecting themselves to each other and to particular storied places. Put more personally, as conversations happen, we connect to each other and to places precisely by and in our mutual practice of re-telling and talking-up. Insofar as these narrative practices comprise our mutual becoming, they also comprise the inherent radical agency of iterative and dialogic world-making in practice. This reflects Stetsenko’s (2020, p. 74) account of human subjectivity that, ontologically, is involved with the world through a “dynamic and perpetual flow of being-shaped-by-shaping-what-is-shaping-us”. My conclusion here is that agentic narrative practice comprises a

particular and pivotal plexus of this immanent co-creation. As human beings, we contribute to making ourselves, contribute to making the world, and change both through our agentic narrative practice.

These findings offer insight into how a world worth living in—a world we want, a world we hope for—inheres in our own agency-as-practice. This insight has implications for how this world worth living in might be further enabled in other sites. Ali Sina, Abbas, Ali, Kalim, Aliah, and Milad demonstrate agentic narrative practice that runs counter to deficit notions of displacement, disruption, passivity, and exclusion commonly associated with asylum-seekers (Dunwoodie et al., 2020). Rather, their agentic narrative practice at once draws on past solidarities and anticipates and generates future solidarities with particular people in actual places. Precisely through this solidarity, their agentic narrative practice enlivens notions of dynamic capacity, emplacement, continuity, activity, and belonging.

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Chapter 10

Keeping Each Other Safe: Young Refugees' Navigation Towards a Good Life in Finland, Norway, and Scotland



Nick Haswell, Mervi Kaukko, Marte Knag Fylkesnes, and Paul Sullivan

Abstract The metaphor of *navigation* has been used to investigate the social and moral movements people make in changeable or fluctuating circumstances, as well as to shed light on the intersection of people, practices and the changing contexts and social forces around them. In this chapter, we first provide a short overview of navigation as a metaphor, and how the situations of young refugees might add to the multiple meanings of navigation. Using empirical data from the international NordForsk-funded project *Drawing Together: Relational wellbeing in the lives of young refugees in Finland, Norway and Scotland*, we explore how young refugees socially and morally navigate through the complex and unstable circumstances of building new lives and new social networks in host countries. Then, turning to our findings, we discuss how ‘living well’ involves not only movement towards individual goals, but also movement with, for the sake of, and in relation to important people locally and transnationally. We conclude the chapter by envisioning the destination of young refugees’ navigation as hinted at by the data: *a world worth living in for all*.

Keywords Navigation · Refugee · Relational well-being · Social practice

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Introduction

Navigation, recalling its Latin root *navigare*—‘to sail, sail over and go by sea’, denotes the practice of locating one’s position in, and following a planned route through, a fluid medium. Beyond its maritime context, the concept has been used in the social sciences as a metaphor to describe the gaining of one’s bearings in a shifting, unstable environment and finding one’s way to a chosen destination by understanding, predicting, and responding to uncertain and changeable conditions. Often the term’s maritime connotations are emphasised to highlight the turbulence, opaqueness, and unpredictability of the conditions to be navigated, such that one navigates “the murky waters of ethical decision-making” (Mower et al., 2015, p. 131), “the muddy waters of harmony-promoting censorship” (Skoda, 2013, p. 7), and “uncharted waters...” (Ellis et al., 2015).

The metaphor of *navigation* has been used to investigate the social (Vigh, 2009) and moral (White & Jha, 2021) movements people make in changeable or fluctuating circumstances, as well as to shed light on the intersection of people, practices and the changing contexts and social forces around them. In this chapter, we use the metaphor of navigation (Vigh, 2009; White & Jha, 2021) to discuss how former unaccompanied minors, now young, settled adult refugees,¹ move towards living well with others and establishing a good life in their host countries. We draw on data gathered in Finland, Norway, and Scotland, as part of introductory welcome events of an international research project, *Drawing Together*.² The aim of this project is to understand how former unaccompanied minors draw and describe their networks and relationships: how their social networks flow and evolve over time, and how they start building good lives in their new home countries. In our welcome events, the participants met online or face to face to discuss the importance of social networks and relational well-being in their lives. Their responses, taken as a whole, provide insights into their thoughts and experiences of navigating complex ‘seas’ of post-displacement circumstances.

In this chapter, we first provide a short overview of how navigation has been used as a metaphor to highlight different dimensions of people’s movement, and how the situations of young refugees might add to the multiple meanings of navigation. Then, turning to our findings, we discuss how *living well* involves not only movement towards individual goals, but also movement with, for the sake of, and in relation to

¹ The participants in this study were young adult refugees aged between 18 and 30, who had arrived in their destination countries as unaccompanied minors and who have been granted various types of permission to remain. Most arrived in their host countries in 2015 at the height of the so-called *refugee crisis*, discussed in more detail in the chapter. While acknowledging the problematic nature of labelling, for clarity we henceforth refer to the participant cohort as *young refugees* or simply *participants*.

² Funded by NordForsk Joint Nordic-UK research programme on Migration and Integration for 2020-2024, see more <https://www.drawingtogetherproject.org>. The project is discussed in more detail in the chapter.

important people locally and transnationally. We conclude the chapter by envisioning the destination hinted at in the participants' discussions: *a world worth living in for all*.

Navigation

Navigation has been used as a metaphor or an analytic tool in different social sciences, including anthropology (Vigh, 2009), sociology (e.g., Crosnoe, 2011; Ng & Zhang, 2021; Olsson et al., 2006; Reyers et al., 2018), human geography (e.g., McQuaid et al., 2021) and migration studies (e.g., Kuschminder, 2021; Nunn et al., 2017). While some texts discuss navigation in a general sense, others home in on particular dimensions of people's environment (e.g., social, cultural, educational, environmental, political, bureaucratic) to understand how those dimensions influence their navigation, or alternatively, look at people's movement as social or moral practices. Our interest is mostly in what has been written about social and moral navigation, to understand how individuals in unstable circumstances navigate in relation to their social networks.

Social Navigation

Social navigation is conceptualised by Vigh (2009) as the movement through which "we organise ourselves and act in relation to the interplay of the social forces and pressures that surround us" (p. 425). Highlighting the mutable and constantly changing nature of the conditions enabling or constraining people's practices, Vigh (2009) draws a distinction between social navigation and other metaphors describing more rigid spatial or environmental conditions, such as 'field' or 'landscape' (2009, pp. 426–427). This perspective of navigation as a movement within movement, Vigh (2009) argues, shifts one's "analytical gaze... toward the way people not just act in but interact with their social environment and adjust their lives to the constant influence (in potential and presential) of social forces and change" (p. 433). This dialogical relationship of individual practices and the conditions which enable or constrain them is in line with most practice research (see, for example, Kemmis et al., 2014). There are parallels also between Vigh's (2009) thoughts and what Kemmis and colleagues (for example, 2017, p. 53) refer to as the three-dimensional intersubjective spaces in which practices happen, that is, in semantic space, physical space–time, and social space, all constantly changing, and all mutually shaping one another. Likewise, Vigh (2009) pictures social environments shaping people's actions and interactions, and these environments being as fluid as a shifting seascape; a confluence of predictable tides and reefs, and unpredictable waves, winds, and storms. Navigating these social seas, like navigating physical seas, can be a complicated task, dependent on one's knowledge of its tides and on the strength of one's ship.

Social navigation, according to Vigh (2009), relates to one's movement through immediate circumstances, reacting and responding to them as they unfold in the present. Yet, key to one's present movement is the direction from which one has moved, as past events and experiences impact on one's present circumstances. As Vigh (2009) points out, it also refers to the direction towards which one is moving, as one navigates through the "socially imagined" (p. 425), be they potential future circumstances or desired social goals. For recently arrived refugees, like the participants in our study, navigation "through the socially imagined" can be seen as the way in which, while finding their way through unfamiliar circumstances, they also strive to shape the world as they imagine it being desirable.

The concept of social navigation directs our attention to how people read, interpret, and predict fluctuating social conditions and the actions and intentions of others, as well as how they map these circumstances in such a way as to be able to steer a promising course within and through it. Through social navigation, we gain a sense of the intentionality and directedness of people's movement, as well as the responsibility of those navigating. In some important respects, however, social navigation falls short of providing a full picture of young refugees' navigation within social networks. Firstly, it seems to assume that one's navigation is always driven by a striving to improve one's circumstances or maximise one's gains. In this view, one is never passively floating in a sea, carried along by the currents of circumstance; one is at the helm of one's ship, steering it. In reality, though, people sometimes steer, sometimes do nothing, and sometimes stop altogether. Sometimes people find relief in not being in charge of their lives and need to drift a little to feel well. Secondly, as we discuss below, social navigation does not account for the moral and ethical ties that exist between people, enabling and constraining their navigation. In other words, navigation with others cannot be merely social; it is always also moral and ethical.

Moral Navigation

The ethical and moral ties that exist between people mean that they never truly move within social environments independently of others, but are constantly connected to others, locally and transnationally. As the anthropologist Lambek (2010) describes, we, as inherently ethical beings, "cannot avoid being subject to ethics, speaking and acting with ethical consequences, evaluating our actions and those of others, acknowledging and refusing acknowledgment, caring and taking care, but also being aware of our failure to do so consistently" (p. 1). This means that our practices cannot avoid having moral, social and political consequences for people around us. Ordinary ethics manifest within the everyday flow of people's lives, "grounded in agreement rather than rule, in practice rather than knowledge or belief, and happening without calling undue attention to itself" (Lambek, 2010, p. 2). It is also bound to

people's hope, in their "attempts in everyday practice and thought to inhabit and persevere in light of uncertainty, suffering, injustice, incompleteness, inconsistency, the unsayable, the unforgivable, the irresolvable, and the limits of voice and reason" (Lambek, 2010, p. 4).

White and Jha (2021) use the metaphor of *moral navigation* to investigate the way in which people navigate as ethical beings through social environments involving relationships with others. Maintaining the social navigational notion of moving within a moving environment, this perspective draws attention to the interdependence that characterises people's lives, and the processes by which people maintain, or attempt to maintain, responsibility for each other's health, happiness, and prosperity through acts of caring and sharing (see also Gergen, 2009; White, 2017). Focusing on the relationality of social ties, moral navigation describes more than the movement towards individual goals through everyday social interactions; it also describes a movement with others towards a communal vision informed by moral perspectives that arise out of the ordinary experiences of people navigating their social circumstances. White and Jha (2021) characterise this kind of navigation as a morally committed "pursuit of what ought to be, demonstrating one's belonging and status within a moral community by fulfilling one's responsibilities, seeking to ensure that others also do what is right" (p. 251). Through this characterisation, they point to both a philosophical dimension of moral navigation, in the thinking about "what ought to be", as well as a practical dimension, in the fulfilment of one's responsibilities. The distinctions between ethics and morality vary, but we here follow White and Jha's (2021; see also Mattingly, 2014) approach of using them interchangeably, recognising that both internal and external values, standards and rationalities are drawn on in the formation and maintenance of social ties.

In highlighting the unavoidable moral entwinement of people's movement, White and Jha's (2021) definition of moral navigation includes a dimension of relationality that is not addressed by social navigation. They see the self as "essentially forged in and through relationships" (White & Jha, 2021, p. 251), evoking an image, not of individual ships following personal courses amidst others, finding their way to personal harbours, but of ships travelling together in groups bound by ethical and moral ties. Complicating this image, however, is White and Jha's (2021) reminder that these ties are not always clear, benign, or compassionate. Within wider communities, as well as among more immediate social networks, there can be competing goals or moral perspectives, and tensions can exist between individual and collective interests.

In considering how young refugees move towards living well with others and establishing a good life in their host countries, moral navigation can shed light on the connections between well-being, care, and social circumstances. Without oversimplifying the conditions that impact this movement, we can employ the metaphor to explore how our participants think about their social networks and ties between them. Employing this metaphor, however, raises an interesting question: if the destination of moral navigation is to become established within a group, what can we imagine the destination of the group itself to be? Here we may combine the ideas of social and moral navigation to envision a shared movement towards an imagined or desired future shaped by the communities' notions of *what ought to be* and *what is right*. In

short, we could imagine the destination to be both a state and process of living well together in a world worth living in. In this way, we are interested not only in social or moral navigation, but in relational navigation for living well with others.

Young Refugees in Finland, Norway, and Scotland

Our focus is on the social and moral navigation of young refugees in Finland, Norway, and Scotland. During the so-called *refugee crisis*³ which peaked in 2015 yet continues today, the number of asylum seekers increased rapidly in Europe, with many making their way to Finland, Norway, and Scotland to find refuge. According to the UN Refugee Agency, most of these people were fleeing war, conflict, or persecution in their home countries, most commonly leaving Syria, Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Eritrea, and other parts of sub-Saharan Africa (UNHCR, 2015). Up to 10% of these arrivals were unaccompanied minors; that is, children or youths travelling without their parents or other customary care givers (UNHCR, 2021).

These unaccompanied minors moved through often lengthy asylum processes in their new host countries. At the same time, they were growing into adulthood with increasing independence. Those granted permission to stay, like our participants, started building new lives in their host country and within new communities. This process was impacted by multiple, intersecting social, economic, and cultural factors (Allsop & Chase, 2019) that differ across the three countries in our study. Compared to Scotland, the populations of Finland and Norway are more homogenous in terms of ethnicity and religion. Policy discourses concerning cultural diversity in Scotland are influenced in part by the UK's colonial past which differs from the Norwegian and Finnish contexts. These historical differences have impacted the way policies have evolved within the three country-specific welfare systems. With Nordic welfare models, Norway and Finland provide more universal services to its residents than Scotland, whose model approximates the liberal welfare regime. The biggest differences in the Nordic and liberal welfare models relate to available social welfare benefits and therefore to individuals' dependence on kinship and social networks. These differences are part of the social-political as well as material-economic arrangements within which the young refugees start building their new lives.

In the broader *Drawing Together* research project, we wanted to gain insights into how these young refugees form and maintain social networks in their post-displacement lives, and how their networks generate relational well-being. Throughout the autumn of 2020 we organised a series of events in Finland, Norway, and Scotland in which participants living in those countries met to be welcomed into

³ Like, for example, Perre et al. (2018) and Petäjänieniemi et al. (2021), we consider the events leading to the increase in forced migration in 2015 to be a crisis of protection, solidarity, and humanity rather than a refugee crisis.

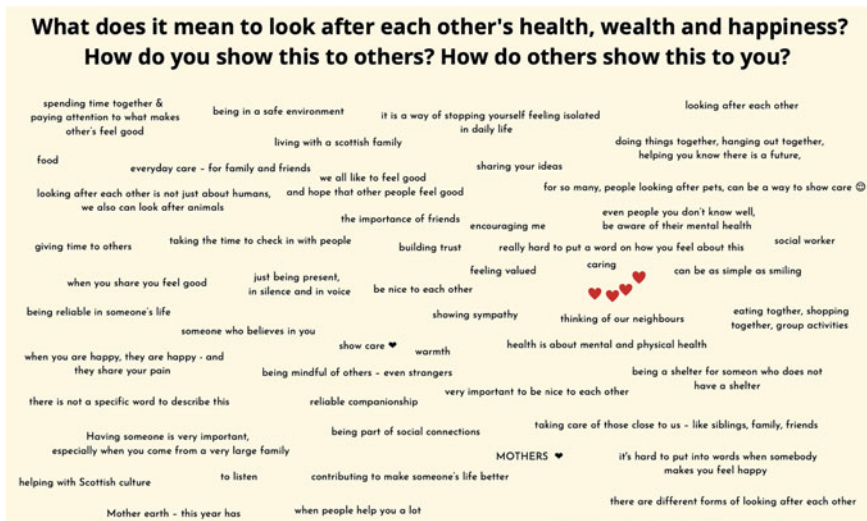


Fig. 10.1 Example from the Scottish welcome event exercise

our project.⁴ These welcome events—held in person or online according to local COVID-19 regulations—were opportunities to start a discussion on the project’s focus. The participants were asked to write down their initial thoughts about what it means to live well with others, and to care for, and be cared for by others. This activity was dialogical and loosely structured, initiated by pre-designed prompts. The prompts differed slightly between countries in language and wording and included, for example: *What does it mean to live well or to live a good life with others? What do other people mean to you, what do you mean to others? How do you look after each other? What does it mean to care for others? How do you show it [care], and how do others show it to you?* Depending on the format of the meeting, the responses were collected on either post-it notes or via the Zoom Whiteboard application (Fig. 10.1).

The welcome events were conducted during the first waves of the COVID-19 pandemic. The safety measures related to physical contact and movement differed in our contexts, which influenced how we could collect data. The situation could also influence how the young people saw their social network, and the ways of keeping in touch. The discussions were mostly in the host country languages English, Norwegian or Finnish, although some participants wrote their responses in other languages. All responses were translated into English for data analysis. The responses were analysed thematically, guided by the social navigational notion of moving within moving environments and the moral navigational emphasis on moral and ethical movement with others. In particular, we looked at what the data revealed about the types of social and moral movements participants make in the formation and maintenance of their

⁴ A total of 52 young refugees attended the project’s welcome events; 17 in Finland, 18 in Norway, and 17 in Scotland.

social networks. Finally, we took some liberties to imagine what the destination—a state of living well together in a world worth living in—could look like based on these short responses. The findings are structured around these themes.

We acknowledge that the data at hand consists of short, written notes, so we cannot make far-reaching interpretations of what individual participants meant to communicate through them. Furthermore, the data is purposefully selected to illustrate the metaphor of navigation. It is not based on a systematic analysis of the views of the participants as a whole, as our welcome event data does not allow us to do this. However, these short notes work as illustrative examples of how young refugees' responses point towards "what ought to be" (White & Jha, 2021, p. 251) as they describe their lives in new communities.

Findings

Our interpretation of the data identifies three types of movement that participants make in forming and maintaining their social networks, each of them comprising social and moral elements:

1. the participants' movement *with* others,
2. the participants' movement *for* others,
3. and the participants' movement *in relation to* others, specifically people important to them locally and transnationally.

The participants' movement with, for the sake of, or in relation to others does not happen in isolation from their context: both the current circumstances of their host country, as described above, as well as their past experiences with forced migration, have impacted their movement. Yet overall, it seems that navigating *together* with those important to them has helped the participants manage in the moving sea of their host country's social environment. It also seems that while the types of movement, whether it was moving with, for the sake of, or in relation to others, were intertwined and overlapping, each had some particular features.

Moving with Others

In navigating with others through their post-displacement circumstances, our participants intentionally and purposefully formed ties to, and maintained ties within, social networks. This is what we mean by moving *with* others. The groups consisted of family, some of whom were in the same country as our participants while others were far away. It also consisted of new and old friends as well as other acquaintances made through sports, hobbies, volunteering, work-related activities or from organisations related to participants' asylum process.

As suggested by the responses,⁵ moving with others could take the form of everyday companionship, in which reciprocal caring and sharing takes place. Much of this movement involves shared activities. It could be socialising in general, such as “hanging out together” [S] or “do[ing] things together” [S] as some responses describe, or more specific activities such as exercising, learning a language or cooking together. Part of this spending time together, as alluded to in one response, is “paying attention to what makes others feel good” [S]. It is also about paying attention to what others, and the participants themselves, need:

Practicing English together – because I need to speak to make friends and to feel safe. [S]

I cannot be silent – I want to speak so I have to learn English. [S]

The shared experience of learning a language can be seen as moving with others to navigate the challenges of integrating into new cultural and social environments.

The benefits of moving with others can be gleaned from participants' descriptions of what it means to care for, and be cared for, by others. In these responses, being cared for was closely connected with being safe. Participants described the sense of safety not only as something that comes through learning the language or learning to cope in society, but also as having emotional safety. “Giv[ing] one another safe space” [F] and not leaving people “alone” [F, S] were cited as elements of living well. These relationships, as other responses confirmed, provide support by preventing participants “feeling isolated in daily life” [S], offering them “reliable companionship” [S], and feelings of being “valued” [S] and needed by others. Overall, they show that “you have somebody who cares for you” [F].

It is impossible to say how much these responses differ from what another group of young adults without refugee backgrounds would have given, but it is noteworthy that, in pointing to the importance of safety and the care and closeness of trusted companionships in their lives, many of these young refugees have experienced a distinct lack of these experiences as they fled their countries unaccompanied, to arrive in countries where some of them had no acquaintances and where none of them spoke the dominant language. Regardless of the motivations to give these responses, the feeling of safety and trust in one's social network was emphasised.

Many responses pointed to the help one receives from others, but some also described how one helps others. Thus, they suggested that well-being was considered by participants as reciprocal rather than something that others around them donate to the young refugees. Through their social ties, they saw themselves as being able to positively influence other people, “contribut[e] to make someone's life better” [S], and “keep ... each other safe” [S]. So, what they appreciated receiving from others seemed to be just as important as giving back. That these acts of caring were described as opportunities rather than responsibilities hints at the reciprocal nature of ethical ties. As one participant wrote, “when you share you feel good” [S].

The responses also highlight the interdependence of social ties; that looking after another requires looking after oneself. “First of all we must be safe and able to manage

⁵ Responses are coded in the following way by the country in which the response was gathered: F = Finland, N = Norway, S = Scotland.

yourself, then you are able to help others” [S], one participant wrote, while another described caring for each other in terms of being “a fundament to both yourself and others” [N]. This is in line with what White and Jha (2021) observe about the maintenance of social relations as part of moral navigation. Its relationality is clear as it benefits the receiver as well as the giver, as can be seen in the responses below:

[Through language learning] you can keep yourself well and then others [S]

Managing relationships is about how to live healthily – exercise, activity, motivation [S]

Important to do exercise together – to chat together [S]

Several participants mentioned the hospitable act of inviting people to share food and drink.

Food/ Inviting someone round for dinner [S]

Treat (in the sense: treat others a cup of coffee, etc.) [N]

Food and cooking for people is a way of showing care [S]

These statements become more significant when considering the socio-economic context of the participants, most of whom are students or working in low-paid jobs. Hospitality, as some other responses suggest, plays a deeper role in navigation than simply spending time together. Guests, one participant wrote, “are not coming for the food only, but for a chat and to help you work through ideas about the future and about concerns” [S]. Another response, written in Persian, described guests as “the light in one’s eyes (original: مهمان ها نور چشم ما هستند)” [F]. So, while this participant is hosting for the sake of the guests, the participant also benefits from it.

Moving for Others

In addition to instances of everyday companionship and mutual support described above as moving with people, some responses inferred compassionate actions and intentions that, while perhaps undertaken as part of movement with others, may be more fittingly described as moving *for* others. Some responses described compassionate actions in general terms, such as “helping the people who are in need” [F], or “I give to people close to me: Love, Information where it is found, Strength!” [F], while others suggested that caring for others made one’s own journey better, while others implied that it was a moral responsibility:

As a human being you want to see people happier and healthier [S]

As a human being we owe to each other to be nice... because we share the same Earth & space [N]

In many responses, moving for others, in the form of being, is hinted at in the way participants described how they communicate care through body language or mere silence.

Showing support through smiling/body language [N]

Show love [N]

Show understanding [N]

Support others as well as I can – both physically and psychologically [N]

Make you smile [N]

Bring joy together with others [F]

Being nice to each other [S]

Help and look after each other's mental health [S]

For the participants in our study, being in contact meant that they were present for others. Presence for others was particularly associated with listening to, or witnessing, the other:

Just being present, in silence and in voice [S]

To listen and just be present [N]

Just listening – so being silent when people want to speak [S]

Someone being there, being a witness [S]

The notion of being there for others was also alluded to in terms of showing others that one is available to provide comfort and care, as well as to give them a shelter, which might be a physical or an emotional shelter. Others described the intangible benefits of these exchanges:

If a person needs you, you show them that you are there [S]

Offering help to those in need [S]

Being a shelter for someone who does not have a shelter [S]

Being reliable in someone's life [S]

As exemplified by the response, “Being present—even if you can help or not—... is more important than solving their problem” [S], participants seemed to see presence as an important aspect of caring for the emotional and psychological welfare of others.

Moving in Relation to Others

Movement with others and for others can both be seen as relational in nature. When we move with those around us, we move in, and negotiate with others, a common direction. When we move for others, we gain a sense of the direction in which the

other wishes or needs to proceed and help them move along in that direction. This highlights the moral dimension of such navigation. All our actions change something in the lives of individuals and societies around us with a range of consequences both positive and negative. In this perspective, we can think of morally committed actions as those that aim to consider the direction of the movement as carefully as possible, aiming towards the best possible outcome not only for the actor themselves but also for their social network and the wider world.

Some responses, however, alluded to a type of movement that stems from a different form of relationality than those mentioned above. We refer to these as a movement *in relation to* others. These movements are not necessarily interactions with any particular people but instead movement in the way participants try to find their own position in relation to others. For example, many participants referred to their roles and responsibilities, as members of families or communities, as informing their movement through various social and moral environments. In a response to the question “What does it mean to look after each other’s health, wealth and happiness?”, one participant wrote: “Being a good citizen—not breaking the law” [S]. In another response, a participant associated being “a big brother” with “know[ing] I matter” and being “a reason to be happy” [F]. Finally, a third participant summarises a similar thought by writing:

Me --> a hero for my family!

Family --> Sun for me [F]

Being a good citizen, friend, or a brother seems to define many of these participants’ understanding of what they need to do, in relation to others, to live well. Many refugees and migrants support family members living in precarity. For these people, family is an important consideration when everyday life choices are made, for example, in relation to education or work. One’s position in their own social environment directs their movement within broader society and makes living up to the expectations of their families or communities an important value. Yet the sense of responsibility can also reach beyond one’s immediate networks, as this response points out:

We need to think about ourselves individually—or our close families—but we also need to think beyond our own circles [S]

These participants have come to Finland, Scotland, and Norway as unaccompanied minors without their families. Some have been welcomed by people who see beyond their ‘own circles’ in contexts that may be hostile towards newcomers; new friends or neighbours or professionals have become important for participants. It is impossible to say from these short notes whether this extended hospitality is something these young refugees wish to pay forward by offering hospitality to someone else who needs it. Finding this out is one objective of the larger research project to which this study connects.

A World Worth Living in for All

What we have described above are movements with others, for others, and in relation to others. They all hint at a form of social and moral navigation in which young people ponder how they should live well with others. Their responses go beyond talking about *what is*—about the world they live in now. Moving “through both the socially immediate and the socially imagined” (Vigh, 2009, p. 425), the participants also talk about “what ought to be” (White & Jha, 2021, p. 251), describing what they imagine to be a world worth living in for all.

In a world worth living in for all, we can imagine seeing the types of practices described above: people moving with, for, and in relation to others. A list of qualities that the imagined world requires can be gleaned from participants' responses:

Love for all, hatred for none [F]

Having patience [F] / patience- accept most things [N]

Truthfulness [F]

Trustworthy [F]

Honesty [F]

Kindness [F]

Help each other [N] / Helping the people who are in need [F]

Respect [N] / Respect other peoples' lives [S] / Mutual respect [F]

Compassion [N]

Empathy [N]

It is hard to disagree with these general, unanimously positive qualities. Who would not want to live in a world of love, kindness, compassion and empathy? They could be anybody's description of a utopia: a desired, alternative social reality where present injustices can be overcome and life is fair (see also Kiilakoski & Piispa, in this book). Some of the responses allude to a very broad understanding of this imagined utopia. For example, many participants seem to extend their concern beyond humans:

Looking after each other is not just about humans – we also can look after animals [S]

We need to think about ourselves individually – or our close families – but we also need to think beyond our own circles [S]

Mother earth – this year has taught us that the earth provides us life – climate crisis is something real – we need to hold that with us [S]

We share the same Earth & space [N]

These responses can be read as acknowledging that social and moral navigation are not solitary acts, and they do not happen independently of the broader sea of life. We can imagine participants' ships bearing not only ethical ties to a group of other ships, but also ethical ties extending to animals and to the physical world itself. The ethical ties of care and responsibility that participants hold to the "Mother Earth" and the "Earth & Space" impact on how they navigate in the world. By caring for animals, for example, one is moving for them. Recognising the reality of climate change, as one of the responses did above, one is moving in relation to a physical world under threat. Yet, more than this, what these responses speak of is a kind of relationship with the non-human world that participants see as fitting for a world worth living in for all; a relationship based on, as the responses above describe, "thinking beyond our own circles" and "sharing the same Earth & space".

Discussion

Without attempting any deeper or more specific interpretations of short responses that are read without a full understanding of their context, what we have inferred from the data is that the young refugee participants hold thoughtful and considered perspectives on what it means to live well with others as they build new lives in their host countries. In our analysis, we discerned three types of movement which together constituted the participants' shared navigation towards living well. There was *moving with others*, referring to the reciprocal and hospitable sharing and caring of everyday companionship, giving mutual benefits of support, encouragement, motivation, and mutual respect. There was also *moving for others*, referring to the compassionate actions and intentions of participants towards helping and caring for others through being present, showing care, and being in contact. Finally, there was *moving in relation to others*, referring to the performing, or living up to the roles participants play as members of a family and community. Viewing participants' networks of relationships as their *moral communities*, these movements can be read as "demonstrating one's belonging and status within a moral community by fulfilling one's responsibilities"; an integral part of moral navigation according to White and Jha (2021, p. 251).

Unlike many other young people in Finland, Norway, and Scotland beginning their voyages into independent adulthood, our participants have set forth on their voyages in foreign countries far away from their familial networks. As former unaccompanied minors, they already navigated through the turbulence of displacement and asylum. In their current situations, they are faced with yet another, unforeseen kind of turbulence in the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 may have shaped their responses about how they miss contact with others, and how they think about the role of important people in their lives. It is impossible to conclude this from the data, but we can see that the young people's responses about the importance of connections are thoughtful.

While the COVID-19 pandemic presents a new situation for all, other parts of the social sea may be more familiar to young people without refugee backgrounds, for whom predictable and favourable currents may already be mapped and shared by

their families. For the participants in our study, the sea in which they move may at first be murky and uncharted, with unpredictable cultural, political, and bureaucratic cross currents (e.g., Nunn et al., 2017), but the short responses show that many of these young refugees have figured out a way to navigate within it. The participants discussed how they should be, and how they should act, in this navigation to live well with others in their communities. In the process of learning this they have bound their ships through ethical ties to groups of other ships. Some of these ties are old, carried from their country of origin and maintained transnationally. Other ties are new, formed locally in host countries with friends, acquaintances, and support workers. Through the ethical ties of care, compassion and responsibility that bind the ships together, participants may help others and be helped by others.

Considering navigation as a relational practice sheds light on the dynamic nature of living well with others. Movement is always part of the formative years of childhood and youth—young people move away from childhood into adulthood, away from the familial networks toward independence. For the participants of our study, this movement had the added elements of moving across borders, most often doing this without choice, taking all these steps rapidly and at times within the context of violence or social disruption (Kohli, 2014). Their navigation skills had taken them to where they were when we met them, and the responses at hand offer glimpses of how they see this process. The moral perspectives of these young people's navigation suggested that for them, the "pursuit of what ought to be" (White & Jha, 2021, p. 251) includes qualities such as love, kindness, compassion, and empathy, not only for those in one's own social or familial network but for others, including strangers. They also included care for animals, and a sense of responsibility for the world that we all share. In describing how they, and others, "ought to be" in living well with others, participants were imagining a world worth living in for all.

Most studies exploring former unaccompanied minors' relationships focus on the early phases of settlement (Kaukko, 2017; Kaukko & Wernesjö, 2017; Kohli, 2011). Our study adds to the current knowledge by exploring the experiences of young people who are settled. Overall, the analysis suggests that young people in Finland, Norway, and Scotland see themselves as active agents in forming reciprocal and supporting networks; they have people in their lives that they can rely on, and that rely on them in return. This is in line with the findings of Eide et al. (2020), who explored how former unaccompanied minor refugees understand their networks over time. They found that young people's capacity to assess the trustworthiness of others and assert agency in building relationships developed over a period of two years. Our findings add to this by showing the sense of interconnectedness young people may develop, and the intersubjective dimensions that social navigation implies.

Our data does not allow us to do any direct cross-context comparisons or say anything definite of where moral or social navigation starts and where it leads. The different prompts and questions shaped the data, as did the varying group dynamics. To muddy the water further, COVID-19 forced some of these activities to be done online. Complexity and messiness in the data was to be expected, due to the dialogical and changing nature of the data creation. More importantly, the welcome events were aimed at *starting* a dialogue, not finishing it and capturing its essence in writing.

However, taken together, these notes point towards young people's views of living well with others. Acknowledging the risk of sounding sentimental, we can conclude that this little piece of data paints a picture of a changing world where people are, through relationships based on reciprocity and care, navigating towards harmony in a world worth living for all.

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Chapter 11

“The Kitchen is My Favrote Place in the House”: A World Worth Living in for Children with Feeding Difficulties and Their Families



Nick Hopwood, Henry Gowans, Jessica Gowans, Kate Disher-Quill, and Chris Elliot

Abstract We cannot live well without food. However, a significant number of children experience medical issues that impact their feeding, in some cases requiring feeding via a tube. The SUCCEED Child Feeding Alliance recognises the challenges that tube-feeding presents, and collaborates with parents, healthcare providers, and others to take steps towards a world in which all children who tube-feed thrive, experiencing the full joys of childhood, and agentically pursuing the futures of their own making. This chapter is inspired by Henry, who despite an ongoing need to tube-feed, has a passion for cooking, and wants to be a chef when he is older. We explore the challenges and praxis of tube-feeding, and different responsibilities and opportunities we have as adults in promoting positive change—from perspectives as parent, clinician, artist, and researcher. This dialogue is infused with theoretical insights from the theory of practice architectures, and Stetsenko’s transformative activist stance, which draws our attention to ways in which we contribute individually and collectively to the future that ought to be. We conclude by presenting one of Chef Henry’s own recipes.

Keywords Agency · Transformation · Feeding · Activism · Childhood · Praxis

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Introduction

We cannot live well without food. This applies to the biological necessity of food as well as the shared joys of eating together: feeding nourishes us in many ways. Feeding practices are sites of togetherness in everyday routines, moments of celebration, and rites of passage. Feeding relationships with parents underpin children's emotional development and parents' experiences of caregiving, shaping wider family identity (Wilken, 2012). In this chapter, we conceptualise feeding not only as of nutritional significance, but as of relational, social, and transformational significance. As a parent (Jess), clinician (Chris), artist (Kate), and researcher (Nick), members of a collaborative project called the SUCCEED Child Feeding Alliance, we explore what it means to live well when a child feeds using a feeding tube. We are joined by Jess' son Henry, who spent time with Kate, and gave Nick a cooking lesson.

Food and mealtimes vary around the world. However, there is a significant group of people, especially children, who have in common medical issues impacting their feeding. Within this group, the most seriously affected require feeding via a tube. Even though there over 350 medical conditions requiring tube-feeding (Feeding Tube Awareness Foundation, 2016), it is overlooked in the everyday discourses of health systems, and artistic expression (Hopwood et al., 2021a, 2021b). Our title quotes Henry, who like his sister Rosie, has a metabolic disease that requires tube-feeding. Henry has tube-fed since birth. When he was two and a half years old, he began to drink a special formula through a bottle. Now seven years old, Henry can ingest some foods orally, but chewing and swallowing can be difficult, so his bottle formula and a tube-feed using a pump overnight remain needed. His comment in his Year 1 school workbook is significant. Given the ways tube-feeding can create barriers to inclusion in feeding and other practices, it is remarkable and wonderful that he wrote what he did (Fig. 11.1).

SUCCEED began with an aim to improve the lives of children with feeding disorders. We started by creating a website (childfeeding.org) that plugged gaps in resources available to help parents with everyday life aspects of tube-feeding their children. We conducted interviews and focus groups with over twenty families whose children had tube-fed, guided by our Parent Advisory Group, which led us to create opportunities first and foremost for parents to tell their tube-feeding story. We draw on excerpts from these discussions in the dialogue between us below.

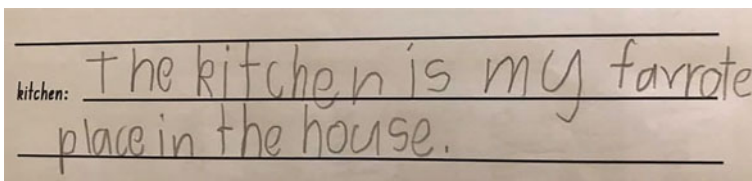


Fig. 11.1 Henry's words

Following Vygotsky, SUCCEED rejects deficit models of disability, and chronic and temporary illness (all of which can require tube-feeding). Where stigma and barriers to participation arise, the ‘defect’ lies in society, not in a physical quality of the child (Stetsenko & Selau, 2018; Stetsenko, 2020e). Our task is not to change children who tube-feed, but to re-educate the majority who feed orally, and transform the practices that produce unnecessary difficulty and exclusion. Vygotsky linked the topic of disability and difference with social action: our commitment to action is not to compensate for biological difficulties, but social ones (Stetsenko & Selau, 2018). The deficit we address is a ‘secondary one’ (see Sannino, 2018), one that is socially produced and perpetuated.

An important feature of the SUCCEED website involved images that challenge stereotypical, negative views of children who tube-feed as fragile and sick. Parents wanted pictures to reflect the way they saw their children: as happy, playful and above all, as *children*. This became an explicit focus in subsequent arts-based collaboration with Kate called *The HIVE*. *The HIVE* was an immersive art installation at the Partnerships for Better Health 2019 International Symposium (International Convention Centre Sydney), involving collaboration between artists, academics, health professionals, health service consumers, and carers. Kate produced a series of black and white images relating to tube-feeding, called *Be Not Afraid of my Body* (Disher-Quill, 2019). Kate’s exhibition was installed at Sydney Children’s Hospital in 2021.

This series of portraits aims to share the challenges and vulnerabilities of these mothers while celebrating the courage and resilience that I witnessed. It also gives a voice to these children, who just like any other child, need to be nurtured, loved and accepted. (Disher-Quill, 2019)

One of the images that was displayed was of Henry, shown in Fig. 11.2. This, along with Henry’s statement about the kitchen (Fig. 11.1), are taken up as key foci in the dialogue between us as co-authors of this chapter.

We take tube-feeding as a site to explore and reflect on the practices, practice architectures and critical praxis (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008) of a world worth living in *for all*, and the transformative activist stance (Stetsenko, 2017) required to make that world a reality for all children and their families, regardless of how they feed.

Transformative Activism and Critical Praxis

We use theory critically to probe how just and inclusive practices, which *realise* better futures, become possible. This brings us to questions of in whose interests, in solidarity with whom, and towards what future we struggle (Kemmis, 2019). Building on resonances outlined by Hopwood (2021), we draw on the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis, 2019; Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Kemmis & Smith, 2008) and Stetsenko’s (2017, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e) transformative activist stance.

Fig. 11.2 Kate's photograph of Henry



We focus on practical and emancipatory aspects of the theory of practice architectures. The former concerns acting wisely and prudently for the good of humankind, through *praxis* which is history-making and self-forming at the same time. Emancipatory aspects concern *critical praxis*, interrogating and transforming existing ways of doing things where they have untoward consequences (Kemmis, 2019; Kemmis & Smith, 2008). Through the theory of practice architectures, we are interested in the sayings, doings, and relating that form complexes of actions around tube-feeding, and the cultural-discursive, material-economic, and social-political arrangements that make practices—especially those of critical praxis—possible.

Stetsenko's transformative activist stance (TAS) revives and reinvigorates Marxist philosophy, extends insights from Vygotsky's work, and draws on theories of resistance including critical pedagogies (Freire) (Stetsenko, 2020e). In TAS,

acts of being-doing-knowing are non-neutral, transformative processes that produce the world, its history and also people themselves, all realized in the process of taking up the world, rather than passively copying it or coping with it. (Stetsenko, 2020e, p. 1)

In the struggle to create a world in which everyone lives well, TAS pivots away from an ethos of adaptation and political quietism, instead striving for social transformation guided by principles of social justice and equality (Stetsenko, 2020e). Here we find resonance with critical praxis. In TAS, human beings are agentive,

contributing through actions oriented towards sought-after futures as they envision, imagine, and commit to those futures. We take up Stetsenko’s (2020d) call to make theories ‘dangerous again’—that is, useful and used in the struggle for a better world.

TAS maintains individual agency without falling into traps of individualism. Individual-social dichotomies are eschewed in a view that social reality is contingent on each and every individual human being, and is changed every time individuals act (Stetsenko, 2019a). Agentic actions are contingent on access to cultural tools that are provided by society and agentively taken up by individuals (Stetsenko, 2019b). TAS shares with the theory of practice architectures a grounding in critical theory, Marxist dialectics, strong materiality, and an explicit reference to the philosophy of practice (Stetsenko, 2020a).

In both frameworks, the future is up for grabs, dependent on agentic individuals whose agency relies on what society provides. Both pull scholarship towards active engagement in co-making the future rather than passive by-standing and observing a world that already is. On this basis, we explore tube-feeding in childhood from a transformative activist stance, interrogating the status quo, co-producing cultural tools of agency in solidarity with others. Despite our different backgrounds and *standpoints* as young person, parent, artist, clinician, and researcher, we share a commitment to an *endpoint* that involves alternative futures (Stetsenko, 2015): not a naïve utopia, but a precise-yet-open vision of a world in which all children who tube-feed are able to thrive and live well, as fully and joyfully as their peers who feed orally.

Feeding Difficulties and Tube-Feeding

For all their vitality, feeding practices are often challenging. Clinical measures suggest a quarter of children have feeding problems (Aldridge et al., 2010), although when parents are asked, the figure is closer to half (Borowitz & Borowitz, 2018). The prevalence of feeding difficulties reveals how feeding reflects biophysical, family, social, and environmental factors (Aldridge et al., 2010):

Feeding is a complex, dynamic process requiring not only well-integrated movement and coordination among muscles but also effective interaction with caregivers and the environment, globally defined. (Kerwin, 1999, p. 193)

Chewing and swallowing are not possible or safe for all children. When children are not able to eat orally, tube-feeding is an alternative. Tube-feeding can be needed because of premature birth, congenital heart disease, cerebral palsy, neurodevelopmental disabilities, metabolic disorder and cleft palate. Estimating the prevalence of tube-feeding in childhood is difficult, however, because little data is collected systematically (Hopwood et al., 2021a, 2021b). Figures suggest between 1 and 4 per 100,000 children tube-feed at some point, but some evidence points to a figure closer to one percent (Krom et al., 2019). As children who tube-feed, Henry and Rosie are

far from alone, but too little research attention has been paid to what it means—and what it takes—to live well as a young person who tube-feeds.

Commonly, children are first given a nasogastric (NG) tube, which is inserted through the nose and continues down to the stomach, with the external tube taped along the cheekbone. The insertion of an NG is uncomfortable, an NG can be pulled out relatively easily, and is highly visible to others. For longer term tube-feeding, surgically emplaced tubes are used. A common form of this is a percutaneous endoscopic gastrostomy or G-tube, a small plastic button to which a longer tube is attached when feeding (see Fig. 11.2). Henry used an NG from birth until 11 months, since when he has used a G-tube.

From the perspective of the health-care system, tube-feeding tends to be regarded as a solution to the problem of nutritional intake, ensuring children gain weight as they would if they were able to eat orally. Adequate nutrition is necessary to thriving, but does not guarantee children will live well. A feeding tube solves the problem of delivering food to the body, but does not address social practices of feeding (Craig et al., 2003). In this chapter, we shift the focus away from calorific nutrition and towards other ways in which children are nourished: through love, joy, and connection with others. In what follows, we consider the challenges to living well that society's response to tube-feeding presents, what it means to live well while tube-feeding. We consider Henry's words (Fig. 11.1), the photograph of him that Kate produced (Fig. 11.2), and how parents, clinicians, artists, and young people themselves can contribute to transformations that make living well more, and more equally available, to children who tube-feed and their families.

What Are the Challenges to Children Living Well While Tube-Feeding?

Our dialogue begins by exploring the challenges to living well that arise through tube-feeding and the way society responds to it. First, we hear from Jess, as a parent:

Jess: I think the first thing is tube-feeding isn't something that is very well known, so there's a lot of confusion about what tube-feeding actually is. To me it is the thing that keeps my children alive. It doesn't just give them nutrition, it manages their ability to get through the day. When you see pictures of someone who's tube-fed it is in the context of being severely unwell. It's challenging because people generally don't understand and haven't had those experiences in their own lives... I went around so many preschool centres. They weren't all equally open to Henry attending, even ones that had an inclusion sign on the door.

Jess points to social-political practice architectures that separate those who experience tube-feeding from those who don't. This manifests as an institutional separation preventing access to preschool and an epistemic one, in which social understandings

of tube-feeding are narrow and, in parents’ eyes, incorrect. This is something Kate learned from her time as an artist working with families:

Kate: A lot of it comes down to stigma, what do people think of me and my family if they see my child with a tube. I saw a huge challenge being the perceptions of others, how parents and children perhaps feel judged. I think people relate the tube to sickness because of images we see: tubes are used to represent a sick child.

Association with sickness leads to views of tube-feeding as *life-saving*, while Jess sees the tubes as *life-enabling*. Cultural-discursive architectures in which imagery of tubes and sickness are embedded reinforce a sense of deficit in the child, simultaneously producing and reproducing the secondary deficit in wider society. This manifests when families are out and about. One mother commented in a focus group:

Everybody stares. When you walk with the pram, somebody runs back and says “What’s wrong with your child?” I’ve had that.

This resonates with other accounts of “living life on the margins” (Hewetson & Singh, 2009, p. 325) and stigmatisation of the child, and of the parent who (in the eyes of others) fails to meet normative expectations of “good mothering” (Craig & Scambler, 2006, p. 1116). Negative associations with tube-feeding can also manifest within families, particularly around photographs of children. Several parents explained to us how they had resisted requests from grandparents to have photographs of the child without the tube:

Why can’t she have photos in the house with the tube? Because that’s her story.

Again, we see practice architectures of separation and othering. The materialities of visible tubes and their depiction in photographs collide with discourses of normalcy and sickness, unsettling relationships and creating dividing lines.

Chris, a paediatrician, expanded our reflection on challenges relating to tube-feeding:

Chris: Many parents tell me that it’s hard when you have to feed using medical formulas, because otherwise you would be preparing food from your heart, as an expression of love for your child. From the healthcare point of view, we don’t focus enough on tube-feeding. We focus on the serious, life-threatening condition [that creates the need for tube feeding]. The tube-feeding just gets done in a pragmatic, ‘move on’ kind of way. Nutrition is of course key, but that’s where most people stop with tubes.

The materialities of tube-feeding may disrupt the expression of parental love through preparation of food and feeding. This connection between nutrition, food, and love is often missed in healthcare, where a focus on nutrition can compound a medicalisation of both the child and parenting. The child’s needs are framed around nutrition and

weight gain, and the parent's role is viewed as one of enacting prescribed feeding routines. The architectures of healthcare practices focus on materialities (volume, pace, frequency, and content of feeds) through discourses of weight gain. These often do not align with the social architectures of parenting, which foreground loving relationships with the child. Morrow et al. (2008) found a contrast between health professionals' concern for weight gain and parents' concern that their child feels loved. An overly biomedical focus can amplify a sense of loss and disempowerment in parents as their role is reduced to one of compliance with medical instructions (Hewetson & Singh, 2009; Pahsini, 2018).

Difficulty arises not from the child or failings in caregiving, but from what happens around tube-feeding. In the language of TAS (Stetsenko, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e), a significant part of parents' struggle and striving is not tube-related, but around the relationship between tube-feeding and society. The architectures that shape and uphold everyday practices and healthcare practices create separation and perpetuate framings of tube-feeding around sickness, when, in Chris' words, the multiple complexities of tube-feeding 'don't preclude you from having a life filled with wellbeing and joy'. It is to this form of life that our dialogue now turns.

What Does Living Well with Tube-Feeding Mean?

- Jess: I think living well means having similar opportunities and choices to the people around us, enjoying life. Being joyful and having nice things to look forward to. It would be nice to live in a society where tube-feeding is accepted, because it is a basic need for people who do have a feeding tube. Tubes can be life-enabling not just life-saving. I really believe that because I see it in my own children. If they didn't have a feeding tube they wouldn't be able to access all those opportunities [picnics, preschool, school, play], and have all the choices in life I would like them to have.
- Kate: I think to live well is to feel accepted, to feel you don't have to change a part of you. You're accepted for who you are and you have the support you need around you, to fulfil all those aspects of who you are and who you want to be.

Living well is something that becomes possible *because* of feeding tubes not *despite* them. From Jess' perspective, Henry's and Rosie's feeding tubes have been what has opened doors to the joys of childhood and their empowerment to make choices in and about their lives. This shows clearly how it is not the tubes in themselves, or the underlying medical issue that creates barriers: these barriers unquestionably are an effect of the 'secondary' deficit (Sannino, 2018). Living well as a child who tube-feeds is no different from living well as a child who feeds orally: having the opportunity to fully realise oneself—in the moment and towards projected future selves.

Chris frames living well in terms of linking nutrition with love and joy:

Chris: I see living well as depending on confident, well-informed healthcare professionals who have a family-centred understanding of what tube-feeding means, and can adapt to individual circumstances. That then enables taking joy in the child, in mealtimes, and in going out and about. The child is at a centre of a family who loves them, who feels happy and confident; they’re receiving the nutrition they need, but in a way that’s joyous.

Healthcare practices that make living well possible require architectures that enable care that attunes to specific circumstances based on holistic rather than narrowly nutritional understandings of tube-feeding and thriving. Nutrition is not just a precursor to a joyous life or feeling loved, but can be an enactment of these things: nutrition can be delivered joyfully and as an expression of love when tube-feeding.

These expressions point to what the sought-after future looks like, outlining the *endpoints* (Stetsenko, 2020e) that we and others commit to, from our different standpoints. Significantly, these endpoints are not about ‘fixing’ children, or measurable in terms of weight gain, but about a different society, a society that enables children who tube-feed to fully realise themselves, joyful, accepted, and loved.

Henry’s Comment About the Kitchen

Henry writing that the kitchen is his preferred, ‘favrote’ room in the house struck us all in a way that we wanted to explore further. But first, Henry’s perspective.

Henry: I looooooove fooooooooooooooooood!

This was one of the first things Henry said when he met Nick for the first time on Zoom. Subsequently, Jess invited Nick to their home so Henry could give him a cooking lesson. Henry improvised a recipe for a chocolate pudding (see below), and while it was cooling down, Henry sat on the small steps he uses to reach the kitchen bench, and in between sips of his formula, talked to Nick about his love for cooking (Fig. 11.3a). He mentioned his grandmother frequently as an inspiration. During the cooking lesson, it was clear that Henry loves measuring out foods precisely, taking great care and pride in filling the scoops so the flour was level. He said he likes to make his own recipes. While he had a basic plan for the chocolate pudding, new elements were added as he went. One of these was a caramel icing, which he decided he wanted to insert into the middle of the pudding. He came up with the idea of using



Fig. 11.3 Cooking with Henry: **a** A chat while the pudding cools; **b** using the syringe

one of the syringes from his feeding kit, which worked perfectly, and which he had never done before (Fig. 11.3b). Decorations were added before the puddings were served up, including portions for Rosie and Jess. Cooking with Henry gives a clear sense of the many ways he finds and expresses joy in food—measuring, stirring, mess, texture, creativity, being with others, and doing something for others.

Henry's use of the syringe is a striking example of his agency. A device so wound up with his feeding difficulties is appropriated into something that furthers his passion, a solution to a creative problem in a moment of joy. This all seems so natural when you're with Henry. However, Henry's passion for cooking and food has developed despite considerable challenges and conditions that might well have led to food being a source of negativity and frustration.

Chris: What gets me in my heart is—without knowing what and how they did it—that his family gave him this gift of joy in the kitchen, when the medical system and his own health have provided an almost indescribable number of barriers to that.

Chris' comment attests to the fact that reality for children who tube-feed is not a 'given'. It is 'taken' by them and the people caring for them. The barriers that appeared to be given did not determine Henry's relationship with food, his relationships with others through food, or his visions for his future, as Jess explains.

Jess: When I read [Henry’s comment], I was really shocked. I just sat there and I stared at it. I’m tearing up now talking about it. I think I’m going to frame it. It means so much to me because it means we’ve been able to give Henry those nice experiences, a nice relationship with food and cooking food, rather than him think it’s hard work or a point of difference. It’s a celebration of all the things we’ve done with in those seven years with him. He loves the kitchen. He loves cooking food. He wants to be a chef when he grows up. In kindergarten, they had a dress-up day and he went as a chef. He loves recipes, being creative and experimenting and putting different things together. He just loves making food, giving people food and serving them things. You can see that joy, that creativity, and that love. Food is involved in a lot of social situations. He’s able to celebrate those and be involved by making food, even if he’s not always able to eat it.

For all that tube-feeding often leads to exclusion, for Henry food has become a means through which he creatively, with joy and love, *contributes* to his own life and lives of others. This has been made possible, taken as his reality, through agentic actions of Jess, her husband, and Henry and his sister Rosie. It also reflects practice architectures: materialities which enable his physical doings in preparing food; relating in which he is included not just within family food preparation, but in wider settings such as birthday parties; and cultural-discursive architectures in which food is a subject of talk focused on exploration, experimentation, and hoped-for futures. This is the discursive space that gave rise to Henry’s words about the kitchen, which Chris notes “are the absolute endorsement of the difference between feeding and meals. Nutrition is nutrition: materially, emotionally and substantively different in every way from a meal with a family”.

Kate’s Photograph of Henry

As discussed above, visual representations of children who tube-feed form part of public discourses associating tube-feeding with sickness, and can be sites of more private struggle within families when a tube’s presence in images celebrating children is contested. Part of the secondary deficit that creates and perpetuates difficulties is, therefore, in cultural-discursive practice architectures. These are upheld by everyday imagery of childhood, as well as campaigns which can exacerbate negative connotations as well as an othering of children who tube-feed. Kate’s photograph of Henry (Fig. 11.2) is part of a body of work seeking to disrupt these architectures, mobilising artistic expression to transcend the status quo. The endpoint is not the production of the image, but the transformation that the images can forge in those who view it.

Kate: Henry and Rosie were running around, playing, doing their thing. I was just taking his photo and he lifted his shirt up. He was being really playful and silly. I felt he was covering his face to be cheeky. I can't see that image without seeing his actual face. He's such a hilarious, funny child, always smiling or laughing. I see a confident, cheeky boy. He's covered his face, so it could be anyone. So in a way it is kind of an anonymous image. The fact it could be any child, helps our aim to make tube-feeding everybody's business. I feel like it is a strong image in that any parent with a kid who is tube fed could see that and think, 'Oh, that's my child' you know? They probably can relate to that kind of image. I wasn't aware that these PEGs exist. You wonder how many others are there that we just don't know about?

Chris also reflected on the anonymity of the image being what makes it so disarming and transgressive. While typical images invoke a sense of someone else's (sick) child, this image could be any child, your child, my child, and it invites a connection of joy, of contact and togetherness, radically upsetting the distance and separation that so many other images produce:

Chris: It's a breathtaking portrait. The gastrostomy tube is so visible, but because he's got his t-shirt over his head, he's sort of anonymous. Clearly a child, but it could be any child. There's a really universal aspect to it... It makes you want to give him and all children a big hug and just tell them they're loved.

A point that we discussed was whether Henry was being confident or shy in hiding his face. Was he, perhaps, in the act of concealing himself, revealing the thing (the tube) that he most wanted to hide? Jess' reflections helped us explore this ambiguity:

Jess: It's my son, it means a lot to me. Henry is really embarrassed about his feeding tube. He doesn't like showing it or talking about it, but on that day, it was all about him and Rosie and how wonderful they are. He was actually really proud to show Kate, but he chose to hide his face. I think he was still a bit embarrassed. But you can see under his shirt he has his massive smile. You can see that joy there. He's so cheeky. We just let them play. Kate was sharing stories and I was sharing stories about other families we've met with feeding tubes. He's cheeky. This is what we're talking about, celebrating the joy, allowing it to be there, he's like 'Okay, well look at my tube, but I'm going to hide my face'

Through Jess we can understand Henry's dual confidence and embarrassment, and the social conditions in which his act unfolded, where adults were naming the feeding tube as part of their being wonderful, and he was able to be the cheeky child he is through his play, and then his pose for the photo. This environment was one of relationships that gave space for the playful doings of childhood, sayings that did not shirk away from the tube, but which elevated it as part of celebrating who he is.

As one image from a body of work—*Be not afraid of my body* (Disher-Quill, 2019), we can see how Fig. 11.2 embodies the contribution that the arts can make to transcending the status quo. Images *can* reshape the ways people understand tube-feeding and connect with it. They can replace distance, separation, othering, and pity with proximity, connection, togetherness, and joy. As such they form powerful cultural tools of agency (Stetsenko, 2017), making Henry's agency as a cheeky boy

contagious, challenging the viewer not to be brought into his world, a cheeky world of play. By being brought into his world, viewers become complicit contributors to a different world, bringing us closer to the future that ought to be.

Conclusion: Contributing to a World Worth Living in for All, and a Dangerous Proposition

Stetsenko (2017, 2020a, 2020b, 2020c, 2020d, 2020e) challenges us to reject bystander scholarship and the acquiescent political quietism that is bound up with it. Instead, she calls for “flagrantly partisan” (2015, p. 113, borrowing Dewey’s expression) scholarship, where research, theory, social practice, and realising the future are all part of collective, committed actions. This is the spirit that SUCCEED aspires to. Therefore, in conclusion, we reflect on our roles as parents, clinicians, artists, and researchers in contributing to alternative and futures that transgress the (false) givenness of the status quo. As a prelude to this, we first acknowledge Henry’s contribution—it is with his permission that we reproduce his words and image here. In preparing food for others, in dressing up as a chef, in aspiring to work as a chef, and in being cheeky in play with his sister, Henry is not merely participating, he is already agentially contributing to his own world and the world of others. As are all children who tube-feed and do what children do.

Henry’s agency does not arise in a vacuum; like all expressions of agency, it is contingent on what is made available to him socially and through culture. Key in this have been the (equally agentic) actions of his parents.

Jess: We had to create our own opportunities and choices when they weren’t there. We’ve shown them they can enjoy their lives by going to preschool and playgroups and trying things other children their age would try. We’ve created those spaces. We might go out for a picnic, taking food the kids can eat and having our tube-feeding equipment with us. We’re still experiencing the picnic, but we’re doing it in a way that made it possible for us.

Jess eventually found a preschool that was ready to work with her to make Henry’s attendance possible. Henry was the first, but since then other children who tube-feed have attended. Others have followed in Henry’s wake at his school, too. In their commitment to Henry, Jess and her family are also clearing the path for others.

As a paediatrician, Chris sees different responsibilities and opportunities to contribute. These range from changes in his own work with families, to becoming a voice advocating for deeper and wider changes:

Chris: The challenge is to recognise that being nourished isn't sufficient. You need your heart and your mind, and your family nourished as well. That comes through mealtimes. Mealtimes happen at home, not in clinics. We need to get better at that hard work of figuring out what works for each family. At the same time, we need *less* variation in care in the sense that all families should get the same options and level of support whichever health district they live in... You think about guide dogs—there's legislation allowing them onto trains. There's ramps for people who use wheelchairs. We're a long way from those kind of legislative and structural aspects for tube-feeding. Things like tube-friendly cafes. Finding ways so that families don't get asked 'When is your child going to die?'. As a doctor I feel responsible for the healthcare elements. But I also have an opportunity to bring families' voices into the mix and join them in engaging with and understanding what matters to children and their families.

Sharing the same endpoint, Kate considers the contribution that can be made through the arts:

Kate: I think art can play a very powerful role in making an issue that is taboo or sits in a medical space, bringing it into a space that is celebrated and appreciated and valued. That's what art is, something people love and appreciate. So, when you bring that other world that people might have quite negative feelings towards into that positive art space, it suddenly changes their perception of it, perhaps their own feelings towards their own relationship with that issue.

The arts offer a rich basis for cultural tools of agency that enable children who tube-feed to live well. Not by safeguarding their nutritional intake, but by addressing the secondary social deficit. The spaces and values of artistic expression can address not only epistemic issues around understandings of tube-feeding, but affective and relational ones too, creating joy and connection, helping to make tube-feeding everybody's business.

Reflecting on the scope for contribution through research, Nick draws on Stetsenko (2019b, 2020c) and Bierria (2014).

Nick: Through SUCCEED I've recognised that I do not only have an opportunity to be committed to a better future in research, but an obligation—ethically, epistemologically and ontologically. We are making our reality whether we like it or not, and as researchers we can stand for the status quo and uphold hegemony, or we can act insurgently, transgressively. We can accept the world as it is, or we can come to know it as it is changing, and become part of that change. I have come to understand my role as one—always in collaboration and solidarity with others—of discovering the cultural tools of agency already in use, developing new ones, and reshaping practice architectures so they become more equitably available

We thus imagine research as a form of critical praxis, co-creating a world worth living in by interrogating the status quo, seeking inequality and injustice and the means to rectify them (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Kemmis, 2019). Theory, including the theory of practice architectures and the transformative activist stance,

play a crucial role, but only if we work with them “dangerously”, that is “useful in the struggle for a better world” (Stetsenko, 2020c, p. 7). In terms of tube-feeding, the world that ought to be requires looking outwards, to society, for the change that is needed, for it is there where the challenges to living well are born. A group of students from UTS called the Neu Collective collaborated with SUCCEED and parents, developing this expression, which captures this crucial but often forgotten point, now our axiom, to be put to use dangerously in the struggle for the world in which all children who tube-feed can live well:

The tube fills stomachs
But sharing a meal fills hearts.

And finally, as an expression of Henry’s agentic contribution, making his world, his future, and the worlds and futures of others, we offer his recipe for the meal he made with Nick. This is our contribution to and extension of his critical praxis. The recipe represents the sayings, doings, and relating that Henry employs in his own emancipation. When Henry, Rosie, and Nick sat and ate the pudding, Nick explained the intention to write about the cooking lesson and to publish his recipe. At which point, while chewing slowly on his own creation, and with sprinkles beautifully scattered on his lips (Fig. 11.4), he made the following comment, asserting in his own words how, for him, food can be part of his contribution to the world, his refusal to accept the given future, and his charting of a path towards a future of his own making, with others:

Henry: Oh that would be wonderful! Now I can be famous for my recipe!

Chef Henry’s Choc Pudding

Scored 1,000,000 out of 10 by Chef Henry (later revised to 7.94/10, then 8.57, finalised at 9.24/10).

Ingredients for 2–4 servings:

Coconut spray (to grease ramekins)
1 ½ cups plain flour
1/2 cup white sugar, then another 1/3 cup
1 Egg
250 ml unsweetened almond milk
Ground cinnamon
Ground nutmeg
Chocolate syrup to taste (Henry suggests a generous helping)
1/3 cup pure icing sugar
Gourmet caramel syrup to taste (Henry suggests an equally generous serving)

Fig. 11.4 Henry eats his creation



Chef Henry's Choc Pudding

Coloured sprinkles
Edible smiley faces

A 60 ml syringe is needed to inject the caramel icing mixture into the pudding.

Instructions:

Mix the flour and sugar in a bowl, and add the egg. Add the almond milk and stir. Sprinkle the cinnamon and nutmeg, then pour chocolate syrup into the mixture and stir until evenly mixed in. Scoop the mixture into pre-greased ramekins (two for a larger portion, four for a smaller portion). Microwave individually on high for two and a half minutes. Allow to cool.

While the puddings are cooling, mix the icing sugar with the caramel syrup. Use the handle of a teaspoon to drill a hole down the middle of the pudding, then syringe 20 ml of the caramel mix to fill the hole, allowing extra to spread over the top. Decorate with sprinkles, and use spare caramel mix as glue for the smiley faces.

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Chapter 12

Facing the Climate Crisis, Acting Together: Young Climate Activists on Building a Sustainable Future



Tomi Kiilakoski and Mikko Piispa

Abstract In this article, we examine the constructive democratic practices of young climate activists and their views on how democracy should be improved. We study how the youth climate movement is expressing utopias of democracy. Utopias are thought to be central to imagining more just societies. Furthermore, they enable critical analysis of existing social structures and have a special function in surpassing dystopian reality. For young activists, living well refers to preserving a planet that can sustain decent and eco-socially just conditions for all. These conditions are endangered by the current way of life. According to our results, acting together is a source of hope. Besides criticising the current status quo, young people have combined everyday activism with efforts to influence decision-makers. Furthermore, they argue that while democracy is the best platform to approach the eco-crisis in a just manner, democracy needs improvement. The analysis is based on multi-sited ethnography and 18 interviews, gathered during 2020. Our emphasis is on the young as agents, not as recipients or objects of education. Analysis combines theoretical educational perspectives, which emphasise the significance of utopian thinking, with empirical youth research.

Keywords Climate activism · Youth · Youth studies · Environment · Future · Democracy

Something Happened

Although it might be a common conception that young people are the future, they are often downplayed and not accepted as full participants in political debates and decision-making about the future. The contemporary climate movement of the young has been—at least to an extent—an exception. The movement has mobilised young

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people around the world. It has inspired and encompassed various collective ways of acting and thinking. The protests of the young have challenged the current socio-ecological state of contemporary societies, and these concerns and criticisms have been widely heard. Despite various, and perhaps inevitable, efforts to downplay the agency of the young, as when arguing that they are still too immature (e.g., Bergmann & Ossewaarde, 2020; Jacobsson, 2020), several participants in the movement have been given opportunities to address national and global leaders and influencers at political meetings.

Greta Thunberg has been a key figure in the movement. She started a *school strike for climate* and refused to go to school on Fridays to draw attention to the climate emergency and the lack of a means to address it. Consequently, she inspired a whole movement. She has been invited to speak to various international forums, such as Davos, in 2019, for the business elites of the world. Her message was expressed in clear terms: “We can create transformational action that will safeguard the living conditions for future generations. Or we can continue with our business as usual and fail” (Thunberg, 2019).

Greta Thunberg’s speech is an example of the messages and strategies of the climate movement of the young. It emphasised the need to take seriously the warnings of climate scientists about the urgency of the matter. She refused to be an expert with expertise only. She presented herself as a proponent of science. Most importantly, she did not demand that the young be given more environmental education, nor did she call for the transformation of institutions offered for the young. Instead, she called for political and transformative action to change the harmful practices of current societies and to take seriously the ecological crisis facing us. Besides the transformation of unjust environmental practices, she challenged a mindset that favours short-term economic benefits over long-term environmental concerns.

Greta Thunberg was 16 at the time of the Davos meeting. The fact that the young Swedish activist was given a chance to speak at the World Economic Forum highlighted that the message of the climate movement was heard by all of society, from the grassroots level to the corridors of power. Although the reactions varied—it could be argued that the message was heard only partially, as the climate policies still lag behind the goals set by the Paris agreement—at least the climate movement of the young captured the attention of the public. They voiced their views at “a historical juncture when the cultural environmental critique has merged with scientific concerns” (Szolucha, 2020, p. 93). The climate movement was able to articulate concerns shared by many adults too and managed to seize what researchers have referred to as a current “planetary moment” brought about by the rapidly rising general consciousness of environmental and climatic dangers (Millsten et al., 2020). In a way, it seemed that the young were given the role of educators of the wider society, as they formulated their sentiments and anxiety about the fate of the planet and emphasised the need to act. Moreover, the movement of the young adopted strategies and ways of relating, which prefigured what a good life would look like for them in the future.

In this article, we examine the constructive democratic practices of young climate activists and their views on how democracy should be improved. In doing this, we

utilise ethnographic data and interviews collected from young climate activists in Finland during 2020. All of the quotes in this article are from our interviews. We regard the young as actors in their own right, not mere *victims* of the climate crisis, and we focus on their collective action. Second, we study how the young want to contribute to society, what kind of improved forms of democracy they imagine, and how they think the necessary steps towards eco-socially just societies can be created. This contributes to the fundamental question of what living well in a world worth living in might be like during the eco-crisis and ecological transformation.

New Forms of Self-expression

The climate movement of the young does not seem to accept the readily available routes to adulthood offered to them by contemporary societies as fully unproblematic. The movement adopted non-violent strategies that managed to disrupt the existing social order. One visible demonstration has been the *Fridays for Future*-movement, where young people have refused to attend schools on Fridays and instead demonstrated on the streets and in social media and demanded change. By doing this, the activists contradict the central generational narrative of modern societies by claiming that there are more important issues for children and the young than schooling if we want to ensure a good and just future for all. This effectively questioned the social contract, in which formal education was seen as the most useful way to secure a good future.

In Finland, a country in northern Europe with 5.5 million inhabitants that traditionally favoured formal education as an individual and societal way forward, the school strikes gathered significant momentum during the spring of 2019. They, along with other major demonstrations organised by young people, left the educational community perplexed. Finnish activism has generally been described as consensus-driven and rarely adopting strategies that radically challenge the normal state of affairs (Luhtakallio, 2019). Compared to their European counterparts, Finnish youth have been less interested in demonstrations or other forms of what Pierre Rosanvallon (2008) has called counter-democracy (Myllyniemi & Kiilakoski, 2019).

The refusal to go to school was met with different responses. Some educators supported the demands of the young, while others adopted legalistic perspectives and suggested different forms of punishment (Kettunen, 2020). The new climate movement was seen as a surprising phenomenon by the general public. Nevertheless, it should not have come as such a surprise, since the importance of environmental issues for children was noted during the 2010s (Holmberg & Alvinus, 2020). Millennials, in general, have been described as a generation interested in politics, affected by the economic and ecological crises of our times and ready to adopt new ways to engage politically (della Porta, 2019). Ecological concerns play a strong role for the majority of the young, although not all. In Finland, a national youth barometer found that, already in 2018, climate change caused by human activity was the greatest concern or a source of uncertainty for young people aged 15–29. Those who are

more concerned about the environment are also more likely to be active politically (Myllyniemi & Kiilakoski, 2019).

The novel climate movement adopted anti-hierarchical, bottom-up strategies and was successful in utilising social media and other digital platforms to achieve the political goals of the movement. What was perhaps less visible were the calls to revise our societies so that they would be based less on consumerism and economic growth and the calls to address current socio-ecological injustices. Our study is based on analysing the prefigurative and critical aspects of the climate movement, echoing the imperative which sociologist Alan Touraine described as follows: “Today we must start with the conviction that the study of social relations, conceived as primarily created by social movements, is linked with the permanent fight for freedom and against non-social explanations and legitimisations of social order” (Touraine, 1980, p. 14).

In our earlier work, we have analysed socio-ecological disappointment as a motivational basis for the new climate movement (Piispa et al., 2021), dimensions of ecological injustices argued by activists (Piispa & Kiilakoski, 2021), and calls to democratise political debate on the future (Piispa et al., 2020). The movement has created descriptions of a good future and practices for how to cooperate democratically. In our analysis, we use the concept of utopia to point out how *the world worth living in* is pictured.

Utopia as a Method of Imagining a World Worth Living In

According to philosopher Bloch (1986), humans tend to yearn for something better. A better shared social world can be imagined if the current reality can be seen as something that can be changed. Utopias are a way to imagine alternative social realities where present injustices can be overcome. Originally, utopia referred to an ideal place in Greek—eu topos—or to a place that does not exist—ou topos. Utopias have been thought to exist in the mind of an individual, in a mythical place or in a concrete geographical place (Portolano, 2012). They may be concrete or abstract, idealistic or realistic, short-term or far in the future. Utopia has a distinctive social function. Utopia serves as a tool for social critique and change. Utopias require social imagination and are connected to hope. For many scholars, “utopia’s importance lies in its capacity to embody hope rather than simply desire and to inspire the pursuit of a world transformed” (Levitas, 2013, p. 108). Utopia requires both a language of hope and a language of criticism.

The climate crisis is an urgent concern that affects the very basis of human societies. Levitas (2013) emphasises that the utopias of today have to be ecologically sound; they cannot be founded on societal architecture that is damaging to the climate. Bloch (1986) argued for “concrete utopias”, where a good life and a better future are outlined through the analysis of historical and social realities. Given the need to come up with rapid, far-reaching, and unprecedented changes in all aspects of society (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2018), climate change

requires immediate global action. Thus, climate utopias are relatively short-term utopias. In addition, they do not have to be future-oriented: some utopias can already be here. The concept of everyday utopia emphasises that utopias exist in life as we experience it when new practices are formed. These practices challenge mainstream ideas, enable thinking about life differently, and show that new social patterns can be formed today. For instance, some (youth) cultural environments might already represent one kind of utopia (Cooper, 2014). To use a different language game, utopian ideas about the future can be brought to concrete existence today by prefigurative politics. Social movements, non-bureaucratic groups or networks create practices that try to challenge mainstream activities and create new solidarities (Yates, 2020). In our understanding, prefiguring what the world worth living in looks like is an important part of the future orientation of the climate movement. The utopias of the new climate movement are formed within the peer group that utilises digital tools and connects the global discussion to local activities (Piispa et al., 2020).

In our interpretation, ideas about a better future serve as cognitive and emotional resources that generate political activity and provide hope for the situation seen as threatening the basis of human life on this planet. But utopias do not exist only at the cultural-discursive level. They can inform new practices and practice architectures on which sustainable solutions are based.

Methods and Research Questions

The writers of this article are youth researchers. Our approach is influenced by youth studies on the participation and political activities of the young. This research field examines everyday activism and participation, concerns how young people cope in changing eco-social conditions and how they react to the changing eco-social order, and examines sites and agoras where young people *do* democracy. As Gharabaghi and Anderson-Nathe (2019) emphasise, when studying youth and climate, we must ask what young people themselves do in the face of climate change and what we can do here and now to listen to their voices.

In our analysis, we combine theoretical educational perspectives with empirical youth research. While there is a rich array of theoretical discussions on utopias, empirical examples of what the utopias of the young might look like are harder to find. In our article, we analyse democratic utopias and how the political agency of young climate activists points out a way for societies to get there. Our analysis is based on ethnographic data that includes 18 interviews gathered during 2020 as part of a research project called *Nutopia*—Youth Utopias in the Era of Climate Change. By activism, we mean collective action in the public sphere that aims to create social change and renew existing practices. Our emphasis is on the young as agents, not as recipients or objects of education.

Multi-sited ethnography was done by participating in forums where young climate activists were *in action*, such as demonstrations and various other kinds of events. Political activities and discussions were observed, as well as how young activists were

received in debates concerning climate; in other words, what role young people have in different forums and settings pertaining to climate action. After the coronavirus pandemic hit Finland in early March 2020, the data were largely gathered using *netnography* (Kozinets, 2015), that is, observation of climate activism online.

The interviewees were from various cultural backgrounds. A majority were from, or lived in, the Helsinki capital area, but some interviewees also lived in other locations at the time of the interviews. Approximately two-thirds ($N = 12$) of the interviewees were assumed to be female based on appearances. At the time of the interviews, the average age was around 23 years. The interviews were mostly carried out via video phone calls due to the coronavirus pandemic. The interviewees were given detailed explanations of the aims, implementation, background and funding of the study to ensure informed consent (see also Piispa & Kiilakoski, 2021).

Our research questions are categorised into two groups, first one dealing with political practices of the young, and the second one on the future of democracy.

1. What type of practices of political and democratic participation do the young climate activists engage in? How do these practices prefigure the sustainable democratic practices of the future?
2. How do the young want to change their ways of participating? How do they see the future of democracy?

Acting Together

Young activists shared a fear that unless our societies manage to rectify the current practices that are causing the eco-crisis, there is a possibility that human life and social order, as we know it, is in grave danger in the foreseeable future. Different scientific reports, such as The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's (IPCC, 2018) Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5 °C, were often referred to as offering a knowledge basis for action. The report indicated the need to act rapidly, since "avoiding overshoot and reliance on future large-scale deployment of carbon dioxide removal can only be achieved if global CO₂ emissions start to decline well before 2030" (IPCC, 2018, p. 18). However, despite the scientific evidence, actual political efforts to renew the practices have been insufficient and the requirements of the report have not been met. In our interpretation, the eco-social disappointment towards the inability of the older generations to act quickly enough has been one of the key motivations for the new climate movement (Piispa et al., 2021).

The public reception of the climate movement has often been concerned with environmental anxiety and other individual reactions of the young to the climate crisis. Some, although not all, of our respondents said that they felt powerless and suffered from environmental anxiety. However, the collective power of the movement itself was a remedy for individual action. Acting together was seen as a way out of negative feelings, even if some of the informants thought that we humans had destroyed the planet so much that we could not repair all the damage.

What was perhaps most meaningful to me was that I had such a huge environmental anxiety, and I got rid of it through acting. I had a lot of feedback from others that they had gotten rid of the anxiety the same way. It boiled down to this: It is not only about saving the planet—which is a rhetoric I do not prefer to use, since man cannot save the planet. [The] planet is beyond saving and we should concentrate on saving our species. It [acting] becomes the enabler or guardian of the individual's wellbeing. Like, if you are depressed and have anxiety, don't dwell on it, since you cannot act if you are depressed. Even the tiniest form of activity, even if it is just minimising your personal waste amount, has been an empowering factor for many.

The above quote describes the necessity of doing something at the individual and collective levels. The individual ecological burden is easier to bear when one has a feeling of doing something towards saving the human species. This feeling is echoed when significant others share the same sentiments. Social movements share engagements, familiarity, mutual feelings of ease, shared memories, and common traditions (Luhtakallio & Tavory, 2018). Previous research has noted that participating in social movements has a long-term impact on the personal and political lives of the people involved. The power of a social movement lies in the fact that social movements articulate common concerns, offer a way to do something to find a solution to these problems, and create relationships. Participation in social movements can be empowering and may change not only the lives of the young people involved but also bring about sustainable practices within the family and even grandparents (Nissen et al., 2020). In this way, young activists involved in social movements may change what is happening in the private sphere in their daily surroundings.

Everyday activism encompasses both individual and collective efforts. Youth activism can mean influencing the political sphere through different mechanisms, but it can also involve changing immediate surroundings. For the everyday activism of the young

climate-relevant routine behaviours and social practices are the direct target of change, with a perhaps less direct impact on larger-scale public policies. Moreover, youths' everyday activism takes place within young people's personal spheres of influence (e.g., family and peer networks), rather than in the public sphere. (Trott, 2021, p. 3)

Through transforming the practices they engage in, the young aim at creating a more just and sustainable world.

A key goal for young climate activists was to change the way society reacts to the eco-crisis change while, at the same time, to change how one engages in consumption (see also Kettunen, 2020). For many of them, finding ways to practice the virtue of moderation was important: on an individual level, this meant looking for ways to reduce waste or lowering individual carbon dioxide footprint, as when choosing a vegetarian diet. These practices are examples of everyday activism based on ideals about the future. While these practices are based on individual choices, they are debated together and are socially shared.

The emphasis on disobedience is seen as one of the features of the new climate movement, which is stronger than in earlier social movements (de Moor et al., 2020). There is an inherent countercultural element in the new climate movement. Firstly, the young question some elements of the present practices, such as materialism and extensive consumption. They are trying to find ways to create a better life for their

generation and generations to come. Secondly, they actively question the dominant narratives about the role of the young in society. The young refuse to accept the role of learners and listeners and instead see themselves as agents of change (Trott, 2021). The young do not want to sign a social contract and accept the consequent place in society that is offered to them as *not-yet-adults*; they are instead, as active agents, trying to convince society that current practices are not sustainable and need to be reversed quickly. By creating alternative forms of democratic engagement and social interaction, the young experiment in a more socially and ecologically just future.

For many of the activists, engaging in politics was an important goal. On a personal level, many activists interviewed stated that their activist practices today are something that they want to continue. They want to engage in processes of deliberative democracy that they regard as valuable and meaningful. In other words, their political practices of today can often be interpreted as prefigurative to their visions of better democracy.

Despite the promise of the more democratic future, various interviewees reported that, at times, they experienced fatigue related to climate activism. Many expressed the hope that some decades from now, in their full adult years, they would no longer have to be *climate* activists. Nevertheless, they typically expressed that they would like to utilise their skills and knowledge in other fields of society. In this way, while the topics of their activities might change, they feel that activist practices themselves will be with them in the future.

Informant: I really hope that I don't have to do this [in the future]. I don't do this for fun but because I have to and this is needed... And I don't have other hobbies. I can imagine other things to do too instead of using my time in this, but now it's simply obligatory. [...]

Interviewer: What about some other political activity, like working in some organisation, can you see it as your future profession or...

Informant: Absolutely. I have ended up on this road and there is no way to get me out of it anymore.

Prefigurative politics “links the particular, local and present moment to alternative worlds and the future via imagination and practice” (Yates, 2020, p. 9). New social movements such as the climate movement of the young use innovative and often everyday forms of activism. Through experimenting and developing new social practices, these movements and people involved in them examine new political identities and concepts, new ways of interacting in a just manner and creating new socio-ecological relations (Blühdorn & Deflorian, 2021). While it would be easy to over-emphasise the critical components in the new climate movement, it is worth acknowledging that by creating new practices, the young and others are prefiguring what just society and eco-socially sustainable practices could look like. For this reason, the road they have “ended up on” has the potential to change not only individual life courses but also our shared social world.

Democratising Democracy

The political styles and ways of influencing society within the climate movement are varied. Some proponents of the movement opt for influencing the political system from within, some use social media to shed light on ecological issues and others use the tools of counter-democracy such as demonstrations or civil disobedience. What all activists share, more or less, is eco-social disappointment. This has been taken to mean that a lot of adults—such as educators, researchers, and politicians—have failed them, inside and, more importantly, outside the classroom (Trott, 2021). The young are also critical of the existing state of democracy, which emphasises electoral political participation and downplays various other forms of democratic participation. Young activists also do not see consumer democracy and individual lifestyle choices as being enough (Pickard et al., 2020). Despite their criticisms, young activists do not call for abandoning all the intellectual heritage that our societies have to offer: instead of replacing democracy with something else, they seek to improve it.

Young activists are committed to the principles of democracy although they are critical of the current state of democracy. The political system that has been destructive and has caused an eco-social disappointment, is still partly inevitable in imagining what a better world would look like in the future. Young activists value *the promise* of democracy. A truly democratic society is an integral element of the eco-social utopias of the young. When they are building better practices, the way forward is to democratise democracy and help citizens become more engaged in matters affecting them. However, in order for humanity to sustainably face the climate crisis, democratic principles should be preserved, cultivated, and renewed.

Despite everything I still in a way believe in democracy. It is, after all, the best we have, in light of what we know. But then again, democracy is not something designated, it can be in bad shape or good shape. At the moment it is not in very good shape, thus [I hope] it could evolve and improve.

When a better society is imagined, implicit images of the good society and views of how people are and should be are presented (Levitas, 2013). The democratic principles are shared by young activists. There are calls to make democracy more inclusive and to ensure that all voices in society can be heard. These call to create grassroots democratic practices are shared by many social movements and are often contrasted with the existing (party) political culture. The social organisation of the movement prefigures what a better society might look like. The dynamics between the way the group organises itself and the way society is thought to operate are one of the motivational bases for activities (Luhtakallio & Tavory, 2018). One of the activists we interviewed offered a vision for the future using immanent critique (i.e., the form of criticism that contrasts the promise of our political system to the realities young people are facing).

Of course I hope that [politics] would transform to more dialogical activity and that it would take into account everyone, that it would be more equal and that certain kind of toughness would disappear from it. But then I also just hope that all the young people [...] don't give

way to the old practices, but rather just bravely... I hope all the young people would renew and contest the practices and conventions that don't serve the purpose that everyone could be well.

The *old practices* that prevent citizens from engaging in political activities and contribute to preserving ecologically harmful ways of life are criticised. The explicated ideas about how the new democratic practices could look like may, at first, seem rather general and devoid of concrete content. This, too, can be seen in a different light if we look at the way the practices of the young prefigure how democratic decision-making should be. They are anti-hierarchical, inclusive and react rapidly to whatever is going on. Young activists are also aware that they need to engage with the adult society. The call to listen to science is paramount for the movement, but utopias of the young are about enabling citizens to participate in the world of politics.

I think decision-makers should strongly rely on expert knowledge and bring experts in to help make the decisions and to make preparations. And then we need to offer citizens possibilities to take part in the decision-making as widely as possible, and also utilise tools of direct democracy where possible.

The democratic ethos of activists is about maximising the freedom of everyone and supporting engagement with the world, which are seen as key elements in education for democracy (Biesta, 2013). Central elements of the utopias expressed by the young are creating more spaces to debate and discuss how we could tackle the challenges facing us. Seven out of eighteen interviewees emphasised that we need more dialogue between people and different groups in our society for everyone willing to be able to express their opinions and participate in democratic processes. In other words, democracy should be more accessible, understandable, and open to all.

We really need to get people to meet in various ways and frame the issue in a way that we try to solve these problems together, and not compete with who gets to decide. [...] And we should create places for discussion, and teach people to discuss, and negotiate how to do it and how to keep it going.

On a personal level, many saw that their activist practices pertaining to the new climate movement were something that they wanted to continue. They wanted to engage in processes of deliberative democracy that they regarded as valuable and meaningful. In other words, their political practices of today can often be interpreted as prefigurative to their visions of better democracy. While they felt the need to renew ecological practices, there were calls to do so in a socially sustainable manner. These problems about a just ecological transformation cannot be solved without asking questions that are educational in the deepest sense of the word and creating sustainable—in all of its meanings—democratic practices. Also, the activism itself needs to be sustainable, and if it can currently create sustainable practices, they can also prefigure future changes.

But now, especially at the grassroots level they have taken into account this sustainable activism, regenerative culture, mental wellbeing, sharing the positions of power, decentralisation and all these elements, they are included in the activities better than before. [...] And it is also less hierarchical, more reciprocal, than what we are used to in society in general.

For the activists themselves, democratic principles, inclusion, and deliberation are important. Yet this is something that is currently not easy to realise in society. Some expressed a wish that their political agency would become better embedded and more natural in their own lives, emphasising the view that the ideal of democratic citizenship is still in the making. This might be more feasible if decision-making were more accessible to all. Currently, activism is a moral duty that is not always easy or enjoyable. Not only is climate activism often seen as a *must* rather than a source of enjoyment, it can, as pointed out by multiple interviewees, be time-consuming and exhausting and may result in burnout. This, intrinsically, is far from the ideal of social activism or democracy at large.

For the young activists interviewed and observed, living well is connected to a lively democratic culture. In this kind of culture, active citizens would be supported. The utopias of climate activists are about creating a participatory culture in which different people have the capacity and motivation to act. There is optimism that creating a democratic culture would encourage citizens to be active and interested. To achieve this, democracy and education should be connected.

I would start to think about our educational system from a whole new perspective. I would change it so that it would provide more broad education, and that it would encourage being active, and that people [...] would become active citizens. [...] And I believe that this process would feed on itself, and it would produce the healthy change needed within the political system. I believe that if the climate movement becomes more radical or creates a shake-up of the political system, that it is certainly fine and interesting and all, but what I'm afraid of is that it is just an eruption of a volcano. Whereas sustained and farsighted creation of a political citizen is something that feeds itself and keeps itself alive.

One thing the interviewees widely agreed upon was that democracy should form the platform to reach the climate goals. Five interviewees acknowledged that the climate crisis could, in principle, be tackled by non-democratic, inhumane means, but *climate totalitarianism* was rejected as a solution. Climate activists share the idea that the climate crisis should be tackled democratically. Most seem to agree that democracy requires fixing, but in principle, it is the best imaginable framework to debate the contents of and to implement a socio-ecologically just transition.

Conclusion

One central tenet is shared by the activists: various current practices need to change. By voicing that our societies' current track is not sustainable, the climate movement has challenged the moral and cognitive authority of adults and instead has sought to influence society at large. In this way, the climate movement can be seen as an example of how reacting to the needs of young people may require "resetting and rearming the intergenerational contract" and acknowledging that the "approaches deriving from consumerism are completely obsolete", to quote French philosopher Stiegler (2015, p. 207). The demands of the young include resetting current ecological and political arrangements. This requires creating sustainable practices, some of which

are prefigured in the way the new climate movement operates, fostering a dialogue that takes young people seriously as societal agents and aims to create inclusive spaces for democracy.

Living well in a world worth living in for young activists is connected to being able to achieve ecological transformation. Achieving transformation, in turn, is connected to creating democratic processes where citizens can discuss and participate in matters that are important to them. Young climate activists often argue that the eco-crisis is fundamentally a crisis of democracy, as the current political system has not been able to address the situation sufficiently. Creating democratic structures requires building new platforms and supporting dialogue. Climate activism itself is participating in democratic processes in a myriad of ways, and the ideals of active citizenship and so-called sustainable activism demonstrate a way forward: towards just forms of politics and citizenship that constitute what lives worth living are about.

Furthermore, climate activists demand that political decision-making should not be tied primarily to economic interests; rather, it should serve the purpose of creating an eco-socially just society (Piispa et al., 2020). This may well require completely new frameworks for how we understand a life worth living. These requirements show the interconnectedness of the ecological and the social. By picturing both points of criticism through the lenses of the present status quo and an alternative and better state of affairs, young activists are in effect simultaneously educating themselves, through their interactions, and society at large by exploring processes of extinction, survival and human suffering and flourishing (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018). Seen in this light, the young feel that they are the ones who are in charge of educating the elderly, not the other way around. This task of educating societies and previous generations is described as follows.

When future researchers and historians look at this era, they are like ‘how can it be that there were so many adults and decision-makers around, who were so badly in the dark, and they always managed to prioritise something else, whereas these kids just pressed on and pressed on and pressed on, and passionately fought together for a better tomorrow...’ like we were not the hooligans, but we were the ones who stood for the right cause.

Young climate activists have emphasised that whatever a *world worth living in* might look like, it certainly is not what they see around them. They have taken agency in both criticising current practices and imagining what a better world might look like. Living well for all requires meeting these demands in a sustainable, democratic and inclusive manner. In addition, they are prefiguring what sustainable practices look like. Perhaps more than anything, the new climate movement shows how important it is to combine understanding about the eco-social condition, the values that should guide finding solutions and the need to create new practices that combine the present with ideals and hopes about the future.

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Chapter 13

Finding Worlds Worth Living in



Stephen Kemmis and Kathleen Mahon

Abstract This chapter discusses diverse views of worlds worth living in, as described by different groups of students, young people, and adults. It also highlights how the project of research and writing that produced this volume is an example of critical praxis: history making action directed towards realising the good for humankind. Perhaps, in this, it is an example of what Anna Stetsenko calls a ‘transformative activist stance’. In researching and articulating views of worlds worth living in, the contributors to the volume, and the participants with whom they spoke, not only began to imagine worlds worth living in, they also began to realise them.

Keywords World worth living in · Deep listening · Transformative activist stance · Critical praxis · Social justice

Diverse Views of Worlds Worth Living In

From their deep listening, contributors to this volume have articulated diverse views about what constitutes a world worth living in. Some chapters have identified the views of students or refugees or young people about the kinds of worlds *they* think would be worth living in. Some chapters have also identified the kinds of processes needed to help people articulate their views about worlds worth living in. In some chapters, educators have articulated what they think a world worth living in might be like. And some chapters give researchers’ views about the kind of research needed to bring into being worlds worth living in.

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The Views of Participants

In many chapters of this volume, authors have listened to and reported the voices of different kinds of young people and adults about worlds *they* think are worth living in. As participants in these investigations of worlds worth living in, students and others are not only envisaging futures in which injustices and obstacles to better worlds are overcome, they are also showing ways in which they *can be* overcome. Through their collective efforts, they are already realising, or beginning to realise, more just, inclusive, and sustainable futures.

In Chap. 3, for example, Susan Groundwater-Smith advocates research that captures and amplifies students' voices; the students she talked to said they wanted to be agentic so they can successfully construct the futures they want to realise. Gunilla Karlberg-Granlund (Chap. 4) reports that small village schools give students "roots", a sense of safety and of belonging to a place with its own local culture and history, and also "wings", a sense of their own growth. Virginia Moller (Chap. 5) explains that students in Steiner schools develop a sense of agency that reveals a deep understanding of the processes of life; a caring love for people, plants, and animals; and a subtle understanding of the forces at work in the world at large. In Chap. 6, Christine Edwards-Groves echoes the voices of young Australian Aboriginal men who hope for a world in which they are heard, valued, and trusted, and in which they can lead fulfilling lives that embrace their Aboriginal identities, communities, cultures, and knowledge. Catherine Burgess, Christine Grice, and Julian Wood (Chap. 7) call for strenuous efforts to ensure that the voices and perspectives of Aboriginal people are recognised and responded to in deliberations about education, especially Aboriginal education. Sally Windsor and Master of Educational Research student Amoni Kitooke (Chap. 8) report on projects undertaken by participants in this Master's degree course. They explore aspects of a world worth living in and conclude that such a world offers people opportunities for (1) civic political engagement; (2) both interdependence and dependence in terms of connections with others and meeting everyone's basic needs; (3) both "flow and slow" paces in life in terms of having meaningful work to accomplish valued ends while also doing it at a sustainable pace that preserves their mental health; and (4) equitable access for all to sufficient resources necessary for living a reasonable life. Sally Morgan (Chap. 9) shares the views of asylum-seeking tertiary students whose opportunities to live well are impeded by a range of practical, political, and legal obstacles; they want worlds in which they can act transformatively together, "conjuring up" relational and collective agency, to overcome the disempowering discourses of governments. Nick Haswell, Mervi Kaukko, Marte Knag Fylkesnes and Paul Sullivan (Chap. 10) share voices of young people in Finland, Norway, and Scotland, who have arrived in those countries as unaccompanied minors and as refugees. They want a world in which they are cared for and can care for others, where they are listened to and can listen to others, where they feel safe and can help others feel safe. Nick Hopwood, Chris Elliot, Jessica Gowans, and Kate Disher-Quill (Chap. 11) report the story of seven-year-old Henry, who feeds by tube. Henry and his family have broken through the deficit discourses

that usually attend tube feeding (e.g., focussed on concerns about the adequacy of nutrition and weight gain) to the transformative extent that cooking and food have become sources of joy in Henry's life. He says the kitchen is his "favrote place". And in Chap. 12, Tomi Kiilakoski and Mikko Piispa call for an ecological transformation to address the pressing climate emergency and to build sustainable futures locally and globally. They also want a world that fosters and renews hope in young people.

Processes to Help Articulate People's Views About Worlds Worth Living In

A strong communitarian theme runs through these advocacies: a sense that building a world worth living in is a collective enterprise, which must be participatory, inclusive, and democratic. On this view, part of what 'a world worth living in' means is that it engages people reflexively (as both subjects and objects) in participatory and collective processes of self-realisation, through collective self-expression, self-development, and self-determination.

In Chap. 6, Edwards-Groves, like Burgess, Grice and Wood in Chap. 7, reminds us of the importance of centring Aboriginal voices and respecting and embracing Aboriginal knowledge, especially in endeavouring to understand how best to support Aboriginal youth in appropriately leading learning in schools and Aboriginal communities. Both chapters stress the importance of deep listening with respect to the voices of Indigenous people. Gunilla Karlberg-Granlund (Chap. 4) describes the experiences of freedom and relatedness that give students "wings" to grow, and the experiences of safety, proximity, and connections to their own culture and history that give students "roots" in their communities. Sally Windsor and Amoni Kitooke (Chap. 8) describe how a course created a community of practice to conduct research in which students could study aspects of what a world worth living in might be. Sally Morgan (Chap. 9) reports initiatives with asylum-seeking tertiary students who also advocate forming connections and networks to build collective agency for building more equitable life conditions for everyone. Youth researchers Tomi Kiilakoski and Mikko Piispa (Chap. 12) call for participatory, inclusive, and democratic processes of transformation that engage young people in working to build what they describe as "everyday utopias", informed both by critique and by hope. These processes should be realised as hopeful, sustainable forms of life that will continue to contribute to global transformation. In Chap. 11, Nick Hopwood, Henry and Jessica Gowans, Kate Disher-Quill, and Chris Elliot advocate for research that takes a *transformative activist stance* (Stetsenko, 2017) and promotes people's agency in overcoming deficit discourses and creating discursive, material, and social conditions that realise worlds worth living in.

These views of the kinds of processes that help to realise worlds worth living in demonstrate that the authors contributing to this volume are already working in ways that give life to those processes. Processes of articulating people's ideas about worlds worth living in are not just a preparation for a distant future, but bring that future into being.

Research to Realise Worlds Worth Living In

As already suggested, several contributors to this volume have advocated establishing sustainable processes of research that investigate and articulate what different groups of people think constitutes a world worth living in. Susan Groundwater-Smith (Chap. 3) echoes this view, drawing on her experience of research articulating student voice. Christine Edwards-Groves (Chap. 6) suggests that a central aim for researchers is to help bring into being worlds worth living in, both by listening to marginalised and subaltern groups, and by giving voice to their hopes and aspirations. The young people interviewed by Tomi Kiilakoski and Mikko Piispa (Chap. 12) also call for research that gives young people a voice, including research like their own, which was conducted by (and with) young people. This message also reverberates through Sally Morgan's Chap. 9 about asylum-seeking tertiary students who also want to build research networks to help them realise better lives for themselves—and for all. In Chap. 8, Sally Windsor and Amoni Kitooke advocate for building communities of practice that conduct research to bring better worlds into existence for everyone. Significantly, the participants in the research reported are co-authors, which not only challenges the power imbalance we usually see between author/researcher and research participant, but also lifts their voices to another level as they represent themselves. Nick Hopwood, Henry and Jessica Gowans, Kate Disher-Quill, and Chris Elliot (Chap. 11) push beyond *hope* for a better world, by making better worlds *happen* through research that takes a transformative activist stance.

These contributing authors show that they are already conducting the kinds of research that they believe can help to create worlds worth living in.

Educators' Views About Worlds Worth Living In

Education, as the contributors to this volume see it, is not a process of preparing children, young people, and adults with knowledge, capabilities, and values for *future* participation in their communities' and societies' cultures, economies, environments, and social and political life; it is a process of bringing about good for each person and the good for humankind in the *present* everyday life and practices of schools and other educational institutions. The volume reveals a variety of ways in which educators and educational researchers think about education as a process that brings into being worlds worth living in (although the consequences of educational processes sometimes turn out to be otherwise).

In Chap. 2, Stephen Kemmis argues that education has a double purpose: the good for each person, and the good for humankind (and for the community of life). He thinks that education should foster individual and collective self-expression, to realise a culture based on reason; individual and collective self-development, to realise productive and sustainable economies and environments; and individual and collective self-determination, to realise just and democratic societies. In Chap. 4,

Gunilla Karlberg-Granlund discusses the accomplishments of small village schools that do not just teach about, but model and embody living well in a world worth living in their communities. Virginia Moller (Chap. 5) presents a view of Steiner education, which employs a “pedagogy of love”, “of life”, and “of wisdom”, which, she argues, is evident in students’ developing understandings, capabilities, and values, including in their hope for the ecological future of the planet, and their deep understandings of the processes of life; their caring love of people, plants, and animal life; and their wise understanding of the forces at work in the world at large. In Chap. 12, Tomi Kiilakoski and Mikko Piispa argue for education for ecological transformation to address the climate emergency and bring into being sustainable futures.

Realising the Vision(s)

As this brief review of the content of this volume suggests, the contributors are not merely imagining some future, some better world, and inviting others to imagine such things, they are already taking steps towards realising worlds worth living in. With the help of those they have been listening to, they see the untoward consequences of the ways people now live and work; they conduct critiques to identify the conditions that generate these untoward consequences; they imagine the “everyday utopias” (Kiilakoski & Piispa) that make possible alternative ways of being; and they begin to realise those ways of being in order to see what it means to live well in these worlds worth living in. In their different ways, they are thus, with others, living *critical praxis*, and giving life and breath to the “transformative activist stance” advocated by Stetsenko (2017).

Critical Praxis and the Transformative Activist Stance

For some years, the authors of this chapter, along with other contributors to this volume, have engaged with the notion of critical praxis to draw attention to and understand the moral-political dimensions of education and research (e.g., Kemmis & Smith, 2008; Mahon et al., 2020). The stories shared in this volume personify critical praxis in the senses of

- history making action (Kemmis & Smith, 2008; Mahon et al., 2020): they embody both *critique* of inherited histories so that we might better understand people’s circumstances, and *action* aimed at making the kind of histories they consider socially just, sustainable, safe, and nurturing (i.e., creating conditions of possibility);
- reflexive, deliberative, informed, and morally committed action (Mahon et al., 2020): they emerge from deep listening and meaningful, reflexive, and dialogic

engagement in/with communities (Freire, 1970); deep listening becomes a way of being/staying informed, and is part of the deliberative process in deciding how best to act;

- responsive action (Edwards-Groves & Grootenboer, 2015; Mahon et al., 2020): the story tellers (both authors and participants/communities involved) act in ways that are sensitive to context, culture, and circumstances; the stories reflect deep respect for, and valuing of, their partners in the research.

The commitment to critical praxis permeates this volume: it does not rest content with critique, but searches for, envisages, and strives to bring into being transformative possibilities to make the world a better place. As we have seen, the research that led to the preparation of this volume created a space in which diverse voices could be heard and shared, and in which participants' views of worlds worth living in could be nudged towards reality.

Drawing on a long tradition of Vygotskian scholarship, developmental psychologist Stetsenko (2017, 2019) shares similar convictions. She also discusses how this dialectic of the actual and the possible happens through our agency as individuals and as participants in shared cultures, material circumstances, and societies, through human action in history. She rejects the view that our action in the world is isolated and idiosyncratic; it is always fed by, and contributes to, shared cultures, shared material circumstances, and shared social conditions. Despite our occasional feeling that changing the world is beyond us, she assures us that we change the world every time we act. In fact, we can't help doing it. She describes her perspective in terms of a "transformative worldview", of which she says (2019, p. 2):

In the transformative worldview, reality is reconceived as that which is being constantly transformed and realized (literally made real) by people themselves—and, importantly, by people not as isolated, autonomous entities but as agentive actors or active agents of social practices. At the same time, human development is posited to be not only fully immersed in collaborative practices but, more to the point, co-constituted by each individual's active contributions to these practices, whereby the dynamics of what exists is changed as a whole every time a person acts. The emphasis is thus on the nexus of people changing the world and being changed in this very process of them changing the world—as two poles of one and the same, bi-directional, and recursive co-constitution of people and the world in a process of a simultaneous self- and world-realization. This approach implies that people never merely react, nor respond, to what exists but agentively act in co-creating both the world and themselves beyond 'the givenness' of the present. Agency in this account is accorded with a central, formative (or constitutive) role in the processes of human development, the overall sociohistorical dynamics, and the very materiality of the world.

On this transformative view, talking about worlds worth living in is not just wishing; it is giving a living voice to those worlds; it not only anticipates them, but it also conjures them up as forms of life to be inhabited. Doing this has been the driving force behind the project that has produced this volume.

A Final Word

Since 2006, the Pedagogy, Education and Praxis (PEP) international research network has been investigating the nature of, and the conditions for, education and critical praxis in places including Australia, Colombia, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden. In 2019, in Lübeck, Germany, participants in the network agreed to collaborate in the *World Worth Living In* project to listen to, and give voice to, diverse children, young people, and adults in the countries in which we are based. We have been inspired by their views of worlds worth living in, and humbled to recognise that gathering, listening deeply to, and communicating their views has also been a process of communicative action. Habermas (1987) describes communicative action as what we do when we stop to ask, “what are we doing?” and sincerely commit ourselves to (1) intersubjective agreement about the language we use, (2) mutual understanding of one another’s points of view (without necessarily agreeing with others’ perspectives) and (3) striving for unforced consensus about what to do under the circumstances in which we find ourselves. Now we see the fruits of the first phase of the *World Worth Living In* project in this volume, we also recognise that the project has unleashed communicative action on a large scale. People have done it locally, in their own local settings, and they have done it together, communicating across borders with others who also want to discover and realise worlds worth living in.

At the time of writing (November 2021), the United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP 26) on Climate Change is drawing to a close. It has not produced national commitments to action sufficient to limit global warming to 1.5° Celsius by the end of the century. Despite the pleas of representatives like those of the low-lying island nations already experiencing the destruction wrought by rising oceans and changing climate, official delegates of the parties (mostly nations) were unable to reach a consensus on action to avert the urgent existential threat to humanity and to the community of life on Earth. Outside the conference, activists, protesters, representatives of non-government organisations, and—especially—young people and students urged the parties to commit to more urgent, ambitious, and effective action. The waves of this vast social movement crashed on the rocks of the established self-interests of industries like the fossil fuel industry, and governments reluctant to jeopardise their existing economic interests. Yet those self-interests *will* crumble. They are crumbling now. Disinvestment from the fossil fuel industry proceeds apace; decarbonisation is under way as the world harnesses renewable energy. The contributors to this volume, and the children, young people, and adults they consulted, are on the side of social movement in this dialectic; they point the way out of the cul-de-sac into which our existing social orders have led us. They have allies in progressive nations and organisations, of course. They are not alone in wanting worlds that are more just and democratic in practice—not just in fine (greenwashing) rhetoric—worlds in which they can live healthy, interesting, and satisfying lives, and worlds in which their views and perspectives are listened to. There could hardly be a clearer message in this book for educators: those who inhabit the future have somehow been disenfranchised in the process of shaping it, including in their own education, and

there are significant ways in which this can be turned around. Deep listening is just the beginning. For showing that, and how, transformation is possible, we owe the authors and those whose voices resound in the chapters, a profound debt of gratitude.

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