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Alternative Education/Educational Alternatives

Editors

Stevphen Shukaitis
Jürgen Rudolph

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Contents

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Introduction to the special issue on alternative education/educational alternatives

Stevphen Shukaitis[A] A *Reader in Culture & Organization, University of Essex*

Jürgen Rudolph[B] B *Head of Research & Senior Lecturer, Kaplan Higher Education Singapore*

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The impetus for this special issue comes from a rather quotidian place. A number of years ago, I (Stevphen) was having lunch with my aunt and her children. At the time, I was getting close to finishing my PhD, but wasn't finished quite yet, in a somewhat frustrating manner. It was the period of doctoral study where anyone around you learns very quickly to not ask 'how's your PhD going?' My aunt knew this. Her children were younger and very excited to be telling me about the upcoming school year and where they would be going, what new grade they would be entering, and things of that nature.

'I'm going to be in first grade. What grade are you going to be in, Uncle Stevphen?' my cousin asked.

Long pause… mental calculations….

'Well, I'm not really in a grade per se… but if I had to say, I guess it would be the 23rd grade.'

A horrified look crossed her face. 'I hope I never have to go to the 23rd grade. That sounds like being in school forevvvvvvvvvver.'

And I had to admit, especially from that perspective, she had a point. I found myself thinking back on this moment more recently and reflecting that despite either being a student formally in an educational institution, or now teaching in one, indeed I have been in some relationship to schooling almost my entire life. And despite that, if I were to put together a list of the moments and experiences that I've learned the most from, that have shaped me the most, very few of them would be from anything taking place in a formal classroom. Instead of events in the class room, I'd rather end up with a list of experiences including high school punk bands, making zine and organizing DIY music gigs, reading groups in bookstores, galleries, and cafes, to more recently working on open access publishing projects with independent publishers and magazines. Very few of these would have a formal or official relationship with education, but yet when looked at from the right angle, it could be seen how one could learn from them. Perhaps this is an extension of the often-repeated idea that while going to an academic conference is good, it's often the conversations during lunch or during a post-panel drink that end up being the most interesting and rewarding aspects.

What connects these different experiences from an educational perspective is how they could be thought of as comprising or involving moments of deep learning. This is because they were not part of any formal or official institutional program, anyone involved was there out of their own intrinsic interest in the subject or activity, and not because it would lead to any qualification, outcome, or reward. And while making a zine or organizing a punk show are not usually thought of as 'educational' activities, they require forms of sociality and cooperation that make them possible. There are skills of cooperation, collaboration, and media production that are learned and developed through those activities. That is to say they can also be understood as having components of knowledge production enmeshed in them. This is why Stefano Harney and Fred Moten (2013) make use of their much broader conception of study, to highlight aspects of knowledge production and learning which are found in forms of social life both inside and outside the formal classroom setting.

This is the impetus from which this special issue of JALT on alternative education started. What if we explored the notion of alternative education starting not from the classroom but rather looking outside of it, to these moments of informal study and collective self-chosen activity? What if we looked to find not more policies and committees, but rather desires and joys contained in moments where people are doing and making something together as an end in itself rather than on the way to something or somewhere else? What could we find there? The honest and only real answer is that we didn't know, which is what makes asking the question interesting in the first place (if you already know what you'd find there's little reason to ask).

The materials contained in this issue all have some kind of relationship with the 'outside' or extended world of alternative educational practice. They are based on a virtual symposium on Alternative Education/Educational Alternatives in July 2020 that was co-organized by us on

behalf of Essex Business School and Kaplan Singapore. We now provide a brief overview of the diverse contents of this special issue.

Claudia Firth's contribution "Learning and organising for radical change: A counter-history of reading groups as popular education" kicks off the research article section. It provides a unique insight into the potential of a range of social forums and organization practices by discussing the pedagogical and organizational processes that underpin reading and study groups in relation to social and political movements. Lydia Lymperis's contribution "Evidence from a blended remote learning intervention in Greek small rural primary schools" leads us into different terrain and follows up on an earlier contribution to JALT (Lymperis, 2019). Lymperis not only examined primary school-going children in rural parts of Greece who have no access to English language instruction in their schools, but also provided them with an intervention through online English lessons. Her study contributes to an emerging body of research of blended educational formats in resource-poor settings that go beyond conventional online/hybrid teaching models.

The third contribution in the research article section is by Michael Sutton and Carlos Francisco Bitencourt Jorge, entitled "Phenomenological approach to applying reflective journaling to experiential learning". The authors apply a fresh phenomenological perspective to reflective learning and provide examples from spiritual communities and experientially-based adult learning with the purpose to introduce an instructional tool that can be used for knowledge creation based on personal learning experiences narrated within reflective learning journals. The final research article – Chris Lee's "Centering the document – Towards a critical studio pedagogy in graphic design" – brings a critical design perspective to our heterogeneous discourse. Influenced by Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed, he reimagines graphic design in a holistic and fundamental, historically-informed way by focusing on 'the document' as a substrate of the capitalist state and aims at a framework for graphic design pedagogy that aspires to lead to critical and emancipatory modes of sociality.

One of the highlights of the issue is an interview with Martin Parker, entitled "Strategic utopianism and the avoidance of dualisms". Professor Parker is a prominent voice in critically oriented management and organization studies and the author of the provocatively-titled *Shut down the business school* (2018). Parker proposes to widen the scope of business and management studies and his recent books have been about alternative types of organizations, *Life after Covid-19* (Parker (Ed.), 2020) and *Anarchism, organization and management* (Parker et al., 2020). In a typically wide-ranging interview, we discuss Martin Parker's fascinating oeuvre and amongst many other things, the dual character of the hidden curriculum in business schools and the incomplete decolonisation of curricula.

One of the emergent themes of this special issue is the critical reappraisal of one of the classics of critical pedagogy, Paulo Freire. In his brief article "Education's state of hegemony: Considering the contemporaneity of 'conscientisation'", nelson ang discusses whether such a critical pedagogy continues to be relevant. The author argues that it continues to have unabated transformational potential, but we must avoid domesticating Freire and not fall into the trap of reducing his pedagogy to mere methods.

The issue is completed by three book reviews and a presentation and discussion that is directly derived from the symposium's intentionally idiosyncratic keynote presentation. Mohamed Fadhil critically reviews Mike Neary's *Student as producer* in which Neary (who participated in the symposium) critiques the 'capitalist university' and develops a revolutionary curriculum. Jürgen Rudolph examines two books: McLaren & Wilson's comic book *Breaking free. The life and times of Peter McLaren, radical educator* and Antonia Darder's *The student guide to Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed*. Darder provides an expertly-written guide to Freire's key work that is informed by her own work with the Brazilian pedagogue, while McLaren decided to create a comic book that artistically, and necessarily succinctly, synthesises his colourful life and eloquent work. Finally, the Singaporean Bras Basah Open School of Philosophy presents their projects and experiences in alternative education.

There could have been so much more. At that point in time, amongst the symposia organized by Kaplan Singapore and selected university partners, the symposium on Alternative Education / Educational Alternatives was the best subscribed with close to 100 participants. Due to a rigorous peer review process and authors missing deadlines, the issue became smaller than it could have otherwise been. We were thinking of discussing additional classics such as, amongst many others, Neil Postman and Ivan Illich (in another JALT issue, Rudolph (2020) reviewed Gabbard (2020) on Illich). Perhaps this calls for a sequel symposium. In the meantime, there are other articles scattered across JALT that would have fit well into this issue: more recently, for instance, an interview with Peter Fleming on dark academia, the pandemic and neoliberalism (Fleming et al., 2021); and Moore et al.'s (2021) article on "Supporting casual teaching staff in the Australian neoliberal university: A collaborative approach".

What can we make from these different experiments and experiences? The beauty of it is that it's not up to us as the editors of this special issue, really. In the end, the questions end up being what you, the readers, can learn and make from what's in the issue. The value of alternative educational practices is precisely not how they appear on some league table or metric. We might say, cheekily channeling Marie Kondo (2014), that their value is in what joy they spark, both for those who were involved, and then for people who learn from them by drawing on these experiences in their practice, whatever or wherever it may be. And to conclude where we started, with the conversation with Stevphen's cousin about finishing his PhD, we will leave you with the drawing she gave him after he finished, which was her attempt to portray the feelings of joy he was experiencing upon finishing his PhD (in her rendering that would be the most exciting thing ever, which for her was getting ice cream).

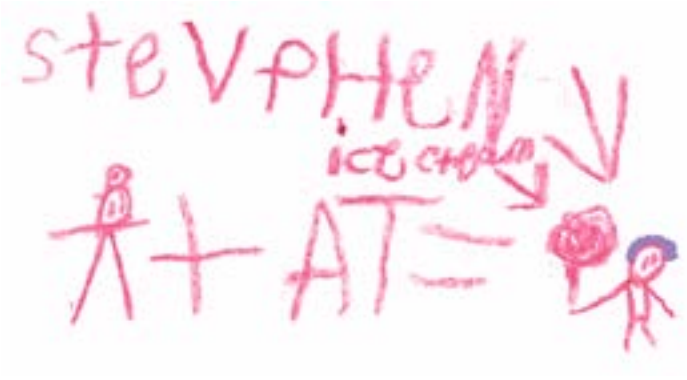

Figure 1: Stevphen's cousin's congratulatory drawing.

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Learning and organising for radical change: A counter-history of reading groups as popular education

Claudia N. Firth[A]

[A] *Associate Lecturer, Birkbeck, University of London, Ravensbourne University*

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Abstract

Historically, radical politics has attempted both institutional and wider social change using organisation as the main method. This article uses this premise to examine examples of reading groups in relation to social and political movements. In particular it looks at the pedagogical and organisational processes that constitute reading groups and how these processes intersect with each other. This is to understand processes of organisation and processes of learning as being in parallel and directly relating to each other. While reading groups often play a minor role in social and political movements, they nonetheless can be significant. This article argues that reading groups can under some conditions and in certain contexts, contribute to the building of solidarity and provide forms of continuity or social infrastructure, in a way that other forms of organisation, such as meetings cannot. The aim here is to examine the potential for development of political agency and solidarity through self-organised study groups. By exploring these little examined group learning practices in different contexts, it might be possible to glean the potential for mutual learning and organising to help to build and sustain social infrastructures for social transformation.

Learning and organising for radical change: A counter-history of reading groups as popular education

In a roundtable discussion in 2000, Stanley Aronowitz talked about organising a study group with fellow workers at the steel factory where he worked before starting his academic life. He described how, while none of them had had a college education, they read novels and sometimes works of theory together. This, for him, was his first form of political activity. Indeed, Aronowitz describes how the process of reading and studying together directly led to more active union involvement: "and the next thing you knew we were opposing the leadership of our district on issues of union power. It started from a study group" (Shukaitis et al., 2003, p. 86). Aronowitz's experience draws a direct link between reading with others in a small group and processes of political organising. In this case, political action in the form of trade union involvement. Indeed, it has been argued, that historically, radical politics has attempted institutional change with organisation as the main method (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2010, p. 25). Furthermore, it could even be argued that this is also true for wider social change. How this takes place is therefore worth examining further, and in this case it will be done through an examination of reading groups.

As a form of organising, reading groups don't come as readily to mind as public assemblies and meetings. However, there is in fact a long history of reading and learning groups existing in relation to social and political movements. Perhaps due to their ubiquitousness or perceived lack of utility, though, they have been relatively invisible. Reading groups have however, been part of the co-operative movement, trade union and community-based educational initiatives and occupied factories, to name a few. Groups have met, and still do, in cafes, bookshops, social centres, libraries, info shops, public spaces, occupations and people's homes. Reading groups have been organised within and across a wide range of institutional and non-institutional settings, existing on the edges or in the margins between formal and informal social spheres. While they often play a minor role in social and political movements, they do, I would argue, contribute to the building of solidarity and provide forms of continuity or social infrastructure that can be built upon in a way that meetings cannot.

It has been argued that processes of organisation are directly related to processes of "understanding, of interpreting the world, and expressing modes of social being" (Shukaitis et al., 2007, p. 31). However, the relationship between the two processes has not been explored that extensively. This article will therefore explore this connection by looking at reading groups both as forms of peer learning and as methods for organising. Reading groups are forums in which both processes of understanding and interpreting the world, and processes of organisation, albeit on a small scale, take place. The aim here is to examine the potential for the development of political agency and solidarity through self-organised study groups and towards this end, I will look at several historical examples.

Theoretical framework

Scholarship on reading groups as social forms has been hitherto reasonably limited. There are fragments about reading groups scattered in and amongst other scholarly work on, for example, the cooperative movement within Black American communities, Spanish anarchist practices of the 1930's, feminist consciousness raising groups and groups involved in social movements connected to the New Left (Ackelsberg, 1991; Farinati & Firth, 2016; Nemhard, 2004; Teodori, 1964). In addition, the history of women's book groups in the US has been charted extensively by Elizabeth Long (2003). And there have been more recent reflections by scholar/activists Burton et al. (2015), on reading groups as activist research, which I will explore further during this paper. I will also build here on my recent PhD work on reading groups related to the historical novel The Aesthetics of Resistance and a recent article charting a partial history of reading groups (Firth, 2019; Firth, 2021).

Here, however, the emphasis is on the dual processes of learning and organisation. Firstly, in terms of pedagogical processes, I am taking a perspective from popular education. Stemming from the ideas of radical pedagogue Paulo Freire, Crowther et al. state that popular education is "based on a clear analysis of the nature of inequality, exploitation and oppression" (1999, p. 4). Popular education is rooted in the interests, experiences, and struggles of ordinary people, and is overtly political and critical of the status quo. There is a clear commitment to progressive social and political change, with a primary focus on learning as collective rather than being purely individual. The collective is conceived as coming into being through a process of learning together, so there is already something of a connection made between learning and organisation.

Freire's ideas can give us pointers as to how we can think about reading collectively in relation to politics. Freire formulated critical literacy practices as "militant research", a perspective that highlights the co-constitution of knowledge and subjectivity. Reading together with others may not be political in and of itself, but as Aronowitz's experience shows it can lead to political action in certain circumstances. For Freire, education is indispensable to political action because of the role it plays in the development of critical consciousness and consequently of developing voice. The aim is to develop voices capable of speaking on their own terms, voices capable of listening, retelling and challenging the grounds for knowledge and power. In addition, Freire contends that context is as important as text. This includes the context in which the text was produced but also the context in which the encounter, the reading, takes place. For Freire, reading the word always implies a "reading of the world", with movement from world to word and from word to world always present and continuous (Freire & Macedo, 1987, p. 25). The knowledge developed will differ, depending on the particular context in which it is produced.

Another important pedagogical concept here is Harney and Moten's notion of *study*. In their joint work *The Undercommons*, they posit study as an activity that exists entirely for the sake of itself. Study, for Harney and Moten is primarily a speculative collective activity, which doesn't just

stay in the realm of survival but actively hopes and dreams for something else. An "undifferentiated labour that knows itself to be superfluous" and is in excess of any demands and expectations (Harney & Moten, 2013, p. 29). They liken study to collective jazz improvisation and this may be useful in thinking about small reading or learning groups. Indeed, Elizabeth Long in her examination of women's book clubs also describes what goes on in these informal groups as being similar to orchestral jazz ensembles.

In relation to the second aspect of the dual processes of learning and organisation, we will now turn to thinking about reading groups as organisation. There are several perspectives that I will draw from here and although there may be some debate as to the compatibility between them, I think they all offer something useful in this context. The first perspective to outline is one from organisational studies, in which organisation is defined as "actively decided order" (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2010). This defines processes of organisation in relation to decision making. Furthermore, it has been suggested that decision is the fundamental aspect of organisation and what differentiates it from other social forms such as networks or institutions, which emerge more organically. Ahrne and Brunsson suggest that there are several organisational elements that, through decision, constitute organisation. These include membership, hierarchy, rules, monitoring and sanctions. They make the distinction between complete and partial organisation. If all elements are present, it constitutes a complete organisation, and if fewer of these elements are present, it should be defined as partial organisation. I have already stated that a reading group is quite different to a formally organised meeting and has quite a different purpose within a social or political movement, if it has one. The main purpose of a meeting is, generally speaking, in some shape or form, to make decisions, while the purpose of a reading group is not. Indeed, if we take seriously the metaphor of the jazz ensemble, the group may well think of itself as being involved in superfluous study. However, that is not to say that decisions don't take place in reading groups, but the reasons for them being convened are not explicitly in order to facilitate decision-making processes.

There are also direct connections that can be made between processes of organisation and the political. Not only has radical politics sought to change institutions through organisation, but processes of decision making also relate to the political on an inter-relational and micro-political level. While producing order and coordination in certain ways, decision, also actively dramatizes uncertainty and paves the way for contestation. The more that is decidable, the more that is also made potentially contentious. This level of contestability has a direct relationship to the political as contestable terrain. Higher levels of contestation mean that more can move into the uncomfortable realm of politics and be experienced as "social groundlessness" (Warren, 1996, p. 244). If issues are too contested, social relations, especially if they are already fragile, can easily fray. Means of decision-making, such as hierarchies, democratic methods, or explicit rules can therefore both open up the possibility of contestation and contain it.

In addition, ideas about the importance of context are not only apparent in pedagogical thinking but are also echoed by some organisational scholarship. In particular, those coming from systems cybernetics or social constructionist perspectives. These perspectives view organisations as emergent networks of communication and meaning that are continually co-created rather than existing as fixed entities or infrastructure (Miksitis, 2019; Campbell, 2000). The role of context in this respect, is that it precisely creates meaning. There is no meaning without context (Bateson, 1972). If organisation is thought of in this way, as meaning and context, there is again a conceptual link here between inter-relational reading and learning processes and processes of organisation. Reading can be part of a political project, depending on how, where and with whom the reading takes place and what is already latent within the various contexts that produce the situation.

Another organisational distinction to make is between formal and informal organisation and their corresponding social spheres. Zechner and Hanson describe the informal social sphere as the field in which individuals and groups engage in "unstable, temporary and *ad hoc* relations" (2015). They argue that the informal social sphere can provide the ground for developing further social infrastructure and organisation. In particular, they suggest that on an organisational level, collective practices in the informal social sphere might provide the basis for other forms of sustainable collective social power, through the building of lasting social relations. They couch their argument in terms of a crisis of reproduction, and the concept of reproduction may also provide a useful perspective to think about the role of reading groups as organisation. The term *reproduction* refers to the notion of reproductive labour, which in Marxist terms is differentiated from that of productive labour. Reproductive labour is the labour necessary to *reproduce* the worker, and get them ready to be productive for capital. The category generally includes domestic work around the house, childcare and self-care. Reproductive labour is often invisible and gendered. In organisational terms, it might be possible to think about the organising needed in order to maintain the organisation, or in the informal sphere, to strengthen and keep social relations in a state from which other more social organisational forms can develop, as reproduction.

When dealing with historical examples, it is important to bear in mind that history is essentially historiography or history writing, and is therefore fundamentally constructed. All historical examples should be viewed with this in mind. The focus here will be not on what particular reading groups read, but more on how knowledge was produced and disseminated, and the groups' relationships to institutions and social movements. This is a perspectival account which is, like all histories, incomplete. I will provide examples from the German resistance to fascism and the feminist movement, as well as touching briefly on some reading groups from 2011. I will try to draw pedagogical and organisational insights from these and examine how they have attempted to create wider social and institutional change through organisation and learning. However, I also want to acknowledge that these accounts are also products of their particular social and historical circumstances and for

not be taken as absolute blueprints.

In thinking about history and what to do with it, Foucault's genealogical method provides a model for constructing counter-histories, as a way to unearth "subjugated knowledges" (2004, p. 8). Subjugated knowledge is knowledge of struggles and forms of resistance that may have been buried or disqualified, and kept in the margins by mainstream or hegemonic historical narratives. Foucault's concept of "subjugated knowledge" includes "underground" modes of knowing, that have somehow slipped through "the leaky cracks of the epistemological containers imposed by the state, the school, or disciplines of power and control" (Dolson, 2009, p. 57). While this study does not engage in the painstaking detail that many scholars suggest is necessary for a full genealogical study, I want to point to Foucault for an understanding of history making as ambiguous and uncertain (Sembou, 2011). In addition, Foucault's work also points to how historical examples can be utilised in the present. He argues that we might "make use of that knowledge in contemporary tactics" through a process of retooling (Foucault, 2004, p. 8). A bricolage-like approach of taking "what is at hand" and re-using it for the present (drawn from Levi Strauss' concept of bricolage which he developed in relation to myth). Because subjugated knowledges are, unlike their official counterparts, non-hierarchical knowledges or modes of apprehending the world and acting upon it, they can be seen as being highly plastic. They lack formal centralisation, and thus are able to be connected, de-connected, and re-connected, according to the situation at hand (Dolson, 2009). I would also like to draw on this idea of plasticity not only in terms of the plasticity of historical knowledges that might be decentralised, reused and retooled, but also in acknowledging that knowledge itself, if we are to think in pedagogical terms, is highly plastic in the way it develops. In addition, plasticity might also useful in thinking about organising processes if conceptualised as processes of meaning-making and co-construction.

Reading groups and anti-Nazi resistance

The first historical example relates to small groups associated with what became known as the Red Orchestra, or *die Rote Kapelle* in Germany during the Second World War. This was a network of small reading or learning circles (*Kreisen*), that evolved into part of the German resistance to historical fascism from the mid-1930s to the early 1940s. The name was given to it by the Gestapo and while the term orchestra evokes a tight knit organizational structure, with everyone playing to the same score, the organisation was far looser and more disparate than the name suggests. In actuality, the Red Orchestra consisted instead, of a decentralised network of small learning groups.

It is often thought that there was no resistance to the Nazi regime in Germany. This is partly because of the level of violence directed towards dissenters and any groups or individuals that actively organised against the regime. Indeed, within six months, the Nazi's had eliminated all formal political organizational elements, leaving only more informal and leisure orientated ones. This was particularly the case within working class communities. In fact, there was some resistance but what there was, mostly took place below the detectable surface. Resistance was fragmented and sporadic, and often adopted "the appearance of inactivity", a kind of camouflage, so that it was hidden from view for much of the population (Rothfels, 2013, p. 17). As historian Devlet Peukert argues, "opposition within the totalitarian state, in fact, found its best expression in informal activities which were hard for the Gestapo and the law to get to grips with" (1989, p. 119). Fascism politicised everyday life by force. Activities that were not thought of or meant as political, such as individual acts of deviation from societal norms, were converted into opposition to the regime.

The informal and leisure spheres took on a very particular role and meaning within the context of Nazi Germany, as these was the only kinds of organisation left that could take on opposition and resistance. More informal activities that might generally be difficult to classify as resistance per se, were punished by the Nazi regime as resistance. These were circumstances in which listening to the wrong radio station for example could lead to imprisonment. As violence and control seeped into all aspects of everyday life, it led some people to withdraw more into themselves while for others it provided a growing imperative to act. For members of the Red Orchestra a sense of playfulness and pleasure played a role in the shared moral stance of the organisation, which some members described as an Association for Persistent *Joi de Vivre* (*Bund für unentwegte Lebensfreude*) (Roloff, 2014). A joyous playful ethic to counter the Nazi drive towards death.

The groups of the Red Orchestra, started during the beginning of the regime as a few circles of friendship, discussion and learning, meeting informally, with the initial aim of preserving cultures that were being eliminated. They mostly met in people's homes. The groups included tutors and alumni of schools and educational institutions, radical high schools, the evening college and art school in Berlin and (many of which could not operate anymore) but also communist groups of self-educated workers, and bohemian groups of artists, aristocrats and early concentration camp survivors. While these small reading or learning circles developed primarily in relation to the Nazi regime, they were also building on a pre-Nazi context of small educational initiatives that were very common in Germany during the Weimar Republic. In Berlin for example, there is evidence that small workers' educational groups existed all over the city, as an intrinsic part of the workers' movement (Wenzel, 2014).

While the groups of the Red Orchestra started in order to preserve particular aspects of pre-Nazi culture, as the Nazi regime continued, they shifted their emphasis and activities to become more political. While many did initially see themselves as providing political education, they became more actively engaged in other modes of resistance such as distributing leaflets and hiding fugitives. Eventually, some members even engaged in formal espionage. The network of learning circles that made up the Red Orchestra developed over time, expanding to include more than 250 people. These circles increasingly overlapped, in "a network of interlocking relationships" (Nelson, 2009, p. xxvi). Personal contacts rippled out in different directions with circles radiating from various hubs, around individuals or couples.

The majority of members only knew one member of another group at most, and very few groups were aware of the existence of others. However, people on the edges of one circle might be in touch with another, so that the content of discussions could be carried over into other groups and the knowledge spread. Members also consciously extended and expanded their links across social boundaries, beyond their own immediate circles, in order to include people from political backgrounds that they wouldn't normally have been in touch with.

According to Ahrne & Brunsson (2010), a network consists of a web of relations between people that is based on personal and informal relations and kept together through reciprocity, trust and social capital. Who belongs is not formally decided upon but is latent and develops gradually. This differs to an organisation, which is based on decision and includes elements such as rules and membership. Using these definitions, the reading and learning groups of the Red Orchestra seem to fall between network and organisation, sharing something of each. Membership would have been decided on an informal basis but also carefully, given the political context. The decision and who to admit would have been based on existing networks of friends and acquaintances and those that they were reaching out to. There would have been decisions made, at first on a basic level, such as where and when to meet, who to invite and what they would read, learn or do. The decision to develop and shift their emphasis to more active modes of resistance would have been taken in some way but was probably not formalised. Ahrne and Brunsson's description of the relations between people in a network also corresponds with the groups. Personal relations were certainly kept together through reciprocity, trust and social capital. Members of the groups have testified to this and these seem to be exactly what was developed and strengthened in these groups over time that enabled more risky resistance activities to be taken on. The groups of the Red Orchestra shared a sense of cohesion with other "underground organisations". A cohesion which that "arises from a strong internal interdependency between its participants" created by a strong external threat (Ahrne & Brunsson, 2010, p. 8). In this case that of the Nazi State.

What is interesting, is that the horizontal, decentralised nature of the network could not be understood by official histories. The relationship between the learning groups within the larger network that made up the Red Orchestra was a horizontal one. This has been described as a relationship of *Querverbindung*, or crosswise connection (Nelson, 2009). However, for historiography on both sides of the cold war ideological divide, the political vocabulary to describe the network of groups just did not exist. The Red Orchestra could only be comprehended as a centrally controlled organisation with a vertical structure. The generally understood model of resistance movements, is that, while, like in the Red Orchestra, participants do not know many others in the larger organisation, there is a hierarchy in the way that orders are given and received. For the Red Orchestra, while this was the method of spreading knowledge and information and leadership did exist, it was not centrally controlled. The horizontal relations of Querverbindung were simply unable to be acknowledged or understood.

Feminist reading groups

The second example is in relation to feminist consciousness-raising groups (C-R groups) of the 1970's and 80's. C-R groups were groups of women which gathered together to talk about their personal experiences of sexism and patriarchy, and are perhaps more well-known examples of small group learning. The production of knowledge from their collective analysis of empirical first-hand experience, fed directly into the campaigns, demands and actions of the wider women's movement. What is less widely known is that many consciousness-raising groups developed out of or began as reading groups (Farinati & Firth, 2016; Spender, 2001). They read books such as Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* which prompted them to talk about topics such as the disconnection between the image of woman, as wife, mother, lover, for example, which women had to inhabit, and the labour it entailed to construct that image. These books facilitated discussions of the members' own conditions, and at some point, most groups switched to solely producing knowledge through the telling of their personal experiences. Through this "telling it like it is", (a process that had also to some extent been used in the civil rights movement), there was a widespread realisation that issues that had been deemed personal and individual were actually systemic and social. The trust, social relations, and in particular the collective analysis of empirical first-hand experience developed in these smaller groups, (which were at one stage on almost every street corner), fed directly into the wider women's movement. Second wave feminism specifically emphasised the importance of multiple voices, narratives, and perspectives, and recognised the value of the knowledge produced in these small groups.

The collective learning taking place in these groups was based on this process of collectivising individual experiences and analysing it in relation to the context of late twentieth century patriarchy. Consciousness-raising groups also enabled women to change their relationship to language, which many felt was a language which was not of their making, being patriarchal in origins, but one that nonetheless they were obliged to use. C-R groups were therefore a way of decolonising everyday life, experience and language, with women being able to begin to "deconstruct their muted condition" (Spender, 2001, p. 93). Again, it is possible to see the processes of collective learning, and meaning making, with, in this case, processes of deconstruction and reconstruction taking place in parallel with organisational processes.

In addition, it is also worth noting the relationship of feminism to other organisations and institutions. In addition to their opposition to the domination of the existing system, feminists constructed alternative spaces and created "counter institutions," such as women's centres, women only bars, bookshops, newspapers and magazines, as a kind of 'counter milieu' (Katsiaficas, 2007, p. 75). Women's illegal occupations of vacant homes to create women's centres, for example, provided prototypes for later movements. These were places where old organisational forms were questioned and non-hierarchical and de-centralised organising structures were created. This provides a good example of how institutional change was attempted through

organisation.

Interestingly, there is one example of a feminist group that had a different trajectory to the majority of others. The Milan Women's Bookstore, an example of a feminist counter-institution, was organised by a group that went through various phases of organisation, and *ended* as a reading group. Their collective practice shifted from a specifically Italian form of C-R or *Autoconscienza*, (directly translated as self-consciousness), to other forms of practice which included collective reading (Libreria delle Donne, 1990). The book shop was run by a collective and set up as part of the move to construct spaces of autonomous self-organisation. Meeting in the basement of the bookshop, they used fiction by female authors to help them to find a language that better represented them. This was part of the general feminist drive to deconstruct and reconstruct language for themselves. The group took the texts apart and put them back together in an experimental way with other non-words, places, facts, and feelings, for example, as a way to claim the words for themselves. They tried to use "the texts as they would have their own words" (p. 10). These experiments resulted in a new relationship to language and meaning. For the Bookstore Collective, they felt that this was a more generative and open practice than the very specific, separatist, Italian form of *Autoconscienza* they had started with.

For the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, the reading material took centre stage of their collective reading practice, facilitating a new relationship to language and through it agency and emancipation for the women involved. Rancière describes a similar process in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, in which the reading material takes the pedagogical place of teacher as the thing in common, around which the students, (and in this case, the tutor), meet on equal terms (Rancière, 1991). The tutor in Rancière's study, Pierre Jacotot, had witnessed the French revolutionary assemblies and saw learning and communication, as practices of doing that created a community of speaking equals. Jacotot's method, involved the students reading together, but also repeating, imitating, translating, taking apart and putting the text back together as pedagogical processes. Jacotot sees this as an emancipatory pedagogy in which equal minds cooperate together to achieve intellectual emancipation. For Rancière, the importance is the reduction in intellectual disparity that is produced in the process and for that reason emancipatory. For the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, the taking apart and putting back together of language was also an important emancipatory practice. Indeed, for feminists the collective analysis of sexist language was synonymous with the analysis of patriarchy and sexism. In both cases, the groups' focus on language was therefore a step towards societal change. Language encoded the meanings of society and therefore, as meanings changed, society potentially changed. Social organisation and linguistic meaning were interlinked. As Spender argued, "to concentrate on either word meanings or social organisation – to the exclusion of the other – is to invite failure" (Spender, 2001, p. 31).

The second wave feminist movement, including the Milan Women's Bookstore Collective, placed a great emphasis on inter-relationality, on the social relations and solidarity created through the processes of sharing personal experiences, and the deconstruction and reconstruction of language. New meanings were co-created through the processes of organising which rested on the development of reciprocity, trust and social capital. These new meanings were then used to challenge the social institution of patriarchy. At the same time, other feminist organisations and "counter-institutions" directly created alternatives. Membership in feminist C-R groups was informally organised, although it had, of course, definite gender boundaries, in that they were women only spaces. Procedures and protocols of speaking and listening were developed and decided upon, although reasonably informally (Farinati & Firth, 2016). And while the informality of the groups allowed for their fluidity in terms of easily shifting between different modes of learning, it also has to be acknowledged that hidden hierarchies did emerge in relation to a certain lack of structure (Freeman, 1970).

Reading groups and the university in the early 21st Century

The previous two examples were both organised in opposition to dominant power structures. The first in relation to the Nazi state, and the second in relation to patriarchy. I now want to move closer to the present, and look at reading groups in relation to the social movements stemming from 2011 in the UK, and their relationship to the educational institution of the university. What is important here, is the role that organisation took in these movements, as a significant tool, to not only counter the established rhetoric about there being no alternative to capitalism, but also on the level of collective practice, in order to directly counter the atomisation and individualism that had been a central feature of neoliberalism.

The social movements of 2011, in this case Occupy and the student movement in the UK (but there are other similar examples elsewhere), brought together popular pedagogy with prefigurative politics, that is, grassroots political practices that aim to practice future ways of doing, through practices of direct and deliberative democracy. These, in line with other "post-Seattle" social movements also emphasised "politics of the first person", that is, those enacting transformations on the level of micro-politics and subjectivity (Bailey et al., 2018; Earl, 2018; Katsiaficas, 2007). Indeed, for many activists involved in the Occupy movement, the actual physical occupation of space and the organisation that this entailed, was primarily a learning experience. Learning, through the putting into practice of principles of mutual aid and self-organisation, was "a defining aspect of the camps" (Earl, 2018, p. 16). Both these movements were in response directly or indirectly to the financial crisis of 2008. The Occupy movement directly challenged the hegemonic narratives about wealth production that led up to the crisis and the vast disparities that the crisis made all too visible. While the student movement developed as a reaction to the UK government's decision to increase university tuition fees, itself a direct policy stemming from the financial crisis. The institution of the university itself also became a key site for struggle and change. The increase in student tuition fees can be seen as part of a wider drive to make universities more business oriented, to which many were (and still are),

very resistant. Radical pedagogical initiatives and popular education projects, such as free schools, proliferated as part of these movements and the surrounding milieu. At the same time, "changes in critical research" were taking place in UK universities, as academics attempted to find new forms of connection between themselves as paid researchers and "communities of struggle," resulting a rise in scholar-activism (Wellbrook, 2014, p. 359).

Reading groups were one of a number of different pedagogical initiatives that proliferated amongst students, academics and activists, which in some cases directly attempted to link these groups of people together, and connect group learning to political activism. Indeed, popular education, rooted in Frierean ideas, precisely aims to "forge a direct link between education and social action," and is committed to progressive social and political change through group learning (Crowther et al., 2013, p. 4). An article published by several researchers involved in the Occupy and Transition movements, argued that reading groups in particular, could provide examples of tactics as part of a strategy to build creative resistance within academic practices. The authors describe examples that they were all directly involved with. One Welsh group they describe, for example, was connected to the Aberystwyth Transition Initiative. Convened in 2011, the group consisted of a group of academics and students wanting to change the university from within. They consciously evolved a less hierarchical and more creative and empowering structure based on critical pedagogy and consensus decision-making. They saw themselves as exploiting the university's resources in order to do this. This group, along with the others that Burton et al. describe, such as the Occupy study group, a group based at the Occupy site in London, shifted between modes of active research or activism and more reflective collective reading. They suggest that these cycles of reading and doing, provide "profoundly transformative" experiences for the participants, and go some way in subverting the university and potentially breaking down barriers between academics, students and activists (Burton et al.., 2015). For academics, Harney and Moten suggest, what is important in order to create radical potential, is to take a stance of being both inside and outside the university, being "in but not of" it (Harney et al., 2013, p. 26).

Consequently, Burton et al. argue that reading groups do not seem prone to institutionalisation by the neoliberal university, because they fall under the radar. Reading groups can potentially, (although not necessarily), dissolve boundaries between different sites of learning and between staff, students and activists, while making use of the university's resources. What they also offer are different modes of temporality from other forms of activism or pedagogy. By providing a longer temporality than activism generally does, they might enable a slower more careful engagement in thinking and imagining and a mode of doing that is not dictated by the academic imperative to produce.

Another researcher also involved in the Occupy study group, Cassie Earl (2018), has suggested that a kind of broad action research type cycle or learning feedback loop could be created between different pedagogical sites in order to connect and share forms of learning so that they might influence and create wider social change. This might allow different forms of learning, across institutions, social movements and community groups to influence and support each other, so that they might build means for creating lasting transformation. In her study of radical pedagogical spaces, Earl focussed on Occupy, Lincoln University and Lincoln Social Science Centre (a small alternative higher education institution run as a cooperative that was initiated by staff from Lincoln University), as three educational sites across and through which knowledge could potentially circulate. These were all larger and more formalised pedagogical entities than reading groups, with complex trajectories and relationships. However, the idea of some kind of learning feedback loop between them in which knowledge might traverse the boundaries and influence, support or change each other, and in so doing, contribute to tactics for creating wider social change, is an interesting one. This suggests that borders of learning spaces can be thought of as porous and shifting. Earl makes the distinction, and I think this is perhaps useful here, between schooling and education. Schooling, being the training and taming of people into the neoliberal industrial reserve army (following Marx), and education, as a process of critically becoming and creating possibilities for imagining and creating alternatives. This perspective also makes a connection between processes of learning and organisation in terms of changes in subjectivity, agency and the potential for the creation of alternative modes of being and doing.

Although very different from the learning groups of the Red Orchestra, in both content and political and social contexts, there are some echoes here, in terms of the potential effects of learning and organising processes in the creation of agency and solidarity. In the contemporary context, these pedagogical forms of organising can also be seen as a form of resistance, but in relation to neoliberalism. This resistance is evident not only in terms of critiquing the university as an institution, but as also in the production of social forums that are in themselves a challenge. One of the main imperatives of neoliberalism is the reduction of all relations to the marketplace and the reduction of all social situations to the condition of individualisation. The market is predominantly a space of private consumption. The production of other forms of public space, such as social forums, occupations, public assemblies and similar spaces, can therefore "be understood as the most basic and necessary form of resistance to this process" (Gilbert, 2014, p. 177). This is particularly the case with spaces in which collective decisions take place.

Conclusion

So in conclusion then, I would like to offer these histories of reading groups not as models per se, but following Foucault, as highly plastic knowledge that can be connected, de-connected and re-connected according to the situation at hand. It might therefore be possible to use or repurpose these histories to construct new cultural forms through a kind of bricolage, improvising and appropriating where needed. I would argue that these examples show the potential that small informal group learning can have within, in the margins of, or between different sites of learning. Groups can overlap and share learning, as part of a larger movement,

network, action-research cycle or learning feedback loop. As informal, fluid and porous sites of learning, some reading groups seem able to easily switch between action, reflection and production or change mode entirely. Reading groups fall into the category of non-institutional self-organised forms of learning, although they can have quite different and varied relationships with institutions, including as a method of organising, in order to bring about institutional change. By exploring these little examined group learning practices further, it might be possible to glean potentialities for mutual learning practices to help build and sustain social infrastructures for social transformation, such as the kinds of "learning feedback loop", which Earl has suggested.

While reading groups do not have to be highly organised entities, decision making does take place on a basic level. Conscious decisions include, deciding when, where, and how often to meet, when to meet next, what to read, how much to read and at what pace. Reading groups are in this sense partially organised, falling somewhere between organisations and networks in the terms which Ahrne & Brunsson set out. They are not emergent, in that there has been a decision to convene them and other basic decisions have taken place. However, they are still characterised by informal social relations, norms and expectations of members that generally emerge from the group working together. They also retain some of the characteristics of networks such as flexibility and spontaneity. This seems to mean that they give themselves to be overlapping, porous and shifting spaces and of learning that can morph between active and reflexive modes, being flexible enough to change according to the conditions and context. These characteristics, alongside their capacity to develop social relations in an informal and low key way (that is not a meeting where everything can become contentious), can provide a reproductive role in organisations and networks. However, even those things which are decided are done quite informally. Reading groups are temporary, fluid and flexible but held together through the tasks that the groups set themselves and the social relations of the members. The temporariness and informality of these groups, coupled with some level of commitment, offers something that is very different to a meeting. Reading groups' raison d'etre is not to decide something, and that is perhaps a strength. Harney and Moten's metaphor of jazz improvisation in relation to study is useful here in differentiating groups that are more exploratory and don't necessarily have to have a conclusion in mind. These spaces can provide the ground for individuals and collectives to find voice in a situation where the risk of polarisation and contention is low. A certain level of safety is developed that helps to develop critical thinking and a tolerance for uncertainty. These kinds of social forum can play a somewhat reproductive role, developing trust, solidarity and social capital on an informal level that feeds into or maintains a wider social movement. Informal social infrastructure might then be built on further and provide the means to attempt institutional or wider change through organisation.

There are, as we have seen, many different ways that the dual processes of organisation and learning might work together within learning and reading groups to increase collective agency. However, none can be guaranteed and it is important not to fetishise the reading group as any kind of exemplary social form. What kinds of effects they have will be determine by a whole range of factors, not least the very specific contexts in which they operate. Indeed, as we have seen, both processes of learning and organisation, are dependent on meaning making and therefore also dependent on context. There is radical potential in a range of social forums and organisational practices. What is important is to understand those differences and what might be possible to build with them, between them and within them.

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Evidence from a blended remote learning intervention in Greek small rural primary schools

Lydia Lymperis[A]

[A] *PhD candidate, School of Education, Communication and Language Sciences, Newcastle University, UK*

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Abstract

The present research evaluates the impact of a blended remote learning intervention on the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) attainment of 8-12-year-old children living in rural parts of Greece who, contrary to their urban counterparts, have no access to English language instruction in their schools. Rooted in a sociocultural understanding of development and the idea that subject matter and academic learning cannot be separated from activities such as social identification, co-construction of understanding and identity development, the present intervention was fundamentally centred around three key concepts: collaborative enquiry, authenticity, and self-paced mastery. Drawing on findings from the quantitative strand of an embedded mixed methods intervention design, the study reveals positive benefits from participation in the blended distance learning intervention with respect to children's vocabulary and grammar knowledge as well as their aural comprehension skills. Moreover, findings indicate that, in the case of small multigrade schools in Greece, a blended distance learning approach is likely to be effective at raising EFL attainment at a comparable cost level to that of face-to-face programmes. The study thereby contributes to an emerging body of international research on pedagogically and financially viable implementations of blended distance learning involving primary learners in resource-poor settings.

1. Introduction

Small schools have traditionally been championed for the value they bring to their typically rural communities. Yet pupils in more than 500 small rural primary schools[1] in remote parts of Greece have for decades been excluded from core areas of the national curriculum, including English as a foreign language (EFL), IT/Computing, PE, Music and Art, due to the higher per-pupil costs involved in staffing these schools with qualified teachers (OECD, 2018). The lack of state provision for access to these learning domains effectively means that rural children are unable to compete with their urban counterparts who, by the time they complete compulsory education will have received six years' worth of additional instruction in these subjects. Inequalities are further exacerbated by the fact that rural families who can afford to, seek out private alternatives to compensate for the gap in state provision, whereas those who are less able to afford private tuition are left behind (OECD, 2018).

This research addresses calls in the recent literature to examine the potential of information and communication technologies (ICT) and other forms of ICT-supported learning for expanding educational access and broadening curricula through distance education, thereby alleviating the difficulties faced by remote rural schools in Greece (e.g., see OECD, 2018). The ongoing global pandemic attached a sense of urgency to an already burgeoning field of research into the effectiveness of blended learning (BL) approaches (defined as a combination of face-to-face and asynchronous online learning) in terms of academic achievement. Yet most of the research on blended learning has been carried out in the context of higher education (e.g., Boelens et al., 2018; Medina, 2018; Castro, 2019) and, while there are some studies which have investigated blended approaches in relation to K-12 learning, these have mostly concentrated on secondary education (Barbour, 2014; Waters et al., 2014). As such, much less is known about the practical feasibility and the parameters that might facilitate or impede academic success in a blended learning environment involving primary school children. Furthermore, there has been little systematic attention to the effectiveness of such educational interventions in low-income and resource-scarce settings, not least in the context of Greece (Anastasiou et al., 2015).

There is also a growing body of research into blended language learning which lends support to the argument that hybrid approaches may indeed, under certain circumstances, support second language attainment (e.g., Shih, 2010; Barani, 2011; Adas & Bakir, 2013; Ghazizadeh & Fatemipour, 2017). However, the majority of these studies focus on university students or have been carried out in private language institutes where the majority of learners are adults. It thus becomes apparent that although the demand for BL has increased, our understanding of effective BL implementation that eliminates rather than exacerbates existing inequities, is at present rather fragmented — especially in relation to K-12 settings.

1 Amounting to 12 per cent of all state-run mainstream primary schools in the country (school year 2018/19).

Yet more recent conceptualisations of blended learning go beyond this notion of accessibility. In addition to flexibility in terms of time and place, BL also affords opportunities to cater to students' individual needs and, thus, achieve a greater degree of personalisation in teaching (Boelens et al., 2018). Speaking to the same idea, Roschelle et al., draw an important distinction between using technology to do conventional things better versus using technology to do better things (cited in Fishman & Dede, 2016, p. 1269; emphasis in the original). The authors argue that we need to move beyond treating technology as a means by which to simply automate conventional models of teaching; the real value in technology lies in its ability to act as a catalyst for a shift towards an "alternative, next-generation educational model" (p. 1271). For Fishman and Dede, this transformation entails swinging the pendulum in the direction of personalised, participatory, collaborative, guided learning, and deeper engagement, amongst others.

This is particularly important for small rural schools operating multigrade classrooms, where two or more grades are taught by a single teacher within the same classroom context. In such learning environments, multigrade teachers are faced with the additional demand of having to simultaneously address the needs of children of different educational levels, ages and interests, while following more than one curriculum within any given period. Indeed, this might be one of the reasons rural schools are often thought to provide a second-class education. Hargreaves et al. (2009, p. 82) consider the view that rural schools' educational provision is "inferior to that provided in larger urban schools where there are more teachers and easier access to resources for teaching and learning" as grounds for pursuing research in rural schools. In the local context, for instance, Year 3 pupils may be taught alongside their Year 4 peers the syllabus of the latter for an entire year. The same pupils would then go on to study the syllabus of Years 3 and 6, respectively, the following year. While exposure to work at different grade levels may benefit some learners by reinforcing and extending their learning opportunities (Berry, 2006), it is nonetheless likely that it will cause undue cognitive strain on others; in other words, what is moderately challenging and motivational for one learner, may be far too difficult for another (Smit & Humpert, 2012).

For all the challenges they bring to learners and teachers alike, multigrade classrooms are at the same time recognised as learning environments that engender developmental opportunities which are unique to these contexts, providing increased opportunities for self-regulation and pupil interaction. Further, educational approaches such as differentiated instruction have recently become interesting options for achieving inclusion and personanalisation in environments where learner variance is high, such that all learners are successfully and meaningfully challenged (Smit & Humpert, 2012). Differentiated instruction refers to the proactive modification of curricula, teaching methods, resources, learning activities and student products based on one or more of the student characteristics (readiness, interest, learning profile) to accommodate diversity and individuality, and to minimise the isolation and marginalisation that some learners face in highly heterogeneous classrooms (Tomlinson, 2014). Importantly, in differentiated classrooms, the teacher acknowledges that children find their need

for nourishment, belonging, achievement, contribution, and fulfilment through different paths, and according to different timetables.

The present study is therefore an attempt to contribute to an emerging body of research into blended educational formats that go beyond conventional models of online or hybrid teaching. Rooted in a sociocultural understanding of development and the idea that subject matter and academic learning cannot be separated from activities such as social identification, co-construction of understanding and identity development, the present intervention was fundamentally centred around three key concepts: collaborative enquiry, authenticity, and self-paced mastery.

2. Literature review

2.1 The rise of blended/hybrid learning

Since the advent of digital technologies and their integration in education, the term 'blended learning' (also 'hybrid learning') has broadly been used to refer to a mix of face-to-face and online learning (Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Blissit, 2016). Others have defined it as "the integrated combination of traditional learning with web-based on-line approaches'" (Oliver & Trigwell, 2005, p. 17) — the former referring to face-to-face instruction and the latter to that part of the course delivered via the Internet, usually through a virtual learning environment (VLE). The term has also been used to describe an instructional model that combines a fully online, distance-based curriculum with required on-site attendance (Watson, 2008), thus suggesting that in contexts where the use of digital technology is widespread, distance learning is understood to be synonymous with online learning. Others yet speak of a mix of synchronous (live or real-time) and asynchronous (e.g., discussion boards where students respond to questions from the instructor or other students) learning environments (Holden & Westfall, 2007).

In this study, the terms 'blended learning' (BL) and 'hybrid learning' (HL) are used interchangeably to describe the amalgamation of synchronous and asynchronous learning modalities in distance education settings, where students are physically co-present in the former but not in the latter. In this sense, the study draws a distinction between second language (L2) learning in blended/hybrid modalities and what is referred to as 'technology-enhanced language learning' (TELL) or 'computer-assisted language learning' (CALL). This differentiation rests on the fact that in the former, technology is thought to be central to both the design and delivery of the curriculum rather than merely a tool to enhance teaching and learning.

But what are the reasons that schools may opt to move from a traditional classroom-based pedagogy to a blend of face-to-face and online learning? First, there are economic reasons for introducing an online component in the delivery of a course (Hobbs, 2004). Although this model has not yet been widely adopted in K-12 education, a rising number of secondary schools around the world are turning to a 'flipped model' whereby at least part of the course may involve teaching assistants supervising students' engagement with online activities in the classroom. Second, there is a combination of other motives, including preparing digitally competent young people for lifelong learning, and equitable access to resources and educational opportunities where this would otherwise have not been possible, as will be shown in the sections that follow. Let us first consider the evidence around the effectiveness of BL in K-12 learning.

2.2 What impact does BL have on K-12 student achievement?

The effectiveness of hybrid approaches to K-12 learning in developed contexts has relatively recently begun to be documented in the literature — albeit concentrated in secondary education (Barbour, 2014; Waters et al., 2014). An ongoing question is whether students in blended learning environments achieve academically as well as their traditional school counterparts. The findings have been mixed in this regard. Drawing on aggregated data from school performance ratings and report cards, Gulosino and Miron (2017) found that students in full-time blended schools across the US were learning significantly less on average in maths and reading achievement than the national average for all public schools. While highly motivated students may thrive in such environments, the authors argue that the online pivot alone is not enough to reverse the trajectories of those who struggle academically. Nevertheless, they acknowledge other ways in which students may benefit from a BL environment such as more flexible instructional time and greater personalisation (e.g., greater student control over time, place, path and/or pace). Picciano et al. (2012) raise similar concerns, stating that many K-12 students may not have the characteristics to be successful in online learning environments, such as maturity and self-discipline. In a similar line of enquiry, Fainholc (2019) declares that successful distance learning entails perseverance, systematic dedication, capacity for self-direction, and an ability for interdependence and communication in groups, amongst others. This echoes Pulham and Graham's (2018) view that, to a certain degree, success will likely be grounded in the pedagogical practices enabled by several BL teaching competencies such as flexibility and personalisation, mastery-based learning, establishing expectations, and community development through facilitation of effective communication and collaboration; student-centred learning was also established as a key teacher competency in fostering students' self-regulation.

Gulosino and Miron's findings reported above conflict with evidence derived from Spanjers et al.'s (2015) meta-analyses that BL instructional conditions are slightly more effective than more traditional learning. Although K-12 students were underrepresented in the articles included, a follow-up moderator analysis revealed that the inclusion of quizzes, tests or self-assessments was a contributing factor to effectiveness. The authors speculate that the feedback accompanying assessment helps give an image of students' mastery of the content, thus providing them with continuity and a sense of direction. As such, they agree with Gulosino and Miron that not all BL programmes are created equal and reiterate the importance of systematic, careful BL design.

2.3 What impact does BL have on L2 Learning?

Despite a growing body of research into blended language learning, the research findings remain mixed. While some researchers contend that exposure to the BL model can enhance L2 learning, others indicate that there is no significant improvement in comparison with more conventional (face-to-face) means of instruction (see e.g., Tosun, 2015). For instance, Xu et al. (2020) found that blended learning was associated with higher probability of passing an EFL course in a Mexican university by more than 3 percentage points, as well as better course grades by an average of 0.409 points on a 10-point scale; the impact on course grade corresponded to a moderate effect of 0.306 standard deviations. While the study did not provide any insights into attainment by language skill, improved outcomes have previously been recorded in terms of English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) reading comprehension (Ghazizadeh & Fatemipour, 2017), listening skills (Bañados, 2006; Barani, 2011), written performance (Adas & Bakir, 2013), oral skills (Bañados, 2006; Shih, 2010) and pronunciation (Bañados, 2006; Chang et al., 2020), based on experimental and quasi-experimental evidence from classroom studies that compared BL to traditional L2 instruction. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the above studies have focussed either on university students, or have been carried out in language academies where the majority of learners are adults; as such, very little is known about K-12 students' performance in blended language learning environments. Vahdat and Eidipour (2016) were amongst the few to look at the impact of BL on L2 acquisition in a primary/secondary education setting. In analysing the listening performance of a group of Year 8 students in a high school in Iran, they found that the students who had participated in the computer-assisted L2 listening programme outperformed their peers who had received traditional instruction. Yet one notable difference between the design of this research and that of the above-mentioned studies (as well as the present investigation) is that the participants were not required to work on the technology-based component of the blended course in their own time, as this was done during regular contact time. This had important implications for the amount of technical and linguistic support that was available to them, and the extent to which the learning setup required them to exhibit a capacity to self-regulate. As such, the findings of the study may not be representative of students' level of readiness to work in BL formats which require them to engage with self-study.

Indeed, this is a crucial difference because an important challenge for blended EFL instruction remains the fact that successful learning in this environment requires students to become at least somewhat autonomous, which may be difficult for some, especially if they're coming from K-12 contexts that are mostly characterised by learner passivity and minimal engagement (Kuh, 2009). While a web-based learning platform can afford students flexible opportunities to engage with linguistic input and guided practice at their own pace, Whyte (2011) remarks that successful language learning requires more than that; encouraging effective and sustained use of online content requires 'imagination and effort' so that it becomes an integral part of the course (p. 218).

Consequently, the question has gradually begun to shift towards *how* to design an optimal blended language learning course across different proficiency levels and for diverse populations. Drawing on second language acquisition (SLA) research, Thornbury (2016) proposes a set of principles that can be applied to the selection of the technology-based component of a blended course. Specifically, he argues that the chosen learning tool should provide opportunities for interaction, personalisation and flow, amongst others. While Thornbury's framework is only concerned with the asynchronous part of a BL environment, it serves as a useful reminder that, to the extent that technologies can enhance the learning process, this cannot be done by purely replicating and replacing 'traditional didactic' teaching approaches. Rather, a design is necessary that acknowledges that students bring their own personal history, knowledge, personalities and experiences into a learning encounter. In this regard, the design should enable them to project themselves socially and emotionally, while allowing the teacher to engineer and facilitate cognitive and social processes "for the purpose of realizing personally meaningful… learning outcomes" (Anderson et al., 2001, p. 5).

2.4 Implementation of blended distance learning programmes in low-resource settings

Interest in the development of BL spurred partly in response to a combination of socioeconomic and pedagogical issues is present in both developing and developed countries. These include the perceived poor quality of teaching and chronic shortages of 'excellent' teachers — particularly in remote areas — together with the resultant issues of equity and access to high quality teaching (Mitra et al., 2008; Ratcliffe, 2014; Dwinal, 2015). Furthermore, the increasing heterogeneity and lack of differentiation in the traditional classroom makes it impossible to sufficiently challenge high band students while leaving those in the lower band behind (Ofsted, 2013).

The potential of hybrid K-12 learning programmes for increasing marginalised students' access to high-quality learning in resource-scarce contexts, rests on the proposition that such approaches can substantially reduce the cost of education, while retaining face-to-face learning components to appease the need for feedback, social skills development, and engagement (Picciano et al., 2012; Marrinan et al., 2015). Traditional face-to-face education models also rely heavily on human resources which are often unavailable in settings with large numbers of students or in resource-constrained environments. As such, hybrid and online approaches are often seen as viable alternatives to face-to-face learning, particularly in rural and remote communities constrained by a financial burden as well as physical barriers (Kim & Frick, 2011).

While research into the impact of BL programmes implemented in the context of remote/distance education is still thin on the ground (Stanley, 2019), there is evidence to suggest that distance learning technologies can be just as effective in terms of student performance as traditional classroom instruction. In what follows, two technology-

enabled BL innovations are summarised which were designed to serve poor and hard-to-reach communities in Latin America with no prior access to formal educational inputs. Both of these have been assessed as success stories.

2.4.1 The case of Ceibal en Ingles, Uruguay

Perhaps one of the best-known large-scale initiatives to promote inclusion and equal opportunities in the K-12 context with the help of digital technologies has been the Plan Ceibal project. Launched in 2007 by the Uruguayan government, Plan Ceibal is a nation-wide interinstitutional undertaking whose goal is to implement the One-Laptop-Per-Child model. Since its inception, it has distributed low-cost, low-power XO laptops and Internet connectivity amongst primary school learners and teachers across Uruguay, and developed a wide range of technology-supported educational programmes (Kaiser, 2017).

Given that English was included in the national primary curriculum as a mandatory subject in 2008 (Marconi & Brovetto, 2019), there is an acute shortage of qualified teachers, especially in remote and rural parts of the country (Banegas, 2013). For this reason, the Ceibal administration decided in 2012 to introduce Ceibal en Ingles (CEI), a project embedded within the wider initiative which blended remote teaching via videoconferencing, a virtual learning environment, and teacher training, with the aim of reaching the most marginalised children. The programme sought to investigate the effectiveness of an educational model whereby lessons were delivered by virtual teachers through videoconferencing, with support from classroom practitioners with little or no command of English. This was deemed a crucial aspect of the programme, as virtual teachers were experts in the subject matter, but their colleagues on the ground were the ones who knew the context and the learners (Banegas, 2013).

Each week, learners received three hours of instruction, one of which centred around language input and was delivered virtually by a qualified teacher (based in or outside Uruguay), and the other two being led by the classroom teacher. Additionally, a customised online platform was developed with educational resources for practitioners, and a space for course developers and teachers to exchange views and collaborate. Classroom teachers also received in-service training and ongoing support from specialised mentors, together with English language lessons to help them progress alongside their students and eventually qualify to run virtual sessions themselves. Students used their laptops primarily for language practice, such as completing information gap activities, playing online games, and creating their own resources, including flashcards, slides, and digital stories (Banegas, 2013).

Current estimates indicate that 71 per cent of Uruguayan students in Years 4, 5 and 6 learn English in the virtual space (Plan Ceibal, 2017), while the programme has now been extended to secondary schools. Overall, CEI has been evaluated as a success story in the context of technology-supported remote education, with primary school children involved in the project showing comparable progress to that achieved by their peers in the face-to-face-programme (see Marconi & Brovetto, 2019). The success of the initiative is largely due to adopting a nimble approach to scale-up and remaining responsive to feedback, with adjustments continually made to hardware and learning materials, as well as initial teacher training and ongoing mentoring schemes (Hockly, 2017). Indeed, in line with the programme's strong commitment to promoting equality, diversity, and inclusion, much of the teacher training centred around practical strategies for differentiating instruction to cater to mixed-ability classrooms (Kaplan & Brovetto, 2019). These included the use of dyslexia-friendly fonts, visual cues to help students with behavioural difficulties to refocus their attention and prepare for the upcoming task, or providing learners with choice in their classroom response format (Rovegno, 2019).

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that an exhaustive programme evaluation of CEI which includes all language skills is yet to be undertaken, and therefore firm conclusions about the initiative's impact at a more holistic level cannot be drawn at this point (Banegas & Brovetto, 2020). Another issue has been that programme participation in secondary schools has seen a slow decline since its launch in 2014, which is in no small part due to high demands on classroom teachers' time (Banegas & Brovetto, 2020). In investigating learner motivation factors in CEI learning environments, Ramirez (2019) discovered that, while group work, games, videos, music, and inter-cultural activities were all driving forces for learner engagement, oral presentations were a source of anxiety, frustration, and demotivation. Similarly, a lack of social and emotional competency in teachers, externalised by behaviours such as not allowing children sufficient time to think through their answers or work through emerging problems, appeared to be have a negative impact amongst learners.

2.4.2 The case of the Amazonas Media Center, Brazil

Remote instruction approaches need not always rely on high-tech solutions. The Amazonas Government's Media Center project in Brazil is another large-scale initiative with an overt social justice agenda based on equity, learning, and low-tech resources. The distance-education programme, which began in 2007, aims to address the disparity in access to education between Amazonas' urban and rural areas (Plata, 2020). Facing a chronic shortage of secondary school teachers for the Amazon's 6,100 riverside communities, together with its concomitant dropout rates (Plata, 2020), the government of Amazonas uses multipoint videoconferencing technology to broadcast lessons in real time via satellite television from a Media Center studio in the state's capital city to up to 1,000 classrooms at a time, with 5 to 25 students each, located throughout rural communities along the Amazon River (Cruz et al., 2016). Each class is mediated by a professional onsite tutor with no specialist expertise in the subject area, who manages the classroom, helps with difficult parts of the classwork, and provides appropriate technical support to ensure that the experience is as interactive as possible (Trucano, 2014). With an emphasis on interactivity, students not only view lectures from the teacher in the studio, but are also able to interact with virtual teachers through the digital platform and have their questions answered in this

way. Just as *Ceibal en Ingles* secondary students are served by a custom-made digital platform with supplementary educational material, so Media Center students are supported by additional educational resources (in both print and digital formats). Lessons follow the state curriculum and are planned by the studio teacher, in consultation with national curriculum and technology experts. This process makes it possible to create localised content that matches the needs of a specific group of learners (Cruz et al., 2016). Studio teachers receive rigorous pre-service and ongoing training in both technical and pedagogical skills. The former cover, for example, aspects of effective behaviours in front of the camera, such as posture, speech, and screenplay.

Between 2007 and 2016, the distance learning programme had reached 300,000 students in remote, riverside communities across the Amazonas state. It was subsequently expanded to include youth and adult education, while upscaling efforts led to replication of the model in seven other states with poor and/or difficult-to-reach populations (Cruz et al., 2016). Despite initial Internet connectivity and infrastructure challenges, preliminary results have shown promise — the programme led to a 16 per cent increase in high school progression rates between 2007 and 2011, dropouts in Amazonas state decreased by almost half between 2008 and 2011 (Cruz et al., 2016), and children's learning has steadily improved, as reflected on the Brazilian Education Quality Index (Robinson & Winthrop, 2016).

2.4.3 Barriers to successful BL implementation

These two case studies provide an example of the future development of the use of technology to support learning and expand access to high quality education in resource-constrained settings. However, they also illustrate that the empirical work in the field of blended remote learning in K-12 education is still at a nascent stage. While flexible access to curriculum and instruction serve to provide access to segments of the population that have been underserved in the past, there are also noticeable gaps that could limit the ability of the education innovations to help fuel and sustain educational progress amongst these children. For instance, few efforts prioritise pedagogical uses of technology that increase the depth and pace of learning (Istance & Paniagua, 2019).

Other neglected factors include the way in which the learners' attributes, together with their level of cognitive, social and emotional development, interact with academic achievement in a BL environment. Indeed, expanded access to schooling in recent decades has increased the variability in learners' readiness for classroom instruction (Ganimian et al., 2020). For example, evaluations of the One Laptop Per Child (OLPC) initiative in Haiti, Uruguay, the United States and Paraguay revealed that many children, especially the most marginalised students, were not able to exploit the potential of the laptop on their own, whether using it at school or at home (Warschauer & Ames, 2010). The authors found that more socioeconomically privileged children tended to make use of the laptops in more creative and cognitively challenging ways. Thus, they conclude that independent, unscaffolded laptop use by children might in fact exacerbate existing inequities, and highlight that failure to recognise variability in students' existing social and human capital as a moderator of academic success 'represents a flaw in the one-sided belief in self-directed constructionism' (p. 44).

Therefore, in seeking to address ways of reducing the English language skills differential between rural and urban students in Greece, this study built on previous international research to examine the efficacy of a blended learning intervention which was delivered remotely to eight small rural schools across the country. Further, it was reasoned that if the study were to provide any actionable insights for policymakers, it would be necessary to acknowledge that an educational programme may indeed be effective in increasing test scores, yet its upscaling ability might be financially implausible for a certain context once it is compared to its alternative. A further aim thus concerned the estimation of the relative cost of the intervention compared to its face-to-face alternative, supposing the latter were available to small rural schools.

3. Method

3.1 Research context and participants

Data obtained for this study came from 47 pupils attending eight different small rural schools across the Greek mainland and the island of Crete (for a more detailed description of the participating schools and the selection criteria that were employed, see Lymperis, 2019). All the schools that received the intervention were mixed gender state primary schools operating with a maximum of two teachers each (including the headteacher, whose professional duties in these schools normally also involve teaching responsibilities). None of these schools had ever had any provision for the teaching of English. There was one computer only in each school, while an overhead projector was available in two school sites. The mean age of the participants was recorded in years and months at the start of the fieldwork testing (M = 10 years 5 months, min. = 8 years 7 months, max. = 12 years 3 months). The participants were in Years 6 (N = 18), 5 (N = 20), 4 (N = 5) and 3 (N = 4) during the fieldwork timeframe (academic year 2018-2019).

3.2 Research procedures

The present scholarship focuses on the quantitative insights that emerged from an embedded mixed-methods intervention design. A pre-test and post-test design was employed to investigate the impact that the BL programme had on children's EFL achievement. Five language measures were administered at the start and end of the fieldwork, each of which was mapped to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and was designed to assess five distinct levels (Pre-A1 to A2.2.) on a single, continuous scale which increased in difficulty. The linguistic dimensions assessed were as follows: vocabulary and grammar (each comprising 25 items measuring both implicit and explicit knowledge); aural comprehension (comprising a listen-to-draw task); writing skills (comprising a timed picture description task); and oral fluency (children's pruned speech rate during a personal information monologue of up

to 60 seconds).

Two different types of measurement reliability were assessed for the tests administered in this study: (1) internal consistency was measured through Cronbach's alpha; and (2) interrater reliability was measured through the Kappa statistic test. Reliability coefficients for four out of five outcome measures ranged between 0.82 and 0.92, and were therefore deemed acceptable. An exception to this was the oral fluency measure, which produced changes in scores that had relatively low reliability ($\alpha = 0.59$), possibly as a result of significant data loss that occurred at the post-test phase. This measure was excluded from further inferential analysis. Moreover, individual differences in children's cognitive ability were measured through the Raven's Coloured Progressive Matrices Test (CPM; Styles et al., 1998), while child and parental background data was gathered through two separate surveys prior to the intervention.

3.3 The intervention

The intervention itself was conducted between January – May 2019, and consisted of two main components: a synchronous and an asynchronous learning component, treated for research purposes as a single integrated intervention. Children participated in weekly sessions with a virtual teacher, which lasted approximately 45 minutes and took place via a free videoconferencing platform. For the purposes of the blended intervention, the national curriculum for primary English was organised around collaborative mini projects – usually spanning two sessions each – which permitted differentiation of pupil output in two key ways:

(1) tiered product assignments: each mini project culminated in the creation of a product which allowed pupils to start at a different entry point (e.g., reviewing for some and extending learning for others, or a single assignment addressing multiple curricular components in response to pupils' varied levels of readiness). Open-ended tasks with more than one right answer lend themselves particularly well to personal response. Examples included (Internet-based) collaborative investigations, surveys and extended enquiries (e.g., What makes children happy, and what makes them unhappy?); interdisciplinary mini projects (e.g., involving tasks which required students to identify spatial relationships between objects and grapple with measurement concepts, such as amount, length, distance, size, weight, volume and time through Stellarium, an open-access and user-controlled real-time night sky simulation); and collaborative online game development (e.g., designing and developing gamified song-based learning tasks for the existing online learning community via lyricstraining.com); and

(2) choice of tasks supported the pupils' use of varied modes of expression, resources, and technologies (e.g., product formats that allowed learners to express themselves in ways other than written language alone).

As noted earlier, the notion of differentiating product assignments as a way of calibrating challenge to the particular needs of a learner is of particular relevance to small schools operating multigrade classrooms, where the circumstances mandate that multiple curriculum areas and proficiency levels be addressed in a simultaneous mode. Further, a great deal of thought was put into how meaningfulness could be preserved during the intervention; therefore, all content was sourced from authentic resources, while tasks and topics were selected such as to encourage the learners to draw linkages between the ideas and skills they study in school and the ways in which these can be used "out there in the real world"[2].

As a way of providing input to the learners, along with opportunities for guided and controlled practice of the target language in children's own time, an asynchronous online learning component was designed to complement the live sessions. This made it possible to obtain comparable results in terms of the participants' learning outcomes, whilst compensating for a lack of textbooks in the participating schools. The study adopted a microlearning app, EdApp, as the e-learning platform. Even though EdApp has been designed and marketed as a corporate training tool, it was judged that it could also lend itself particularly well to language learning within the context of mainstream education due to a number of reasons. First, it combined a plethora of compelling features, such as mobile and web-based learning and mastery-based instructional design options (e.g., the possibility of configuring conditions for learners' progression through the material). It also offered a wide array of interactive tasks and games that enabled participative design, templates for introducing new content in an engaging way, and an intuitive cloud-based course authoring tool. Moreover, the platform has been designed and developed based on a user-friendly interface where navigation is easy and reliable. Finally, it allowed content delivery in a microlearning format, which enabled the breaking down of information into topical, bite-sized chunks.

Additional affordances which acted as key contributing factors to the selection were the following: gamified formative assessment; the possibility to capture digital data from the learners' online activity, together with user, group, and level metrics on performance and engagement; offline mode, thus making it possible for learners to complete lessons when Internet connection was poor or non-existent by pre-downloading materials; and finally, affordability. As a low-cost intervention, sustainability was a key factor that informed design decisions (the *EdApp* mobile learning platform now provides free access to its course authoring tool and hosting services).

2 The phrase is borrowed from one of the child participants who used it to describe what he perceived as a disconnect between his textbooks and 'the real world'.

4. Results

4.1 Changes in EFL achievement

Paired-samples t-tests were conducted to evaluate the extent of improvement in students' EFL achievement. Mean gain scores, t-statistics with their corresponding levels of significance, and effect sizes are reported in Table 1. All measures demonstrated statistically significant increase between pre- and post-test scores ($p < 0.01$). In terms of the amount of variation in scores between pre- and post-tests, analyses demonstrated that effect sizes were positive and large for all four linguistic constructs.

Table 1. Mean improvement from pre-test to post-test (%) and effect sizes, by measure of attainment

L2 measure	N	Mean Learning Gain	*t*	*d*
Vocabulary	46	13.48 *(9.20)*	9.933**	1.47
Grammar	41	15.66 *(13.49)*	7.432**	1.16
Aural Comprehension	40	26.60 *(22.38)*	7.517**	1.19
Writing Skills	43	15.35 *(16.23)*	6.200**	0.95

Note. Standard deviations in parentheses.
**$p < 0.01$

4.2 Impact of the intervention on EFL achievement

Ordinary least squares regressions were used next to examine the strength of association between the intervention and students' academic achievement at post-test whilst controlling for prior attainment; time spent on the asynchronous component of the intervention (*asynchronous*) and in sessions during the intervention (*synchronous*); English proficiency level (*level*); amount of English language learning taking place outside school (*tutoring*; in hours/ week); and pre-test scores (*pretest*)[3].

Table 2 provides an overview of the results of the analyses across the four language domains. Overall, it was found that the amount of time spent on the online learning platform, *EdApp*, used as a proxy for the asynchronous component of the intervention, was a strong predictor of mean EFL achievement at post-test. Separate analyses for each outcome measure uphold this finding, with the exception of writing skills, in which case time spent online could not be established as a significant predictor. With the effects of the other four factors held constant, for every approximate three hours or more spent on the self-paced online course, an extra 8.0, 5.0 and 4.7 percentage points were achieved on the aural comprehension, vocabulary and grammar assessment at post-test, respectively. Conversely, the amount of live contact was not found to have a significant direct effect on post-test performance in any of the four linguistic domains examined[4].

3 The analaysis was only run on measures which had previously indicated a significant change from pre- to post-test.

Table 2. Multiple regression on post-test achievement

	Vocabulary Knowledge	Grammar Knowledge	Aural Comprehension	Writing Skills
	β	*β*	*β*	*β*
Asynchronous	.216**	.198*	.294*	.025
Synchronous	-.074	-.103	-.022	.034
Level	.172	.398***	.586***	.140
Tutoring	-.050	-.143	.020	-.066
Pretest	.713***	.541***	.242	.771***
Adjusted R^2	**.855*** **	**.833*** **	**.690*** **	**.660*** **

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

4.3 Cost analysis of the blended intervention

To identify and estimate the total resource cost for the intervention, this analysis uses the Cost–Procedure–Process–Outcome Analysis (CPPOA) Model (Yates, 1999, 2009) and the ingredients model (Levin & McEwan, 2001). The CPPOA model provides a useful framework for measuring:

(a) resources (what makes a programme possible),

(b) procedures (what a progamme does with participants),

(c) processes (what a programme changes in its participants), and

(d) outcomes for an intervention (what a programme achieves with and for participants)[5].

The ingredients model is a systematic approach to cost estimation of an intervention (Levin, 1983), and entails three phases: '(a) identification of ingredients [i.e. programme resources]; (b) determination of the value or cost of the ingredients; and (c) an analysis of the costs in an appropriate decision-oriented framework' (Levin et al., 2012, p. 9). Finally, the focus of this analysis was on the incremental costs of delivery, above and beyond existing costs of regular school programming in each of the participating schools.

The first step was to organise all the resources used for the implementation of the programme into the following cost categories:

Personnel

An annual personnel cost was established based on teacher base salary data obtained from the Ministry of Economic Affairs. The estimated salary cost was inclusive of time needed for preparation, teaching, marking and administrative duties.

4 Although not discussed here in detail, it is noteworthy that further analysis using structural equation modelling procedures revealed there to be small but significant indirect effects of live contact on vocabulary, grammar and aural comprehension attainment ($p = 0.019$, 0.023 and 0.004, respectively); these were all mediated by the amount of students' engagement with the learning platform.

5 Only (a) and (b) were taken into consideration for the purposes of the present cost estimation analysis.

No adaptation was made for the number of teaching hours per week, as the estimation was carried out on the premise that one English language teacher would teach in more than one school until they reached a full-time workweek (i.e. 24 hours/week).

Facilities

Even though the use of facilities was identified as a resource, this category was not included in the cost estimation analysis. The reason for this was due to the fact that the school space used as part of the programme did not incur any incremental costs for the district as the classrooms were already being used for the purposes of regular school programming.

Materials

The materials resource did not include the cost of computers, as all the schools were already equipped with at least one desktop or laptop computer (whether in use or not), however, it did include the cost of an overhead projector and a screen for groups with a number of students larger than five. Pricing was based on a mid-range projection kit of a similar standard to what was being used by schools throughout the intervention, with an assumed life cycle of four years, which probably constitutes a rather conservative estimation. It also included e-learning content and training materials development costs, which would, nevertheless, be incurred during the first year of programme implementation only.

Following the creation of a list of basic resources, the next step was to identify relevant activities/procedures which were involved in the implementation of the learning programme. These included: (a) teacher training, and (b) delivery of the EFL curriculum.

Table 3 shows a breakdown of the costs of resources by activity, along with a total yearly cost for the implementation of the BL programme across 522 small rural/peri-urban schools, assuming a mean class size equal to that of the intervention. A total cost for a four-year implementation period was also estimated as it would provide a more representative picture of the spread of costs across a period of time matching long-term government budget planning. Teacher training was calculated on the basis of providing a two-week training at the beginning of the first year of implementation, with subsequent two-day training events repeated annually for the next three years for a total of 131 teachers.

A total cost for the implementation of the blended learning programme for Year 1 was estimated at €1,886,543. Due to startup costs, Year 1 would be expected to be the costliest, with an average yearly cost across a four-year implementation period estimated at €1,761,316, compared to €1,960,632 in the regular programme.

Costs were then compared by school, with the yearly cost per student varying from €281.18 to €1124.72 (M = 790.43, SD = 308.80), depending on class size (M = 5.2, SD = 3.0). Additionally, the average yearly costs of programme resources were compared, with teachers being the costliest resource (€1,735,011, or 98.5% of the marginal resource cost). Finally, the average costs by activity/procedure were estimated, with delivery of the EFL curriculum found to be the costlier of the two (€1,731,381, or 98.3% of the activities; teacher training was calculated at an average yearly cost of 29,935).

Table 3. Comparative cost analysis of the blended learning programme versus regular programming, in 2020 euros

	Blended Learning Programme		**Regular Programme**	
	Teacher training	Delivery of the EFL curriculum	Teacher training	Delivery of the EFL curriculum
Teachers	€71,253	€1,710,072	€0	€1,960,632[6]
***Ed4pp* access**	€0	€0	€0	€0
Overhead projector & screen	€0	€65,250	€0	€0
Content development	€0	€19,984	€0	€0
Teacher training materials	€19,984	€0	€0	€0
Total for Year 1	€1,886,543		€1,960,632	
Total for 4 years	**€7,045,260**		**€7,842,528**	

5. Discussion

The present research indicated positive benefits from participation in the blended distance learning intervention with respect to children's L2 vocabulary and grammar knowledge as well as their aural comprehension skills, contributing to a divided and weak discourse on the efficacy of blended L2 learning in low-resource K-12 settings. However, it is important to recognise that there was a high level of variability in the learning gains made by the children on the L2 assessments overall (MVocab = 13.48, SD = 9.20; MGram = 15.66, SD = 13.49; MAural = 26.60, SD = 22.38; MWrit = 15.35, SD = 16.23). In light of this, it seems pertinent to propose that how to systematically support students' capacity for self-regulation in a self-paced online environment in a developmentally appropriate way (e.g., setting goals and self-organising; using performance feedback for self-reflection, including making attributions about their success or failure to meet goals and recalibrating; developing a growth mindset) should be addressed in professional training of teachers so they are equipped to meet the needs of all learners. This includes self-reliance when it comes to making use of the technology at school as well as at home, as a way of counteracting the effect of varying home support.

6 Inclusive of base salary (€13,104 p.a.), Difficult Access Area Allowance (€100/month), and mileage costs (local fuel rate valid as of September 2020), assuming one teacher would teach in four different schools located in neighbouring towns or villages to reach a full-time workweek. As there is no provision for English instruction in small schools, the amount of contact time in each was extrapolated from the stipulated number of contact hours in urban schools, adjusted for class size.

The present research also indicated that, overall, delivering the blended EFL learning programme in the 522 multigrade schools operating with either one or two generalist teachers across the Greek mainland and islands would incur approximately 90 per cent of the incremental costs that were estimated for the education-as-usual format of the course. Costs remained lower even after taking into account initial teacher training and yearly CPD costs. While the latter were calculated on the basis of two-day training events per year — a relatively limited amount of in-service training compared to similar provision in other developed nations — it's worth noting that this study is taking a pragmatic approach, whereby it considers the contextual limitations surrounding these schools and what can be realistically expected in the short to medium term given the realities of the wider socioeconomic context within which they operate. If due consideration is given to the ways in which to optimise training, then even a relatively limited CPD provision is highly likely to constitute a significant improvement on the status quo.

Teacher costs seemed to drive the total cost for both approaches, similarly to other studies (McEwan, 2012). While per-pupil cost was much higher in single teacher schools with few students per teacher, it was found that the BL programme would be able to retain its relative advantage over the face-to-face format provided it was permitted to benefit from economies of scale by being implemented across multiple school units — in this case a total of 522 were included in the estimation. Thus, when designing a blended learning programme, it appears pertinent to consider not only what aspect of learning is being changed, but how many people the change will influence (Maloney et al., 2015).

The absence of a comparison group in this intervention, together with a complete lack of national achievement data at the primary level, made it impossible to determine which of the two approaches provides educational effectiveness at least cost. While it is true that geographical constraints deprive some of these settings of the luxury of choice, identifying the most cost-effective options available to these locales would arguably provide a fuller picture of how to allocate scarce resources across a range of competing approaches. Nonetheless, the present evaluation provides an indicative cost description of offering a BL course in these — and potentially similar — primary school settings, including all inputs needed to start-up and run the courses, as opposed to just actual purchases by a specific project. Therefore, it can be used as preliminary data on cost structures related to designing and implementing BL in teaching English to primary students attending small multigrade schools across the Greek territory — a kind of provision which is currently not available to these populations.

6. Conclusion

This study is, to the best of the author's knowledge, the first attempt to systematically investigate the efficacy of blended remote learning in low-resource K-12 settings in Greece. The present research has demonstrated that the blended remote approach holds promise for improving academic attainment in EFL learning, especially amongst primary children attending the hundreds of small multigrade schools across the country that continue to this day to face systemic exclusion from this area of the national curriculum. What is more, it has provided an indication that it can do so at a comparable cost level to that of face-to-face programmes. The findings of the current study provide a basis for the further development of the field, by scaling up the BL approach to determine whether these positive findings can be replicated in other small multigrade schools operating in remote parts of the country and suffering from long-standing systemic marginalisation. Further, the promising outcomes obtained from this intervention suggest that there is much still to be discovered that can inform our understanding of how blended learning approaches that are centred on principles such as collaborative enquiry, authenticity, and self-paced mastery can promote deeper forms of engagement amongst primary learners.

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Statement on ethics

All research was conducted according to the British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (BERA, 2018) as well as the Newcastle University Code of Good Practice in Research (Newcastle University, 2018), and gained the approval of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee at Newcastle University. Measures were taken to ensure that participants knew exactly what the research involved before consenting. Information sheets were translated into Greek and were provided and discussed with all the headteachers, parents and children, ensuring they had the opportunity to ask questions, that they knew they could withdraw at any time and that their anonymity would be protected. The children who received the intervention would not otherwise have been attending any English classes in their schools, and therefore the intervention did not introduce learning risks that might have arisen in the case of deviation from normal school practice.

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Phenomenological approach to applying reflective journaling to experiential learning

Michael J. Sutton[A] — [A] *Chief Game-Based Learning Officer, FUNIFICATION (USA)*

Carlos Franciso Bitencourt Jorge[B] — [B] *Professor and Researcher, Marília University (UNIMAR)*

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Abstract

The application of unique approaches to experiential education, action learning, active learning, game-based learning, and problem/project-based learning provide an ample suite of examples for architecting reflective thinking and learning. These forms of learning occur to construct of new knowledge within the individual, the team, or the organization. This pursuit of new knowledge is not new but is based upon a new perspective of phenomenology. We need to credit the heritage of spiritually and philosophically grounded phenomenology, which suggests that the tools used today to achieve reflective learning can prove exceptionally valuable.

This paper reviews the literature associated with phenomenology-based reflective learning, especially as it has been applied in spiritual communities. Additionally, experientially-based adult learning will be reviewed to establish how phenomenology has been integrated. Our purpose is to introduce an instructional tool that could be easily applied in online or face-to-face classrooms for creating new, useful knowledge from personal learning experiences narrated within reflective learning journals.

1. Introduction

Historically, spiritual reflection was established upon traditions that created an opportunity to integrate intellect with faith in the pursuit of new knowledge (Harrison, 2002; Zagzebski, 2007). Life in a religious community was organized by thoughts and practices built upon ideological assumptions about personal and spiritual growth that moved individuals to a better appreciation of a Deity through a pursuit of wisdom (Hume, 1992; Mortimer & Robertson, 2012). The outcome was an attempt at constructing new spiritual leadership principles (Rothausen, 2017). The increased appreciation of the relationship between the individual and his/her soul, spirit, heart, and mind were the basis for the Western Mystery tradition of the Essenes, Alchemists, Jesuits, and Benedictines, to name but a few, as well as the Eastern Mystery traditions of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Hinduism (King, 2013; López, 2001).

The religious community codes of conduct, from which sprang from spiritual reflective practices, provided the rules of engagement for members of religious orders to improve their spiritual position and role through the application of enlightenment achieved within the inner religious community. Of course, not all members approached personal growth and development by engaging in reflective learning, but we have inherited a legacy of traditions and techniques from across a wide range of traditions that proved the effectiveness of reflective learning.

With our current learning andragogies (adult learning) in higher education (Draper, 1998; Elias, 1979), the application of unique approaches to experiential education (Kolb, 1984; Kolb & Fry, 1975), action learning (Revans, 1991), active learning (Bonwell & Eison, 1991), game-based learning (Prensky, 2012), and problem/project-based learning (Savin-Baden & Major, 2004) provide an ample suite of examples for architecting reflective learning (Brockbank & McGill, 1998). These approaches to learning construct new knowledge within the individual, the team, or the organization.

We need to credit the historical heritage of spiritually and philosophically grounded phenomenology, which suggests that the tools used today to achieve reflective learning can prove exceptionally valuable. Phenomenology is the study of consciousness experienced by the first-person point of view of an individual (Qutoshi, 2018, p. 216).

> Phenomenology is an approach to educate our own vision, to define our position, to broaden how we see the world around, and to study the lived experience at deeper level. It, therefore, holds both the characteristics of philosophy as well as a method of inquiry.

The discipline of phenomenology is loosely defined as the study of the structures of experience, the meanings we attach to our experiences, aka our consciousness. Through phenomenology, the researcher believes that an understanding of the essential "truths," (essences) of life can be acquired from the everyday, lived, experience of the individual.

This paper reviews the literature associated with phenomenology-based reflective learning, especially as it has been derived from spiritual communities. Additionally, experientially-based adult learning over the last century will also be reviewed to establish the integration of phenomenology into experiential education and reflective learning. Our purpose will be to introduce an instructional method that could easily be applied in online or face-to-face classrooms for creating new, phenomenologically useful knowledge from personal, lived learning experiences of the participants.

How do we prepare learners and employees for a future based upon the VUCA environment we currently live within? Both HBR and Forbes have highlighted the challenges of a VUCA world, (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Berinato, 2014; George, 2017; Kraaijenbrink, 2018). The US Army War College invented the acronym VUCA. The abbreviation portrays the dynamic nature of our socio-economic global environment. VUCA depicts a business environment distinguished by (Horney et al., 2010, p. 33):

- Volatility – The nature, speed, volume, magnitude and dynamics of change;
- Uncertainty – The lack of predictability of issues and events;
- Complexity – The confounding of issues and the chaos that surround any organization; and
- Ambiguity – The haziness of reality and the mixed meanings of conditions.

Critical success factors in a VUCA environment (Sarkar, 2016, p. 9) are contingent upon the application of:

- sound business fundamentals;
- innovation;
- fast-paced response;
- flexibility;
- change management;
- managing diversity – at both local and global level;
- market intelligence; and
- strong collaboration with all relevant stakeholders – employees, customers, suppliers, shareholders and the broader society.

Leaders, from CEOs to any other internal manager, therefore, have a major role to play in ensuring their organizations are responding to the requirements of the VUCA business environment." The world is crazy, requiring educators need to furnish cognitive, behavioural, and emotional skills to our learners in order to help them overcome challenges in life, business, education, and management.

Figure 1: VUCA environment. Attribution: By @alohalavina. This work is licensed under https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/

VUCA often creates a sense of being overwhelmed and frustrated. You cannot fight VUCA. However, if we empower learners who, themselves, build learning organizations, then individuals can begin to chip away at VUCA and construct new competencies and skills.

> Whereas the heroic manager of the past knew all, could do all, and could solve every problem, the post heroic manager asks how every problem can be solved in a way that develops other people´s capacity to handle it.
> — Charles Handy, Irish Economic and Social Philosopher

2. Literature review & theoretical framework.

Overview

In establishing an historical context for the andragogy of reflective learning, reviewing a wide range of theological methods that have existed for hundreds of centuries could prove useful. For example, the Hebrew creation stories were a prevalent means of reflection through meditation. They used chanting and enacting to portray the myths surrounding the creation of the universe. The Hebrew seven days of creation encapsulates a metaphorical "seven pulses of illumination and darkness, knowing and unknowing, of expansion and contraction…" (Douglas-Klotz, 2003, p. 23). Many other cultures also used these mythical narratives as a means to focus contemplation into action in order to acquire wisdom.

According to Merriam-Webster, contemplation is defined as "concentration on spiritual things as a form of private devotion." Contemplation is "the act of thinking deeply about something." On the other hand, The Cambridge Dictionary defines meditation as the "the act of giving your attention to only one thing, either as a religious activity or as a way of becoming calm and relaxed." Contemplation differs from mediation through the range of focus on the subject or object of the activity.

Plato thought that through contemplation, the soul could ascend to knowledge of the Form of the Good or other divine Forms (Rosen, 1980). Platonic contemplation was a love of a concept or idea, a way of restful, deep transcendent gazing upon Good and Beauty (Brandt, 2015). Contemplation was predicated upon establishing a worldview based upon dualism between a 'material' and 'spiritual' world (Cornford, 1922).

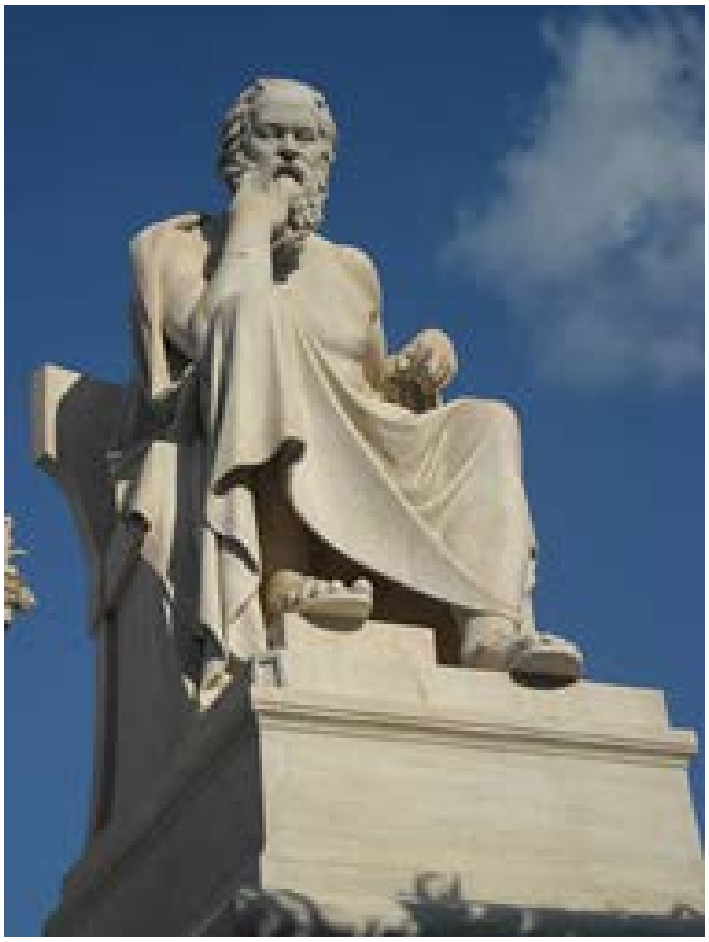

Figure 2: Contemplation. Attribution: "Contemplating" by eltpics is licensed under Creative Commons BY-NC 2.0

In the philosophy of Philo of Alexandria, the dualistic contrast was between intellectual contemplation of life (the spiritual life) with the pursuit the pleasure (a preoccupation with the mundane activities of the physical life). Philo outlined a critical difference between philosophy, the "path of right reason" (Winston, 1981), and wisdom, which philosophers acquired through the "gift of reason." The way to acquire higher knowledge was a devotion to wisdom (Yonge, 1995). Philo was a proponent of Plato's' perspective of contemplation.

As a means to liberates the soul, Pythagoras practiced the contemplation of "first principles" (Hillar, 2012):

- Monad — manifestation of diversity in unity, i.e., the "undifferentiated principle of unity as a whole of reality and the source of the world as an ordered universe" (p. 7);

- Dyad—diversity in the universe, i.e., the opposition of subject and object and the foundation of Harmony; and
- Harmony (Logos)—the relation and bond uniting one thing in the universe with another thing.

By contemplation of numbers, Pythagoreans sought out truth in terms of unity and diversity in the universe.

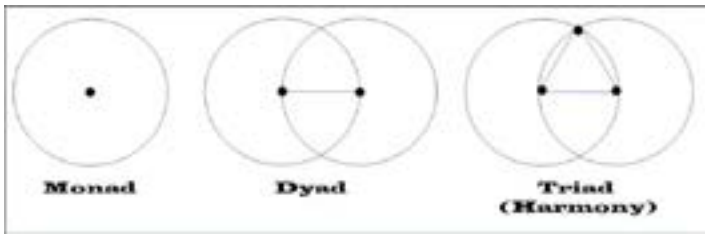

Figure 3: Pythagorean contemplation of "First Principles"

The Gnostics, encompassing a range of mystical Jewish sects (i.e., Essenes, Therapeutae, Hasideans, etc.) during the turn of the century BCE to CE, embraced contemplation (Beall, 2004; Ginsburg, 2005) as a technique for spiritual development. Community Rule (previously referred to as the Manual of Discipline, 1QS XI 60.8–12, Dead Sea Scrolls) was an initiatory text outlining details for entrance into the Gnostic community at Qumran. Additionally, the document delineated the elements of the covenant made between God and individuals entering the community at Qumran, thus, describing the actions associated with contemplation. These mystical groups appeared to be an inflection point for later groups involved in esoteric reflective practice within the Western Mystery Tradition, including: Hermeticism, Kabballah, Sufism, Neoplatonism, Theosophy, Freemasonry, Anthroposophy, Rosicrucianism, Alchemy, and Hermeticism (Turner, 2001, as cited in Hilhorst et al., 2007. p. 770):

> "The highest phase of the ascender's search for knowledge is described as a contemplative vision. In this vision, the gnostic loses the awareness of his individuality. What the seer experiences are only ineffability, tranquility, silence, and stability."

Of course, in the Eastern Spiritual Tradition we have seen the spiritual value of meditation and reflection within Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, and Daoism.

More recently the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola established a reflective learning framework for personal and spiritual development. Within this technique, one enters into a narrative in the contemplative mode that Loyola suggested. One is immersed in the sensual, intellectual, and affective nature of the narrative. The Ignatian participant in spiritual reflection uses the imagination and becomes immersed in the unfolding of the events in the story being contemplated. The participant correlates his/her personal narrative with the prescribed story and is presented with new possibilities for changing and living his/her life.

Figure 4: Scenes from the Life of Ignatius of Loyola. Attribution: "File: Petrus verschijnt aan Ignatius Vita beati patris Ignatii Loyolae (serietitel) Scènes uit het leven van Ignatius van Loyola (serietitel), RP-P-1963-282.jpg" by Rijksmuseum is marked with Creative Commons 1.0

The intention that guides the contemplation undertaken in the Spiritual Exercises encompassed a threefold "searching narrative" (Haight, 2010, p. 169):

- searching for the will of God with regard to one's life,
- a confrontation with alternatives, and
- a confirmation of resolve in a future-defining decision.

The Spiritual Exercises were based upon an extended series of experiential learning activities (called contemplations). The behavioural change outcomes were based upon internal, personal intellectual performances enhanced by personal emotional performances. This technique is still prevalent in the Roman Catholic religious tradition for stimulating personal and spiritual development in individuals destined for leadership positions.

Phenomenology in terms of reflective thinking

What does it mean to explore questions or approach philosophical problems phenomenologically? Since Phenomenology is one of the critical and significant philosophical movements of the twentieth-century, we need to summarize the unique outlook of phenomenological philosophy and discern the key themes that portray phenomenological inquiries in terms of reflective learning. Moran (2000) suggested that phenomenologists react to the culture of Western 'modernity', i.e., modernity is an outcome where "the scientific world-view has predominated" (p. 183). Hannah Arendt, a critically respected existential

phenomenologist, envisioned the modern technological world as both alienating humanity and radically shaping the lives of humans. Arendt proposed that speech required an action to reveal the force behind its intention:

> Action and speech are so closely related because the primordial and specifically human act must at the same time contain the answer to the question asked of every newcomer: "Who are you?" This disclosure of who somebody is, is implicit in both his words and his deeds; … The action he begins is humanly disclosed by the word, and though his deed can be perceived in its brute physical appearance without verbal accompaniment, it becomes relevant only through the spoken word in which he identifies himself as the actor, announcing what he does, has done, and intends to do. (p. 178-179).

Arendt (1979) believed that the most significant thinking pattern was a kind of reflectiveness that was tied to action, a reflection based upon a narrative:

> Everyone who tells a story of what happened to him half an hour ago on the street has got to put this story into shape. And this putting the story into shape is a form of thought. (p. 303)

Over fifty years ago Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger towered over the German schools of phenomenology (Cohen & Ornery, 1994). Husserl was consumed by a philosophy outlining the nature and origin of all knowledge. He proposed that phenomena and experiences themselves could not be separated. He suggested that the method to understand phenomena was through the rich descriptions of subjects who experienced the phenomena (Qin, 2013). One of Husserl's foundational components for his approach included intuiting, a carefully considered logical insight, which facilitated the deconstruction and reconstruction of previous ideas held by the subject (Polkinghorne, 1989).

One of the significant concepts proposed by Heidegger was 'life-world,' described as the mundane world of everyday experiences that often went unnoticed without specific and conscious examination (Heidegger, 1962; Koch, 1995). When intuiting the phenomenon, an investigator immerses himself/herself in the phenomenon under investigation. Heidegger stressed the formation of lived experience through the cultural, social, and individual history of the individual, presenting approaches to understanding the world and the subjects "being" in the world. A reciprocity exists between the individual and the world (Laverty, 2003, p. 24):

> Meaning is found as we are constructed by the world while at the same time we are constructing this world from our own background and experiences.

The individual and the world constitute each other, potentially symbolize by the Yin and Yang (Munhall, 1989). These three thought leaders in phenomenology, Arendt, Heidegger, and Husserl, contributed critical concepts to our current understanding and interpretation of experiential learning and reflective learning in terms of the phenomenological approach.

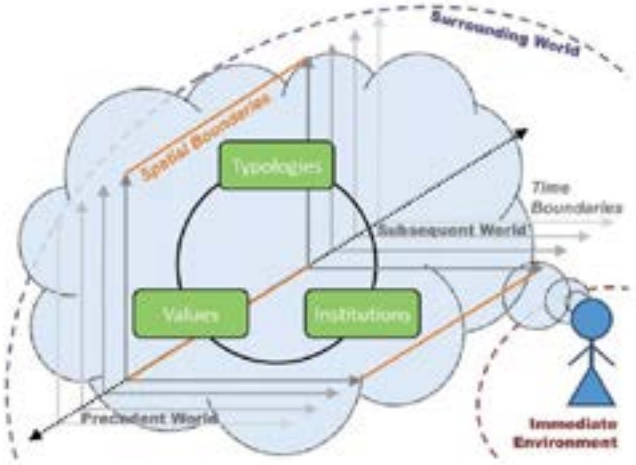

Figure 5: Phenomenological perspective of the life-world. Attribution: Adopted from: Oberkircher and Hornidge (2011), p. 398.

In phenomenological research, the investigator attempts to set aside biases and preconceived assumptions, feelings, and personal responses to a specific situation — (what Husserl calls bracketing). This supposed objective perspective of the individual facilitates the exploration of perceptions, understandings, and feelings of the subjects who experienced or lived the phenomenon. Thus, the phenomenology used for analyzing reflective learning may be described as the investigation and description of phenomena that subjects experience and live (Moran, 2000). Through interpretation of the rich descriptions of subjects living an experience, the investigator has the capability to initiate generalizations regarding what the subject experiences when living the experience.

Although phenomenological research is often conducted through observation or questionnaire protocols that acquire data from in-depth conversations and interviews; some studies collect data from diaries, personal narratives or journals (Giorgi, 2012). Interviews and conversations are designed as open-ended questions to permit the subjects to comprehensively describe the experience from their personal point of view (POV); and often are comprised of small samples sizes, 20 subjects or less. Investigators of phenomenological studies focus on the life experiences of the subjects.

The final research outcome is a complex description (narrative), including multiple tiers of meaning. The phenomenon reveals itself through the essences interpreted by the investigator (Mortari & Taozzi, 2010). This philosophy-based inquiry interrogates the written accounts of subjects' experiences to derive meaning. This phenomenological approach using a descriptive method facilitating the investigator to acquire new, carefully constructed knowledge — very differently from any quantitative methods. The

goal of phenomenological research is the meaning of lived, individual experiences as perceived by the subjects. Research subjects describe an experience they have lived – rather than discussing abstract concepts (Giorgi, 1985). Now that a significant integration has been outlined between phenomenology and reflective learning, we will explore experiential learning and its relationship with reflective learning.

Experiential learning theories and the emergence of reflective learning

The language employed by the learner expresses internal symbolization and representation of the learning experiences. The sensemaking (meaning-making) process of reflection enables interpretation of learning experiences. Through written or oral language, the learner builds a personal sensemaking model, while constructing a written, sharable interpretation of their sensemaking process for others to interpret. Reflection narratives are a method of imposing order on a chaotic world. Narratives rely heavily upon serendipity to craft the narrative, (i.e., "Where do I start to describe the experience? What should I describe it? How did I feel at that moment, as opposed to later?").

The reflection journal is an inductive sensemaking process, not deductive, and integrates a phenomenological approach (Willis, 1999). The resulting discourse is "potentially" tainted by the present retelling of a story of events that took place in the past, e.g., "regard en arrière par-dessus mon épaule," a backward glance over my shoulder at the past event. However, the narrative may not necessarily follow a chronological order, thus, the distinction between the event and its narration becomes fuzzy and distorted. Finally, serendipity often becomes the modus operandi for constructing the narration with the reflection journal, unless some artificial structure is imposed by the assessment rubric.

By outlining the origin of how reflective learning evolved as a spiritual development tool, we can now embark upon how reflective learning emerged in the last 50 years as a method to enhance behavioural change after an experiential learning event. Memorization or reading a paragraph or chapter of a book are quite distinct from experiencing an immersive environment, where one's own competencies and actions facilitate problem-solving, critical thinking, decision-making, and sensemaking. Exploration of a situation can furnish an emotional connection to information that may become an influence on both understanding and behaviour. Experiential learning has the inherent capability to nurture creativity and innovative thinking (Ayob, et al., 2011), both of which are critical success factors for our learners enmeshed in the VUCA workplace. Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985) proposed three facets of experiential learning: returning to experience, attending to (or connecting with) feelings, and evaluating experiences.

Experiential learning has been defined as (Kolb, 1984, p. 38):

> …the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. … the emphasis [is] on the process of adaptation and learning as opposed to content or outcomes … knowledge is a transformation process, being continuously created and recreated, not an independent entity to be acquired or transmitted. … learning transforms experience in both its objective and subjective forms. … understand leaming, we must understand the nature of knowledge, and vice versa.

Kolb contrasted and compared three models of experiential learning before proposing his unique, synthesized model:

- Lewin's Experiential Learning Model (Lewin, 1951; Kolb, 1984, p. 21),
- Dewey's Model of Experiential Learning (Dewey, 1997, 2007), and
- Piaget's Model of Learning and Cognitive Development (Piaget, 1970, 1977).

Kolb suggested that each model portrayed a range of conflicts between opposing perspectives of dealing with the world. He proposed that learning resulted from the resolution of these conflicts (Kolb, 1984, p. 38):

- Lewin's Model—the conflict between concrete experience and abstract concepts;
- Dewey's Model—conflict between the impulse that gives ideas their "moving force" and reason that gives desire its direction;
- Piaget's Model—[dialectic relationship between] the twin processes of accommodation of ideas to the external world and assimilation of experience into existing conceptual structures.

Of note here are the parallels to religious reflective activity based upon the dualistic contrasts inherent in the philosophical and theological dialectics.

Kolb's synthesized model outlined that all the models suggested that learning was a process filled with tension and conflict. Acquisition of new knowledge, competencies, and attitudes were accomplished through inherent clashes across the four modes of experiential learning.

The abilities necessary for effective learning were outlined as (Kolb, 1984, p. 30):

1. concrete experience abilities (CE) — immersive involvement without bias,
2. reflective observation abilities (RO) — multi-perspective reflection and observation experiences
3. abstract conceptualization abilities (AC) — integration of personal observations into rigorous theories, and

4. active experimentation abilities (AE)—application of theories for decision-making and problem-solving.

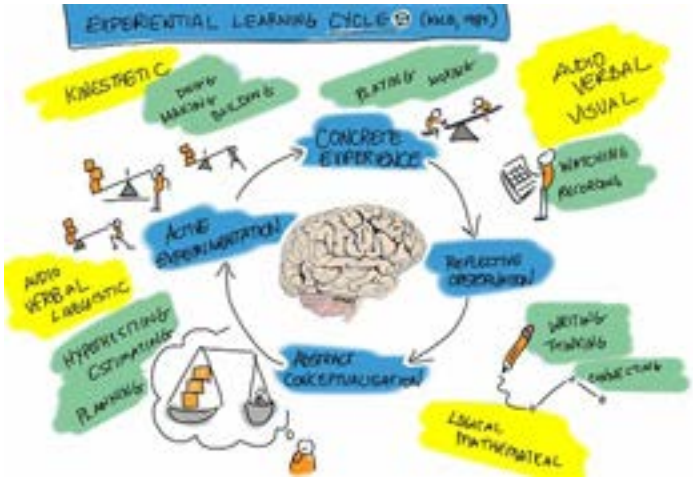

Figure 6: Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle. Attribution: "Kolb's Experiential Learning CYCLE" by giulia.forsythe as marked with Creative Commons0 1.0

According to Kolb, two primary dimensions existed in the learning process:

- Dimension 1a: concrete experience of learning events;
- Dimension 1b: abstract conceptualization of the learning events;
- Dimension 2a: active experimentation with the learning events; and
- Dimension 2b: reflective observation of the learning events.

Therefore, the learner was challenged with a continually dynamic process, at one time an actor and at another time the observer. Consequently, the learner moves from involvement in the experience to detachment. Thus, we can now move further onward to explore reflective learning, which was a critical component of the three models preceding Kolb and the emergent Kolb model.

Evolution of reflective learning in education

Learning by doing is the underlying tenant of experiential education. Reflection is a critical component embedded within the previous four models of experiential learning. Reflection supports an individual's experience by increasing the understanding and appreciation of the experience in order to interpret what is going on within and because of the experience. Since experiential learning is a dynamic process that unifies thought and action, the individual learns to adapt to changing the way things are in the world and reflecting upon how the s/he has been changed by that learning experience. Daudelin (1996), one of the most cited authors in this field, defined reflection as "the process of stepping back from an experience to ponder, carefully and persistently, its meaning to the self through the development of inferences" (p. 70).

Reflection is a critical method for learning (Chitpin, 2006; Miettinen, 2000; Popper, 1995). Teaching the practice of reflective learning for learners in the business and management professions could be an integral competency for business school instructors. This practice can situate and empower the learner to survive and thrive within the ubiquitous VUCA world where the learners need to operate. Let's discuss how learners are required to demonstrate reflective learning. Dennison (2010) described a small study that outlined a range of methods employed by instructors to solicit reflective learning:

- CPD [Continuous Professional Development] Learning Log
- Pieces of Reflection
- Reflective Portfolio
- Learning Journal
- Reflective Report
- Critical Reflection
- Reflection on presentations

The value proposition of these artefacts lay in what, how, and why they create a new way of thinking, behaving, and affecting for the learner. The reflective journal—(blog, log, portfolio, report)—facilitates a process of autoethnographic narrative construction. Constructing narratives within a language empowers a learner to explore new concepts and ideas. Meaning is derived through the reflected internal mental states of the learner as well as reflection upon the external social, cultural, and physical world the learner can observe ['self-subject' vs. 'other-object' perspectives] (Overton, 1994). The reflection journal becomes the basis of rigourous, personal identity construction, a very powerful attribute for a learner trying to cope with the VUCA world.

Varner and Peck, (2003) also described the detailed results of their seven years of using learning journals in their MBA Organizational Behaviour courses with adult learners. They illustrated types of reflective writing assignments that can occur across a wide range of course assignments mapped against 2 dimensions: degree of structure and focus of learning outcomes.

Daudelin (1996) described examples of reflection, which included:

- assessment instruments (solitary reflection),
- business writing,
- department evaluations,

- developmental critiques of self-assessment,
- discussions with fellow learners,
- journaling,
- mentoring and feedback discussions (group reflection), and
- problem-solving sessions.

She requested learners to use personal experiences related to a course topic and to make sense of the topic in order to channel meaning toward some impending or future action. Many researchers argue that journals have the potential to encourage learners to see situations and consequent actions through all levels of the Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Thus, the insight could provide learners with a theoretical basis and praxis for developing the critical-thinking process. The previous six authors have identified a full range of instruments for reflection within university courses.

Reflective learning models

The common primary goal shared by all student learning journals is quite simple: "Students write about and reflect on personal experience as it relates to course content" (Varner & Peck, 2003, p. 53). The generally accepted consensus on subsequent goals of reflective journaling are often articulated as:

- enabling learners to self-direct their learning;
- validating learning by doing and learning by engagement and participation, instead of passive learning;
- empowering learners to frame a new learning within personal experiences; and
- applying newly acquired knowledge to solving work-related problems and creating action-oriented interventions that builds additional personal insights.

The concept of a reflective practitioner has emerged as a much-cited topic within education, especially professional fields. In recent decades, the growing influential work of Schön (1983) has tightly coupled reflective practice with professionalism. A simple Google Scholar search turns up a very significant, but anecdotal, statistic: Schön's (1983) work has been cited over 70,000 times by other authors. This situates his work as foundational in reflective learning principles. He identified two genres of reflection:

1. reflection-on-action (reflecting in retrospect) and
2. reflection-in-action (thinking while the action is taking place).

For the genre reflection-on-action, after a gap or pause following the event professionals are expected to make a conscious effort through experimentation to analyze, describe, reframing, and evaluate historical practices. The learner reflects upon the different outcomes that may have occurred if different courses of action had taken place.

For the second genre reflection-in-action, professionals spontaneously examine experiences and responses in real-time. As budding or current professionals, both genres require learners to connect to their feelings and be aware of the theory that is impacting their action, while constructing new knowledge that can presage future actions. The goal is to encourage deeper understanding of the event/situation context and provide an opportunity to improve future practices:

> The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behaviour. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation. (Schön, 1983, p. 68)

From Schön's (1983, 1987) perspective on approaching complexity and uncertainty, we could infer agreement that professionals must train themselves to be in and of the VUCA environment, (e.g., as Heidegger would say" 'being in the lived-world'). This assures not only survival but also helps the budding professionals to navigate a messy world full of obstacles by using their creativity and intuition. Professionalism aside, multiple frameworks and models have been proposed to describe reflective thinking associated with learning. Appendix A outlines a range of Reflective Thinking/Learning Models (in chronological order).

After reviewing such a range of reflective models, how does an instructor choose one that the learners will easily understand and be able to apply with minimal coaching? That is the conundrum that the authors of this paper encountered when first introducing reflective learning/ thinking into courses:

> "Different models are needed, at different levels, for different individuals, disciplines and organisations, to use in different contexts. Professional practice and education are also likely to benefit from the stimulus – and challenge – provided by competing perspectives and multiple models. Models need to be applied selectively, purposefully, flexibly and judiciously." (Finlay, 2008. p. 10).

As you will notice in the latter section of this article when we describe our Method, we propose a very simple and easy to use an instructional method that can be parsimoniously evaluated for grading.

Assessment of reflective journals

The criteria for assessment of reflective journals appear often to be unbounded and inconsistent (Dennison, 2010, p. 25):

> Lecturers looked for openness – admission of error, doubt or difficulty – self-awareness, insight into others – group dynamics and interactions – authenticity. Some lecturers had more developed expectations: One looked for 'enthusiasm, opinions and openness – the triangulation between these'; another identified a three-stage model – 1. Simple description, 2. Relating present experience to previous experiences, 3. Identifying learning and how to use it in the future.

Assessing reflective learning is difficult (Hoo, Tan, and Deneen, 2020). Since such an activity is essentially a form of self-assessment, few rubrics exist to suggest how to grade a self-reflective activity. Learners from other cultures found it very difficult to understand why and how one would narrate and experience in order to reflect upon it. Most models take very little account of different cultural experiences/ conditions (Anderson, 1988), therefore, if learners are from foreign countries or distinct cultures different from the North American milieu, then they will tend to exhibit a tension in trying to build reflective journals.

One reason that reflective learning is often taught within the business school is the concept of professionalism. This concept inherently involves a continual and habitual self-examination of an individual's activities in order to grow professionally and derive meaning from the impact of the world upon the learners as well as the learner's impact upon the world. McKay (2008, p. 56) proposes that:

> Practitioners are expected to self-reflect critically on personal performance and adopt a reflexive approach to problem solving. Reflecting on performance and acting on reflection is a professional imperative.

Reflective practice is, by its very nature a personal activity (Taggart & Wilson, 2005). Yet, if taken as a publicly shared activity, such as through an online blog, each learner has an opportunity to receive feedback not only from the instructor, but from peers. This potential peer assessment provides an opportunity to enrich the original self-assessment if 'rules of engagement' are put into place by the instructor (Yang, 2009). Through blogging, learners are empowered to document their reflections about experiences relevant to their daily lives. Learners discover that they learn more from the exchange of information without the restrictions of space and time, thereby broadening their practitioner knowledge and professional interests (Godwin-Jones, 2008).

Varner and Peck (2003, p. 54-55) highlighted the role of the reflective learning journal in their courses:

> Internally oriented journals may be used by students for self-assessment of progress toward their personal development goals. Externally focused journals may be used as a way for students to demonstrate to the instructor their knowledge of course material.

Their learning journal assignment consisted of a semi-structured written assignment that covered course topics from the perspective of personal experiences. They included details of the assignment and the evaluation rubric in their Appendix A. They noted that the learning journal assignment furnished their learners with opportunities to practice critical skills required of modern, global organizations. The learners developed conceptual skills of reflection, questioning, and evaluating knowledge and its application for future leaders of complex organizations operating in turbulent environments. Learning journals were substitutes for exams and, thus, were graded accordingly.

We have found Varner and Peck's rubrics to be one of the most comprehensive evaluation tools we have encountered and one we might use sometime in the future in our graduate level and doctoral courses. However, we decided to error on the side of parsimony and employ a less comprehensive, yet incredibly insightful tool — the ABC Reflection Model — in some of our undergraduate and MBA courses. The complexity of the concept of reflective journaling can be challenging to articulate to learners as a new competency.

Sometimes we occasionally floundered trying to describe how to develop a reflective journal entry. We sought out a tool that would stimulate communication and learning. For example, when we asked a learner to reflect "deeper," often the learner could not comprehend what "deeper" actually meant. We felt we needed to coach them with a framework of specific rules of engagement for them to be able to frame the process and benefit from the new method for their professional development. We could not afford to fail them just because we might not have the vocabulary to help them to understand the intimate nature of reflective thinking (Zeichner & Liston, p. 9):

> According to Dewey, reflection does not consist of a series of steps or procedures to be used by teachers. Rather, it is a holistic way of meeting and responding to problems, a way of being as a teacher. Reflective action is also a process that involves more than logical and rational problem-solving processes. Reflection involves intuition, emotion, and passion and is not something that can be neatly packaged as a set of techniques for teachers to use.

Hicks et al. (2019) executed an insightful quantitative analysis on the quality of student reflection activities in classes delivered by specific faculty groups at the University of North Carolina Wilmington (UNCW). The researchers discovered that reflection itself was an acquired skill, and that full benefits of improves critical reflection skills resulted from a number of factors: frequent practice, clear reflective prompts from the instructors, and in-depth feedback from the instructors. A significant finding included (p. 12):

Varner and Peck (2003, p. 54-55) highlighted the role of the reflective learning journal in their courses:

> "Faculty from both focus groups voiced concerns that their students did not always understand the goals, purpose of reflective exercises and consequently produced superficial or disorganized reflective pieces."

One of their recommendations for future study was the method used by faculty to frame the student reflections. The ABC Model discussed later in this paper, provides a structure and rigour that can be combined with frequent use of reflective activities and well-articulated faculty feedback to produce envisioned learning outcomes.

The ABC Reflection Model provided a method for the learner to describe and reflect upon three significant dimensions, all three facets encompassing elements of emotional intelligence: Affect, Behaviour, and Cognition. We often described the holistic reflection process based upon one of the more profound definitions we discovered in the work of Jay and Johnson (2002) as the assignment was introduced in the course:

> Reflection is a process, both individual and collaborative, involving experience and uncertainty. It is comprised of identifying questions and key elements of a matter that has emerged as significant, then taking one's thoughts into dialogue with oneself and with others. One evaluates insights gained from that process with reference to: (1) additional perspectives, (2) one's own values, experiences, and beliefs, and (3) the larger context within which the questions are raised. Through reflection, one reaches newfound clarity, on which one bases changes in action or disposition. New questions naturally arise, and the process spirals onward. (p. 76)

The learners generally grasped this definition because of its pragmatic simplicity and usually embraced the approach in order to describe their meaningful learning experiences.

3. Method

The ABCs of the ABC Reflection Process stands for Affect, Behavior, and Cognition. This model (Figure 7) is especially effective for adult learners who need to integrate knowledge and skills with their feelings about learning and subsequent behavior (Welch, 1999). A sample application of the method is detailed Appendix B, along with sample reflective journal entries from learners in previous courses in Appendix C. The purpose of this paper was to construct an historical foundation for how this method emerged and simply introduce the technique as a means for other educators to adopt it and experiment in the classrooms.

These samples were straightforward examples derived from hundreds of journals. Our goal in portraying these outcomes was to provide other instructors, professors, educators, and teachers with a taste as to what could be expected from

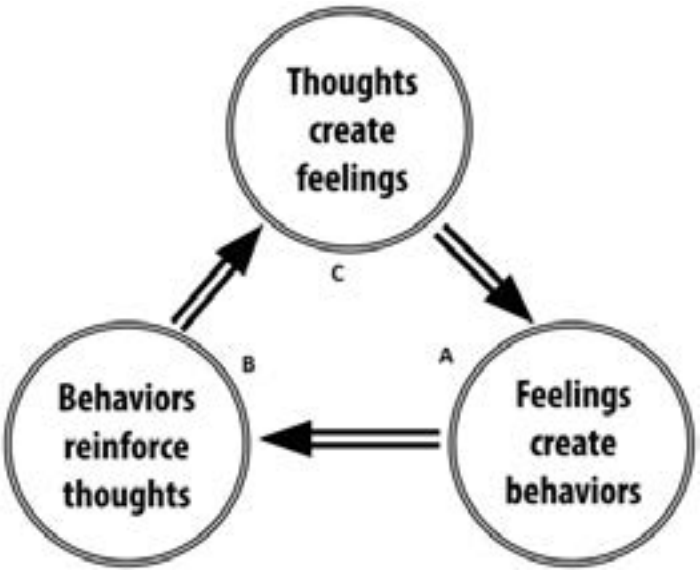

Figure 7: Relationship of elements within the ABC reflection process. Adopted from: Boettcher, H., Hofmann, S. G., & Wu, Q. J. (2020). Therapeutic orientations. In R. Biswas-Diener & E. Diener (Eds), Noba textbook series: Psychology. Champaign, IL: DEF publishers. http://noba.to/fjtnpwsk. The work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

learners. If a practical method was used to invoke emotional intelligence skills, along with behavioural changes and cognitive development, then authentic experiences could be derived.

Many learners initially get caught up in the minor elements of writing an essay, such as volume of paragraphs, page counts, or word counts. The instructor's role was to focus the learners on the depth of reflection necessary in the content of the learning journal. We discovered that making a sample available provided a foundation for many learners to adapt. If the instructor attempted to direct the learners with an awkward introduction, such as 'Let's take the time to initiate our reflection exercise, then the instructor was often presented with "catatonic stares and silence or questions regarding how to reflect and on what to reflect" (Vong, 2016, p. 74). Welch (1999, p. 22) wrote:

> Many instructors quickly discover that merely telling students 'it is now time to reflect' is a clumsy approach for them and students alike. … Similarly, instructing students to reflect in their journals often produces a 'dear diary' account of events that transpired during a service-learning experience with little or no application of concepts discussed in class.

Learners generally lacked the confidence, understanding, and competencies necessary for deep reflection. Learners needed formative assignments with rich feedback in order to practice reflective journaling and build the self-confidence in sharing very personal insights. Moreover, in using the ABC Model we found it provided the appropriate level of framing and structure for learners to use it as a template for expressing their thoughts and feeling, as well as mapping the motivation necessary for positive behavioural change.

Providing links to verb lists furnished a checklist for learners to begin to trigger their reflections in the absence of prompts. Review and clarification of instructions and rubrics eased angst over the assessment of the journal reflections.

4. Summary and conclusions

We proposed a very unusual intellectual quest for the reader of this paper. Let us summarize the journey for a moment. We:

- Reviewed the foundation for reflection in educational contexts within the framework of spiritual reflection;
- Reviewed phenomenology in terms of reflection;
- Reviewed experiential learning within the context of reflection;
- Reviewed models of educational reflection; and
- Reviewed models for applying reflection within the classroom.

Most importantly, our wide-ranging review of phenomenology, experiential learning, and reflective thinking could motivate the reader to seriously consider using the sample of an instructional method proposed in the appendix. A personal research agenda associated with current courses could be constructed as phenomenological research on reflective thinking, especially in higher education serious games and simulations. The rich foundation of concepts spanning these different fields could provide the groundwork for using deeper reflective learning with college and university-level learners.

The authors' goal is to trigger much deeper learning through the application of reflection within role-playing games, simulations, serious games, and immersive learning environments. In our experience, learners have eventually adopted reflective thinking in their daily lives after experiencing this form of reflective journaling in the classroom. Our classroom learners progress to lifelong learners who adopt reflective journaling and have often discovered that they have initiated a path toward deep personal and professional self-development. We need an epidemic of self-development spread across the globe to inject new leadership into all our lives and fields of study. That will be the basis for significant educational and societal transformation.

Let us conclude with the following:

1. We have shared a useful model called the ABC Reflection Model, which we have discovered it works exceptionally well with college/university level learners;
2. The ABC Reflection Model can be more easily assessed and adopted by learners encompassing the emotional, behavioural (actions), and cognitive development they experience when reflecting upon an activity;
3. We are confident, based upon our experiences, that this model creates 'stickiness' with our learners and stays with them, better preparing them to interact in the modern complex world;
4. Our experience suggests that the ABC reflection Model is a simple enabler, where learners continue using it for their ongoing lifelong self-development;
5. Using this tool for evaluating assignments in your learning activities appears to make the learning experience richer and more engaging; and,
6. The ABC Reflection Model is an advantageous example of a Phenomenological learning approach that appropriately combines personal reflection with experiential learning.

Brockbank and McGill (1998) declared that the original ideas for universities were based on "self-reflection as the means to higher forms of understanding" (p. 27). We are only beginning the discourse around how we can situate our learners to successfully navigate the obstacles and obstructions they face in the VUCA world, where they are trying to 'be of the world,' 'be in the world,' all the while striving to earn an ethical living and sustain a planet that appears on many dimensions to be out of control. As professors, educators, and instructors, we are obligated to support, coach, and mentor them to greater success than we could ever imagine for ourselves.

5. Recommendations and follow-up

The creative process of writing fosters constructivist elements of learning (Odgers, 2001, as cited in Catina, 2020). Writing facilitates learners to express their current knowledge and experience in the context of grappling with specific topical domains, i.e., management, leadership, entrepreneurship, communications, etc. The process furnishes an opportunity for the learners to interpret the experience. Concomitantly, the facilitator is provided the opportunity to engage in meta-reflective processes with the learner (by means of the model used for reflection) through the application of dialogical principles. The resulting dialogue prompts the learners to uncover deeper, introspective meaning in their narrative of the experience (Catina, 2020).

We challenge the reader!

How can the reader integrate a learning outcome and value proposition to engineer courses as incubators for professional development through personal and professional reflective thinking?

Please contact the corresponding author (michaeljdsutton@gmail.com) to build on the emerging dialogue on the achievements the reader is able to accomplish through the application of this potent and exceptionally valuable instructional method. Moreover, please contact the corresponding author in writing to be granted a royalty free license on a case-by-case basis to apply the method proposed in Appendix B, as long as the application is attributed with a copyright statement.

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Appendix

Appendix A: Broad range of reflective thinking/ learning models

Table 1: Range of reflective thinking/learning models

1. Five-phase, cyclic Reflective Inquiry Model (Dewey, 1933):
1. identifying disturbance and uncertainty where habit does not work
2. intellectualizing and defining the problem
3. studying the conditions of the situation and formulating a working hypothesis,
4. Reasoning about the potential cause-effect relationships,
5. Testing the hypothesis in action
resulting in solving the problem and controlling the consequent action.
2. Theory of Cognitive Interests (Habermas, 1970)
Empirical-analysis - explore education through a theoretical knowledge base
Hermeneutic-phenomenological - fundamental justification of and legitimatization of common practices
Critical-theoretical - self-understanding, emancipatory learning, and critical consciousness
3. Four Stage Learning Cycle of Reflection on experiential learning (Kolb, & Fry, 1975):
concrete experience (CE),
reflective observation (RO),
abstract conceptualization (AC), and
active experimentation (AE)
4. Levels of Reflectivity (Van Manen, 1977, p. 226):
level 1: deliberative rationality—"the practical is concerned mainly with means rather than ends,"
level 2: deliberative rationality—"The practical then refers to the process of analyzing and clarifying individual and cultural experiences, meanings, perceptions, assumptions, prejudgements, and presuppositions, for the purpose of orienting practical actions."
5. ALACT Model encompassing 5 cyclic phases (Korthagen, 1985):
Action,
Looking back on the action,
Awareness of essential aspects,
Creating alternative methods of action, and
Trial (Experimentation).
6. Three-stage Reflection Model (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985 as outlined in Finlay, 2008, p. 9):
Reflect on an experience by remembering the experience and describing it in a descriptive, non-judgemental manner;
Review one's feelings – both positive and negative – triggered by the experience;
Re-evaluate the experience through four substages:
• association (relating new data to what is already known);
• integration (seeking new relationships between the data);
• validation (determining the authenticity of the new ideas and looking for inconsistencies or contradictions);
• appropriation (making the new knowledge/attitudes one's own).
7. Cognitive Approach—six categories of teachers' knowledge (Shulman, 1987):
content,
pedagogy,
curriculum,
characteristics of learners,
context and educational purposes,
ends, and
aims.
8. Peer Collaboration Process (Pugach and Johnson, 1988)—consisting of four stages:
problem clarification through self-questioning,
problem summarization,
generating potential interventions and predicting their outcomes, and
developing an evaluation plan.
"...to assist classroom teachers in developing a clearer understanding of the problems they are encountering through a reflective consideration of the many variables that may be contributing to the problematic situation... designed to encourage the initiating teacher to practice a new set of problem-solving skills explicitly, with peer feedback, as a precursor to the internalization of those skills" (p. 7).
9. Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988):
Description
Feelings
Evaluation
Analysis
Conclusion
Action Plan
10. Levels of Reflection (Grimmett, et al., 1990):
Technical - instrumental mediation of actions
Deliberative - deliberation among competing views
Dialectical - reconstruction of experiences
11. Progression of Reflective Thinking (Gagatsis and Patronis, 1990)
Initial thoughts
Reflecting on the subject and trying to understand
Discovery and (partial) understanding
Introspection
Full awareness
12. Images of Teaching (Valli, 1990)
Technical rationality: non-reflective, technical
Practical decision-making: technical within a reflective context
Inculcation/indoctrination: moral, ethical, & social in a nonreflective mode
Moral reflection (1. deliberative, 2. relational, and 3. critical)
13. Levels of Reflection (Mezirow, 1991)
Non-reflective action
Habitual action
Thoughtful action
Introspection
Reflective action: content, process, and premise
14. Pedagogical Functioning (Lasley, 1992):
Technical - use of instructional management approaches
Conceptual - fuse theory with practice
Dialectical - critically assess educational practice
15. Three Stages of the Reflective Process (Atkins & Murphy, 1993)
Stage 1 - practitioner becomes aware of uncomfortable feelings and thoughts,
Stage 2 - a critical analysis of feelings and knowledge
Stage 3 - development of a new perspective
"Atkins and Murphy argue that both cognitive and affective skills are prerequisites for reflection and that these combine in the processes of self-awareness, critical analysis, synthesis and evaluation." (Finlay, 2008, p. 4).
16. Race's (1993) Variant on Kolb's Model (using everyday language):
wanting,
doing,
feedback, and
digesting
17. Four Stages of Reflection (Fielding, 1994):
sensing/feeling,
watching/reflecting,
thinking, and
doing.
18. Model of Reflective Thinking (Eby & Kujawa, 1994):
Observe
Reflect
Gather Data
Consider Moral Principles
Make Judgments
Consider Strategies
Action
19. Five Differentiated R* Levels of Reflection During Teaching: (Zeichner & Liston, 1996 as described in Finlay, 2008, p. 4)
Rapid reflection – immediate, ongoing and automatic action by the teacher.
Repair – in which a thoughtful teacher makes decisions to alter their behaviour in response to students' cues.
Review – when a teacher thinks about, discusses or writes about some element of their teaching.
Research – when a teacher engages in more systematic and sustained thinking over time, perhaps by collecting data or reading research.

Retheorizing and Reformulating – the process by which a teacher critically examines their own practice and theories in the light of academic theories.
20. Reflective Conversations (Ghaye and Ghaye, 1998)
descriptive,
perceptive,
receptive,
interpretive, and
critical.
21. Pyramid Reflection Model—encompassing three levels (Taggart & Wilson, 1998):
dialectic,
contextual, and
technical.
22. ABCs of Reflection (Welch, 1999, Winter)
Affect
Behaviour
Cognition
23. Narrative Approach (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1999):
—describes the teacher's personal circumstances where analysis and decision-making associated with classroom events takes place
knowledge-for-practice (formal knowledge and theory),
knowledge-in-practice (practical knowledge), and
knowledge-of-practice (correspondence of field based classroom experiences and theoretical knowledge).
24. Reorganized Dewey Phases (Rodgers, 2002)
Presence to experience
Description of experience
Analysis of experience
Intelligent action/experimentation
25. Model of reflective judgement (King and Kitchener, 2002)
Pre-reflective reasoning (stages 1-3)
Quasi-reflective reasoning (stages 4 & 5)
Reflective reasoning (stages 6 & 7)
26. Orientation toward growth, enquiry, and cognitive abilities (LaBoskey, 2003)
analysis,
synthesis, and
evaluation.
27. Core Reflection Model, consisting of 5 extended cyclic phases (Korthagen and Vasalos, 2005):
Experience/Problematic situation,
Awareness of ideal situation and limitations,
Awareness of core qualities,
Actualization of core qualities, and
Experimenting with new behaviour.
28. Critical Approach (NCTE, 2009):
—socially constructed knowledge influenced and determined by association of gender, class, and power inequalities with
culture,
context, and
customs.
"[The] curriculum needs to provide experiences that build the knowledge base through a progressive introduction to the capabilities of thinking rationally, to understand the world through various disciplines, foster aesthetic appreciation and sensitivity towards others, to work and to participate in economic processes" (NCERT, 2005, p. 24).
29. Three-Step Reflective Framework (Hegarty, et al., 2011, p. 583):
Step 1: Take notice and describe the experience—What did you do, know, feel, think, need? What decisions did you make?
Step 2: Analyze the experience—Why the actions and decisions? What was your reaction?
Step 3: Take action—What did you learn? How will you use this learning?
30. Farrell Five Stage Framework for Reflecting on Practice (Farrell, 2014)—
Farrell's goal of reflection was "to understand power relations within education and to question assumptions and practices" (p. 56):
philosophy,
principles,
theory,
practice, and
beyond practice.

Appendix B: Instructions for the application of the abc reflection process to learners

ABC Reflection Process stands for *Affect, Behavior, and Cognition*, presented conceptually here in alphabetical order solely to help the instructor and learner remember it. The sequence of entries is not important when learners narrate the reflective process. Let us examine each of these in more detail.

Affect

Affect is the way the learning has influenced *how you feel* (your emotional state) about yourself or the topic. The important part of this trait is to recognize how one actually feels because of learning new material or demonstrating a new skill. There is no "right" or "wrong" associated with any feeling regarding a learning moment or activity. Usually, positive affective responses tend towards a desire to repeat the process again. This is why we engage in these activities repeatedly. However, affective responses such as "sad" or "uncomfortable" can actually be the result of very powerful and positive experiences. Sometimes great change comes as the result of feeling like it should have been better.

Nonetheless, this section is NOT about personal preferences ("I like...") or your thoughts ("I think..."). DO NOT describe what you liked/disliked in the topics or course material. Those verbs express personal preferences that does not move a learner deeply into self-reflection. The learner must try to develop a richer narrative about a particularly strong emotive experience brought on by the learning experience. A learner can access a list of strong emotional words at:

https://kartamclaren.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Emotional-Vocabulary-List-Color.pdf

Behaviour

Behaviour is what you actually act upon from the learning (in a way that others could "see"). Many learning moments or learning experiences require one to do something besides write a paper or talk to a professor. Learning experiences that require one to use a new behaviour for decision-making, sensemaking, problem-solving, or promote the practice of a different mode of communication provide us with more than information. The new processes motivate us to behave in meaningful and productive ways, while dabbling with theory. Examples of behavioral verbs may be reviewed at:

https://curriculum.maricopa.edu/curriculum/curriculum-procedures-handbook/resources/verb-list-for-writing-behavioral-objectives

Cognition

Cognition is the most relevant aspect of learning for many people. Cognition is what you now know that helps you to understand the learning that took place. This new knowledge is retained through the experience and supports the application of new knowledge to yet unknown experiences. Cognition includes not only the content itself, but also the cognitive processes involved. Decision-making and critical thinking are central parts of cognition. Cognition encompasses continually examining the processes we use to find materials,

[1] Although original versions of the material in this appendix were published and copyrighted by Michael Sutton between 2008 and 2012, the material appears formally in Sutton, M.J.D., Allen, K. (2019). *Emotify!: The Power of the Human Element in Game-Based Learning, Serious Games and Experiential Education*. NY: BGAMES LLC.

explore ideas, support arguments, and develop conclusions. Examples of basic cognitive verbs may be found at:

https://www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/downloads/p_10/ac_categories_cognitive_verbs.pdf

Feedback for the Reflection Journal

The instructor/coach will evaluate and provide feedback on each of the reflective journal submissions. See Table 2 below for the rubric used to providing feedback on the content of the journal. When writing the weekly reflective journals, the three elements of the ABC model must be used to specify the Section Headings. The headings may be in any order.

The learner must flesh out each section in 2-4 medium-sized paragraphs and address all elements in the essay. The learner should reference specific topics, cases, readings, presentations, games, essays, events, or activities that took place either in their personal/professional lives, a class, or in a workshop.

Caveat Emptor:

The instructor, when reviewing the reflection journals, most often encounters the following issues that learners can try to anticipate to increase the quality of the submissions:

- All sentences and paragraphs should conform to excellent writing techniques. Although the personal reflection journal encompasses an informal writing style, sentences and paragraphs must be cogent and developed properly.
- Sentences are often too complex. Follow a simple sentence structure, such as SUBJECT-VERB-OBJECT (S-V-O), i.e., "I (S) feel (V) overwhelmed by the volume of information (O) in this workshop." Subject-Verb-Object sentence structure contributes optimally to a reader's comprehension. Steam of consciousness sentences (aka the approach used in James Joyce's *Ulysses*) with little structure or punctuation are challenging for a reader to comprehend.
- Paragraphs should not be just a bunch of disconnected thoughts or bulleted lists. Instead, structure the paragraph with a topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a concluding sentence or summary.
- Paragraphs are often too long. On a double-spaced 8.5 in X 11 in page with 1 in. margins, a well-developed paragraph would take up about half a page. A paragraph should never exceed one page for readability.
- Paragraphs may occasionally be too short, (i.e., there is no such thing as a 1-sentence paragraph!).
- Sentences are often too long, (i.e., if a sentence goes over 3 lines, break it up into separate and shorter sentences for readability).

- Be careful with using the wrong verbs within one section (such as "I think" in the *Affect* section) that are actually associated with a different section (*Cognition*).
- Take care with the following errors that often creep into your writing style:
    - omitted words;
    - misspelled words;
    - wrong words— (homonyms: "there" vs. "their");
    - grammatical and punctuation errors;
    - orphaned pronouns—(never begin a sentence with "It was..." or "They were...", unless the "It" or "They" can be immediately derived from the subject or object of a previous sentence; and
    - disagreement in number with pronouns—("They is...", "I are...", etc.)
- Authenticity, a very personal means of expressing the learning experience, is a critical success factor for demonstrating deep reflective thinking. Shallow writing is exceptionally easy for the instructor to discern.

Please proofread, proofread, and proofread. Start out in your word processing software. Once you have completed your draft, then spell and grammar check your work before submitting to the instructor for assessment or uploading to the blog.

Table 2: *Personal Reflection Rubric (Grading % May Be Modified, Depending Upon Activity/Exercise)*

Category	Description	Requirement (Rubric)	Grade %
Affect Domain *"How I feel"*	Reflection describes specific feelings (happy, sad, enthused, frustrated, or bored) about the things learned or the concepts as they apply in the business world.	• has at least one 'page' dedicated to this topic • has at least one clear example of an emotion that is directly linked to an example • is related to the topics within the course	30%
Behaviour Domain *"What I do"*	Reflection describes specific behaviours exhibited by the learner because of the learning experiences.	• At least one 'page' dedicated to this topic • has at least one clear example of a behaviour that is directly linked to an example • is related to the topics within the course	30%
Cognitive Domain *"What I know"*	Reflection describes the new useful/insightful knowledge gained because of completing the project or learning experience.	• has about one page dedicated to this topic • has at least one clear example of knowledge/information that is directly linked to an example • is related to the topics within the course	30%
Writing Style	Including excellent grammar, spelling, paragraph structure, and punctuation.	• Exceptionally clear and authentic writing style	10%

Appendix C: Examples of authentic expression of learners applying the ABC reflection process

Many of learners who were in one of the author's classroom went through transformative learning experience within the context of the experiential learning assignments, including game-based learning experiences, i.e., role playing games, simulations, board and card games, online video games, etc. A few samples from those experiences are quoted below:

Learner A (Affect)

"There have been several topics in our class that have been at the forefront of my mind in recent days. One of these topics, was that of MaryAnn and the somewhat unspoken rivalry between she and her new coworker. MaryAnn had explained to us that the woman was the founder of the company which was recently acquired by her organization. MaryAnn explained that the woman often talks down to her and seems somewhat defensive in their daily interactions.

Because MaryAnn's recent turmoil was on my mind, I was more aware of a similar situation when I came across it at my workplace. We have a woman who has come into the executive level at our office, and as it stands, she is the only female at that level. I began to notice that she tends to treat other women in our office, as though she is superior, and has authority over them. I am one of these people she has been treating like this.

I have often felt uncomfortable around this woman and was never really sure why. If MaryAnn would not have shared her experience with us, I may not have been able to articulate and pinpoint my feelings on the matter. I was able to identify that I feel belittled sometimes around this woman. She gawked in shock and awe at the fact that I am working on a post-graduate degree. As if she could not believe someone like me could be more educated than she is!

Now, this woman reacting in such a manner, really hurt my feelings and got my defenses up. I felt like lashing out at her, or at anyone who would listen. Instead, I remembered the advice I gave MaryAnn when she had emailed me about her situation, and that was to take a moment and reflect on what I am really feeling. I wasn't angry, I was hurt. I was hurt that the woman had reduced me to such a level, whether she had meant to or not. I then calmed myself down and resolved to have a good day, and to keep my interactions positive with this woman, no matter what plans she had for our relationship."

Learner B (Behavior)

"After receiving my first grade on my [assignment], I understood that I needed to better identify opportunities for me to work more effectively and efficiently. I further realized that I can be doing a better job upon receiving a grade for my first personal reflection journal. Going forward, I am going to work to demonstrate my willingness to allocate more time and energy toward my studies. At this point, I am looking forward to defining a better schedule that allows me to allocate my time in a more productive manner.

... I am working to demonstrate my understanding of the course material by being more thoughtful in my comments. Although I contribute to the classroom discussion on a regular basis, I am working to better identify which comments are more appropriate than others.

As mentioned in my previous reflection journal, I quite enjoyed the first lesson of the class on reflection. I continue to reflect on my daily activities in a number of ways. I still find myself doing the majority of the reflection process in my car, both on my way to and from work. However, I have also allocated time for myself to reflect specifically about the day's tasks during the early morning hours, which has been helpful in constructing my day around my goals."

Learner C (Affect)

"During the initial moments of our first class I had alternate feelings of minor apprehension and anticipation. Due to the unique nature of the course I was unsure what to expect. I can be a rather shy and quiet individual so I was especially anxious about sharing so much participation time with only two other class members. I was also nervous to be involved with so much personal sharing; I didn't know quite what to expect.

As the first class progressed and members took turns confiding I found myself becoming more comfortable with the environment and sharing my personal experiences became easier. As I listened to my classmates express their own observations I felt continuously more at ease. As my anxiety lessened I found it easier to listen and reflect upon the discussion. By the second class I was able to relax and better relate to one another's experiences.

Following our reflection conversation I caught myself mulling over my various emotions on my drive into work. I kept thinking about the line (Mintzberg, 2009): "managers are only as good as their ability to work things out thoughtfully in their own way." The notion that I have the ability to solve problems from my own past experiences rather than from textbook solutions was somewhat novel to me--I felt empowered!

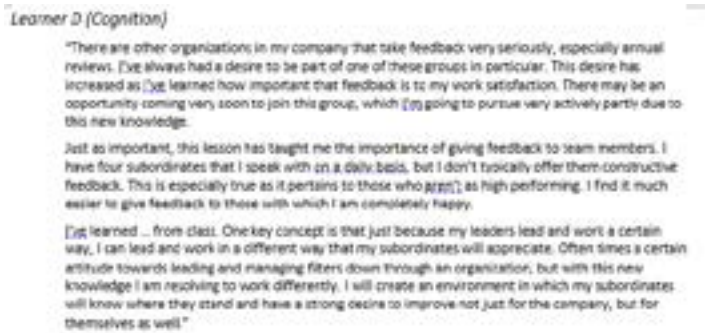
Throughout the first in-class discussion I noticed my emotions ran the gamut from apprehensive to defensive to contrite and ultimately to reflective. However, I noticed that the reflective feeling persisted with me throughout the next work week. In particular, I was conscious of making an effort to combat negative emotions towards a specific coworker with future positive intentions. Or rather I realized that ultimately I wanted to focus on ways to better address upcoming situations. For example, in the past my co-worker and I have had difficulty communicating our needs which has resulted in mutual frustration. Prior to meeting again I tried to reflect on how I could achieve a more desirable response from her. By reflecting on a better way to portray myself I felt more confident and prepared for our next meeting. During our meeting I focused on my rehearsed attitude and the outcome was positive so I believe my attempt was successful."

Learner C (Cognition)

"Looking back on the two Corporate Coaching Conversation classes I've had thus far and the topics covered, I feel the most valuable lessons for me were within the reflections section. What really struck me was the notion of taking time to understand the importance of incorporating feelings and intuition (Gosling, 2009) with 'doing' and 'thinking;' that by doing so I can become a much more effective manager. Since class I've made an avid effort to take a few minutes out of each workday to reflect.

Another beneficial aspect for me was the in-class assignment 'Starter Exercise in Reflection' (Gosling, 2009) where we took the time to write down our thoughts and feelings. I thought this was especially helpful in reviewing my mental processes. For example, the first thing I wrote down was: "I often think I'm right, I only see my viewpoint. I want to see the situation as it is in reality, not my own reality." A few days after the class I went back and read over my thoughts. By doing so I was able to comprehend insights about myself I hadn't otherwise realized. I especially found it very beneficial to see my reflections and viewpoints in hard copy versus just intangible thoughts.

In conclusion, I believe there is considerable value in Mintzberg's urging to manage in a continual state of imagining, reflecting, and questioning (Mintzberg, 2009) and as such I have decided to focus on creating a habit of recording my thoughts for future reflection."



Learner D (Cognition)

"There are other organizations in my company that take feedback very seriously, especially annual reviews. I've always had a desire to be part of one of these groups in particular. This desire has increased as I've learned how important that feedback is to my work satisfaction. There may be an opportunity coming very soon to join this group, which I'm going to pursue very actively partly due to this new knowledge.

Just as important, this lesson has taught me the importance of giving feedback to team members. I have four subordinates that I speak with on a daily basis, but I don't typically offer them constructive feedback. This is especially true as it pertains to those who aren't as high performing. I find it much easier to give feedback to those with which I am completely happy.

I've learned ... from class. One key concept is that just because my leaders lead and work a certain way, I can lead and work in a different way that my subordinates will appreciate. Often times a certain attitude towards leading and managing filters down through an organization, but with this new knowledge I am resolving to work differently. I will create an environment in which my subordinates will know where they stand and have a strong desire to improve not just for the company, but for themselves as well."

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Centering the document — Towards a critical studio pedagogy in graphic design

Chris Lee[A]

[A] *Assistant Professor, Communications Design Department, Pratt Institute, New York City*

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Abstract

As a designer and educator, I endeavor for this article to make an intervention in the way that graphic design is imagined, taught, discussed/debated, and practiced. I believe that graphic design objects mediate forms of sociality in ways that are banal and largely underexamined. This article explores the implications of an historiography that narrates the entanglement of graphic design with the administration of the settlerstate and capitalist enterprise through the genre of *the document*. Broadly defined, the document serves as the substrate for archival ways of knowing that are imposed as a function of the ideological hegemony of statist governance and corporate bureaucracy. As an instrument of state and capital, the document circumscribes how the world is named, and impacts the way it is ordered. Recognizing this is a prerequisite for mounting a challenge to this condition. This assertion is meant to serve as the backdrop against which to speculate on a different kind of graphic design pedagogy, charged with the education of practitioners who imagine and create other forms of what the radical pedagogue Paolo Freire (author of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*) calls "naming the world." The intent of this article is to initiate an exploration of a framework for graphic design pedagogy charged with cultivating a student's capacity to experiment with and invent forms that might actualize critical and emancipatory modes of sociality.

Introduction

Graphic design pedagogy is largely mired in the inertia of a commercial, client-oriented pedagogy. It tends to presuppose an educational telos towards graduating practitioners whose professional motivations and operations are framed by the concerns and priorities of commerce and mass communication. This paper explores an alternative to these presuppositions towards the articulation of a form of graphic design pedagogy and practice motivated by an emancipatory desire. This desire emerges from a recognition of graphic design's historical entanglement with colonialism and capitalism — as the medium of its ontoepistemological impositions — through the genre of the document. It is energized by the possibility of an emancipatory graphic design pedagogy being orientated towards the cultivation of other forms of knowledge production and transmission.

Design imperatives

The canonical form factors engaged in the studio/classroom tend to range from things like typography, logos/corporate identity systems, brands, books, magazines, posters, websites, signage and wayfinding, advertisements and campaigns, and so on. Student assignments tend to be framed primarily by transmission of technical, formal knowledge cultivating literacy in, and adherence to the conventions of legibility and "good design."[1] Ethical/aesthetic concerns tend to be overcoded by language inherited from marketing, and generally adhere to a general mandate to create legible and accessible communication work for such entities as the "target audience." These tendencies are axiomatic of what I call the "design imperative to publicity."

A cursory examination of "Career Outlook" webpages from a variety of graphic design programs in North America give an impression of the discipline's conventional boundaries. Below, a few examples:

> "Graphic Design graduates leave RISD [Rhode Island School of Design] prepared to work in almost any field imaginable — from education to film, television, publishing, retail and more. Alumni follow a wide range of individual paths, including running their own design studios, working for large corporations, specializing in web and interactive media, and creating everything from package design to title sequences for film and television."[2]

> "You can pursue studio courses in areas of practice such as: Brand strategy, Editorial and publication design, Interactive communication, Motion graphics, Packaging design, Typeface design, Wayfinding and information systems"[3]

> "Faculty who are leaders in design professions connect MICA [Maryland Institute College of Art] students with outstanding opportunities for internships, freelance and career-launching jobs… Some companies who have hired MICA designers for jobs or internships include Abercrombie & Fitch, Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum, Google, Kate Spade, Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, Museum of Modern Art, National Public Radio and Under Armour."[4]

> "Typical formats include branding and logo development, posters, books, package design, apps, websites, and interactive design. Students learn to articulate a critical and theoretical perspective and develop graphic design skills, such as type design and traditional letterpress. Strong craft and presentation skills are emphasized throughout. Students achieve the highest level of design excellence through critiques, reviews, and workshops. Recent employers include Apple, Anthropologie, LACMA, Guess, Metro, and Capitol Records."[5]

These examples map a domain of agency and intervention animated by the prospect of making a public impact through mass, networked media. Or at the very least, they promise an engaging career involving high-technology and working for national and international brands, prescribing student (and parent) aspirations before they even enter the classroom studio.

Graphic design history

This tendency and educational trajectory is reinforced by the canonical history of graphic design. The design theorist Tony Fry casts design history as a form of "ontological design" (Fry, 2015). He argues that the production of a history invariably bears an agenda that narrows the discursive breadth and disciplinary imagination of practices like graphic design. In other words, the canonical history of graphic design, Fry argues, shapes the horizon of the disciplinary imaginary, and initiates the learner into a particular "…mode of being." (Fry, 2015) This is exemplified in the de facto accession of Phillip Meggs' *History of Graphic Design* as the primary textbook demarcating the boundaries of what it means to be a contemporary graphic designer and to do graphic design today.[6]

1 One may often encounter this phrase in design education contexts and never know what exactly this means. Still, there might be resonance with what T.J. Watson Jr., former president of IBM is often quoted as having said in a 1966 memo: that "good design is good business." Its apocryphal status amongst designers is less an affirmation of business, and more an attempt at valorizing design by its proximity to finance and commerce.

2 Rhode Island School of Design, Providence.

3 OCADU (Ontario College of Art and Design University), Toronto.

4 MICA (Maryland Institute College of Art), Baltimore.

5 OTIS College of Art and Design, Los Angeles.

6 I would also note that from my own anecdotal survey of students in studio/classroom contexts, asking them why they chose to study graphic design, the answers often range from something to the effect of "I want to do art, but my parents want me to get a job," to "I want a career in advertising." So, even before one encounters the canonical history, or normative program descriptions, graphic design's disciplinary boundaries seem to be circumscribed by artifacts and desires endemic to commerce and the market.

Johanna Drucker critiques the Meggs book for adopting the narrative modality of art history and its concern with provenance, expressed as a concatenation of artifacts that are ordered and narrated primarily along the lines of a linear, teleological chronology. Transposed to graphic design as a techno-progressivist model of history, Meggs' narration "... works against analysis of ideological forces; it naturalizes sequence as a self-evident fact" (Drucker, 2009). Rather than seeing designers as political actors and design as a political and historical force in and of itself, this tendency suggests that these designers and the objects they create are outside of the social, political, economic, and ideological conditions of their being and making. Meggs' history figures a telos of design that departs from the indecipherable, local particularity of pictorial cave paintings towards the universalizing rationality of computation and the internet. In other words, it casts the activity of graphic designers primarily through a narrative lens of technological progress towards a universalizing standardization of the production, transmission, and literacy of communicative form. This of course fails to recognize the Western colonial inflection of this universalism, and in such a narrative, imperialism and global capitalism appear as inevitable. For instance, changes in the appearance of designed objects are inflected by new aesthetic habits of particular individuals, and appear as incidental markers that neatly illuminate a path to where we are today.

Drucker argues that by neglecting the co-dependence between the graphical object, technology, and the "circumstances of production and use" (Drucker, 2009), and by simply situating their historical appearance primarily within the flow of technological progress — Meggs denies the reader any equipment for discerning the political, economic, epistemological, and ontological consequentiality of the episodes and artifacts he describes. Drucker gives the example of his narration of the advent of moveable typography as applied in Gutenberg's printing press. She observes that while Meggs provides an informative description of techniques like punch-cutting, matrix casting, and the development of an alloy specifically designed to withstand repeated pressing, he:

> "...never suggests that the standardization and modularization that are part of letterpress technology imposes rationality on human production in a way that broke with the holistic guild approach and provided a model for attitudes towards knowledge production as well as labor. The fragmentation of processes into distinct parts that had to fit — literally in the case of letterpress is part of larger changes... [T]he printing press exemplifies the organizing principles for discourse formation in the larger social order. The rationalization of sight according to perspectival principles and the introduction of mapping systems to organize space according to a mathematical representation register related and equally striking shifts aligned with these organizing principles" (Drucker, 2009, p. 62).

The other ontological consequence of this techno-progressive parochialism, Drucker argues, is the figure of the ostensibly autonomous designer, freely making creative decisions independently from the conditions that constitute their subjectivity. She argues that for Meggs, "Designers are conceived as acted on, not complicit" (Drucker, 2009, p. 64). The heroic, primarily European male designer-protagonists of such a history manifest form and style simply as a matter of will, rather than as consequences of economic, political, technological, environmental, social forces (Drucker, 2009). The "capitalist realism" (Fisher, 2009) of graphic design pedagogy and practice comes to mind given that this is what most Anglophone graphic design students engage as the history of their chosen discipline.[7]

In his 1984 essay "The state of design history," Clive Dilnot (1984, p. 5) asks: "To what extent can history contribute to what design is and what a designer does?". To give this question some more facets through which to refract pedagogical questions, one asks: how might an alternative discursive formation (Foucault, 1972) — what alignment of concepts, precedents, tools and forms — supplied by an alternative historiography, equip another conception of graphic design pedagogy that breaks with its current individual-designer-serving-the-client and publicity oriented horizon? To respond to this, I propose a graphic design historiography that centers *the document*. The document has been largely neglected as a feature of graphic design pedagogy, and the disciplinary imagination of students and faculty.

I borrow from Drucker's review of Richard Hollis' book, simply titled *Graphic design: a concise history* which highlights the analytical framework he applies to his historical study, to serve as a model for what I will propose. Drucker brings to our attention that:

> "[H]is introductory remarks identify three roles for graphic design that distance his model from Meggs: (1) identification, (2) information and instruction and (3) presentation and promotion. This meta-language of the function of graphic design establishes his study as the analysis of actions... He grounds his study in the idea of design as functions a designer enacts within a system of social relations of production and reception" (Drucker, 2009, p. 66).

While I agree that this provides a more critical framework for the analysis of the discursive formation that comes to be known as graphic design, I would shed the neutrality of Hollis' terms and recast these with the following questions. (1) Who wants to know? (2) What do they want to manage? (3) What are they arguing?[8] In other words, this framework begs the question — what is the agenda of the design object? Applying a similar framework to the design of the document, the functions the designers enact may be: (1) arguing, (2) claiming, (3) remembering (as a function of giving form to knowledge and reifying information). This is to say that when it comes to the design of documents, the

7 Meggs' book has been translated to Chinese, Hebrew, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish (Heller, 2004).

8 A question that Drucker, with her co-author Emily McVarish, prompts students to use as the primarily critical tool for reading their own textbook.

designer's questions are primarily concerned with how to render an inscription — which is inherently unstable and contestable — immutable against the entropy of movement through time and space, and against contestation. The latter is largely a question of how to establish knowledge, and depoliticize an argument, a claim, a memory. The terminology of this framework implies contestability and begs the question — who wants to know, and why?

Later in this article, I briefly explore what these functions might entail in practical terms. It should suffice for now that Hollis' retention of the designer as an individual creative agent is the position from which I intend to depart. I wish to focus for now on how the functions I adapted from Hollis' framework motivate the "designerly"[9] considerations and processes behind the manifestation of things like money, contracts, passports, tickets, receipts, tax forms, property deeds, common standards, etc. In other words, my aim is to destabilize the individual figure of the designer, and to expand the designer's spectrum of practical concerns.

In spite of its relative banality, I contend that the genre of the document is perhaps graphic design's most profoundly consequential. It includes the kinds of artifacts and inscriptions that make claims about and determine who can and can't traverse militarized border spaces (i.e. passports); they usually interpellate all people along the lines of a cisnormative gender binary (i.e. identification documents); they make one available to conscription, taxation, public education (i.e. evidentiary documents like reports and orders); they are the basis upon which legality and illegality are defined (i.e. legislative documents); they reinforce one's exclusive claim to a colonized piece of land (i.e. maps, property claims); and so on. Each of these functions are ultimately related to some force that can back the arguments, claims, and memories inscribed therein. Pointing to these suggests a broader scope of designerly concerns to include the systemic, operational and political dimensions of the kind of knowledge production and transmission that documents facilitate. It also prompts shifting the subjectivity and agency of the designer towards entities like state bureaucracies and multinational corporations, and away from what I call the "Dwiggins designer,"[10] who is rather cast as a technician within these. Such designing subjectivities have been illegible within a design history modeled on art history's affirmation of the individual genius and the singular masterpiece. In contrast, these shifts in historical approach frame a study of what I call the "design imperative to immutability" — an imperative endemic to the document.

If one follows Dilnot's and Fry's question as a postulation that history does indeed shape the theoretical, practical and pedagogical horizons of a discipline, then what are the implications of foregrounding the document as the central object of graphic design history? Before addressing this question, allow me to sketch an ontology of the document.

9"Designerly" is similar to the term "painterly" as an adjectival qualifier, suggesting that something is "of" a designer's praxis. I embrace the vagueness of the term because it destabilizes and opens what being "of" a designer can mean.

The document

In this section, I would like to sketch out what I believe to be the aspects of the document salient to the question of an alternative graphic design pedagogy, and generating the basic framework of an expanded practice. My understanding is rooted primarily in scholarship produced under the banner of media studies, through the work of Lisa Gitelman, Johanna Drucker, and Jonathan Beller. I also draw from the work of performance studies scholar Diana Taylor and others to sharpen the edges of what the document is, by posing it against what it is not.

In her book *Paper knowledge: Toward a media history of documents*, the media historian Lisa Gitelman describes the document as having a dual purpose which she calls its "know/show function" (Gitelman, 2014). She explains that the document, on the one hand, is a knowledge producing artifact to the extent that it transports inscriptions and paratextual features — signals — that can be regarded as information within the bureaucratic system which the documents constitute by their very circulation and storage. For instance, a passport produces knowledge of a subject interpellated by the global system of nation states and their attendant border regimes and agents. It inscribes, and therefore produces: a name (rendered according to a standardized orthography); a date of birth (rendered in an informatic format, aligned with an established convention for marking time); a gender (usually according to one of two cisnormative categories); a nationality (a status which is itself tautologically produced by the very object of the passport), and perhaps other biometric information, which renders the individual body legible as a kind of signature — knowable and identifiable.

As a corollary, Gitelman explains that documents also perform an evidentiary function — they are designed to "show."[11] To continue with the example of the passport, it, like most documents, is primarily dormant, and usually presented only a moment of potential controversy, or to put it more blandly, to settle a claim. It produces and sediments attributes, like those mentioned above, that might otherwise be unknowable in any precise, stable way, but are made legible as such for the sake of the disciplinary gaze of the border agent. Furthermore, the passport, the border agent, and the database against which the border agent checks the passport thus appear in one view as co-constitutive elements that enable the passport to function. In other words, as a designed object, the passport (and its co-constituting system) works as a document to validate one's claim that they are who they (or who the state) says they are, and that they have the right to, or are prohibited from traversing this or that border space[12]. The armed border agent brings to

10 For decades, D.W. Dwiggins has been apocryphally attributed with coining the term "graphic design," to mark the design professional as an intellectual, managerial agent distinct from more blue-collar forms of design and communication labor like typesetting and printing. However, this has been refuted by Paul Shaw, who provides evidence for attributing the earliest use of the term to Frederick H. Meyer. Although it would be much more apt to style my characterization "Meyer designer," since he was a teacher of lettering and reproduction processes for commercial work, I keep "Dwiggins" simply for the alliteration (Shaw, 2020).

11 Etymologically, the word document is rooted in the Latin docere—to show, to teach, to cause to know.

this configuration a violent capacity to impose policy — primarily, one might say, the general policy of compelling people to be available to the imposition of policy through their legibility to the state and its bureaucracy. Gitelman describes such a scenario as a triangulation between the document, the modern individual and authority — the authority of the printed object, and the authority of the bureaucracy which valorizes it (Gitelman, 2014).

This is salient to the question of the design of documents because it supplies a framework for understanding the operational and political dimension of their status and function as design objects. To reiterate, documents don't exist and function as discrete objects divorced from any context. Rather, they are a constituent element of a bureaucratic system whose reductive, schematic gaze — its ontoepistemological imposition — often requires a violent capacity for the reinforcement of its claims. David Graeber charges this observation in his description of police officers as bureaucrats with guns (Graeber, 2015). This alignment of inscription, database, force, is also reminiscent of what Bruno Latour might refer to as the *alignment of allies* (Latour, 1986). I am partial to the use of these terms because alignment suggests a graphical dimension — think the reductive, instrumental rationalization of the world according to the graphical logic of the spreadsheet in order to enable its management and exploitation (Scott, 1998); and *allies* for the way it suggests the political (where there are allies, there are enemies, or alliances with the other's enemies). Indeed, this pedagogical project is partly motivated by a desire to study ways in which one might become an enemy to the current hegemonic state of knowing and remembering.

Information

Johanna Drucker's study of graphical interfaces elaborates. In her book *Graphesis*, Drucker directs us to the basic, critical understanding that "most visualizations are acts of interpretation masquerading as presentation. In other words, they are images that act as if they are just showing us what is, but in actuality, they are *arguments* made in graphical form" (Drucker 2014, p. ix, my emphasis) Particularly significant to the question of the design of documents is her brief exposition on the graphical logic of Mesopotamean clay tablets.[13] It should first be noted that the inscriptions these carried were primarily records of transactions, financial, contracts/obligations, mediating relationships where some kind of economic value was at stake. The range of things to be expressed and known in early writing primarily includes concern for recording things like the quantities of commodities and time. In other words, the earliest known form of writing doesn't come into being for the sake of literary expression, or even religious devotion, but rather for the purposes of accounting (Hobart & Schiffman 1998) — inscribed obligations and records that were required to travel through space and time, but also against ambiguity and dispute, by virtue (primarily) of their ability to hold the integrity of their form and meaning.

12 See also Mahmoud Keshavarz's The design politics of the passport: Materiality, immobility, and dissent (2018).

Drucker calls our attention not only to the semantic value of these inscriptions, but also to their more precise valorization through a syntactic grid that structures the graphical space, providing a scaffolding of rows and columns, a coordinate system for ordering signs into categories, sequence/time, hierarchy, and enabling comparison, combination, calculation. She recalls Denise Schmandt-Besserat's observation that the grids commonly found on ancient documents (implicit or explicit) served an orthographic function, "...a point of reference against which the basic graphic properties of sequence, direction, orientation, size, and scale can register their significance" (Drucker, 2014). When the inscription that a document carries is implicated in a relationship that requires the kind of objective mediation that the document endeavors to supply[14], its correct interpretation is critical to its value as a document, and is helped by the establishment of conventions of writing and reading.[15] A focus on the role of the inscriptions that documents transmit as information will propel and illuminate an expanded conception of design.

Michael E. Hobart and Zachary Sayre Schiffman make a useful distinction between *information* and *commemoration* in order to sharpen our understanding of the relationship of the former to memory. They argue that information operates as abstraction and rhetorical universalization. As such it is distinct from commemoration (co-memory)[16] which is a matter of shared, embodied experience and knowledge — and by its somatic (cerebral), subjective storage, precludes the possibility of its status as stable information. Information, on the other hand, by the immutability of its form and substrate is that which is abstracted from experience and made combinable with other information in order to produce analysis and rational action.

13 I also wish to note that the technical aspect of these ancient inscriptions suggests that "typography" precedes any sort of manuscript as a form of writing. The tablets practically make a self-evident case for this — they are marked by pressing; the symbols are arranged according to an implicit grid; the morphology of the signs are thus standardized by virtue of a consistently reproducible action. This is of course a back projection made deliberately to align more modern, familiar instantiations of typography with political consequence. If the first "graphic designers" were people trying to mediate commercial and political relationships through documents, what could that mean for how graphic design is thought of today?

14 See David Graeber's Debt: The first 5,000 years. To paraphrase severely, Graeber upturns the conventional progressive narrative about the evolutionary transition from primitive barter to the advent of money as the basis of a society in contemporary credit-based economies develop. He argues instead that primitive economies operated on the principle of credit exchange: If we are neighbors in an ancient village, and you need something from me, then I can lend it to you with a reasonable expectation that I can ask something of you later. This kind of credit based exchange is evidently unmediated by a documentary object like a contract or money.

15 Further to the political dimension of typography and printing, see Benedict Anderson's Imagined communities: Reflections on the origins and spread of nationalism. Anderson casts the historian and the grammarian, through the technologies of moveable typography and printing, driven by bourgeois capitalist enterprise (what he calls print capitalism), as protagonists in the birth of nationalist struggles. Printing subordinated local habits and cultures of writing to a standard centralized around administrative print languages. The standardization of written vernacular languages, and their popularization through education, expand the audience and market for printed products.

> "Yet writing did not spring forth fully formed as a technology of communication, much less one communicating speech. Its genius resides in the fact that it originated as something apart from both picture drawing *and* the spoken word, something absolutely new. At its inception, writing was neither more nor less than the very quintessence of information — the classificatory aspect of language abstracted from the flow of experience and rendered visible. The origin of writing therefore constitutes, at one and the same time, the first information technology and the birth of information itself" (Hobart & Schiffman 1998, p. 34).

Where Hobart and Schiffman tend to address information in somewhat neutral terms (i.e. that it comprises mental objects, abstracted from the "flow of experience''), Jonathan Beller puts a finer point to the political significance of this notion. In his book *The message is murder*, he argues that information cannot be divorced from the capitalist logic of the commodity form which, for instance, violently transposes "chicken lives to another domain" (Beller, 2017, p. 30). In other words, in its schematization of the world, information imposes claims that reduce life and worlds in ways that render its complex and plural ontologies into combinable and comparable units, available to the murderous rationality of managerial calculation. Information is not an ontologically neutral thing that is simply extracted from the world and presented as such. Instead, it is constituted and circumscribed by the managerial gaze which seeks it and acts, sometimes murderously, upon it. Beller's illustration may be a limit case that brings into our understanding the violence that can result from the reductive rationalization of life and worlds enabled by the document. Indeed, the document, and its inscriptions understood as information (as a claim, as evidence), constitutes a way of knowing and a way of transmitting that knowledge as an instrument of administration and command.

The archive

As the performance studies scholar Diana Taylor helps us to understand, the document can be implicated as a substrate of coloniality and as an instrument of colonization. Taylor's counterposition of the archive and the repertoire are illuminating. To paraphrase, the "archive" represents practices of knowledge production, storage, and transmission carried out through media that tend to fall within the domain of graphic design artifacts (again, things like passports, property deeds, treaties, etc.). Conversely, there is the repertoire, which entails modes of knowledge production and storage that tend to be rendered somatically, and transmitted through performance. Taylor uses the term "performatic" to describe forms of knowledge production, storage, and transmission — things like dance, song, recipes, rituals, etc. — forms and formats that can evade and do not necessarily require inscription, and which tend to be embodied and transmitted in the moment of performance. Although she is careful not to position these modalities of knowledge production and transmission as absolutely antagonistic to each other, the archival inscription — the document — is implicated in the apocalyptic colonization, that is, the negation of more "performatic" ways of knowing and being. One simply thinks of the colonial erasure, and the relative novelty (to the settler) of the name *Lenapehoking*, and its replacement with the name New York City, on documents ranging from tourist guides and property deeds, to drivers' licenses and popular films, graphic design history books, and so on (Lee, 2020).

If indeed a critical studio pedagogy in graphic design is desired, I propose the entanglement of design with colonial/ism/ity and capitalism, through the document, as the ground against which this might be figured. If it hasn't been too clear yet, my consideration of the document is motivated and charged by the politics of decolonization and anticapitalism.[18] If one can appreciate the extent to which the document, archival inscriptions and such can map — quite literally — to the colonial, this may serve as the other against which different kinds of pedagogical and practical questions may be posed. What I propose is that an antagonism to the colonial entails seeking ways to *remember otherwise* — to counter-claim, to destabilize the inevitability of colonial ways of knowing, as a different kind of task, orientation, mandate, purview, range of concerns for graphic design as a critical, creative discipline.

Designerly explorations

I believe the foundation of this work lies with cultivating a practical understanding of what it means to design the archival, colonial document, in order to produce an analytical basis of a designerly antagonism. As such, I have undertaken an on-going creative research project called *Immutable* which seeks to chart the outlines of the design imperative to immutability. Its essential question is: "how does one design a document?" And in response, I explore, mimic, reflect on, and experiment with processes, techniques, materials that

16 For Hobart and Schiffman, commemoration ought to be understood more as the enactment of a polity's coherence, and as a primitive form of memory storage, passive until recalled at some point as information and evidence. The distinction they make between memory and commemoration also maps to the notions of immutability and mutability, as well as the archive and the repertoire (see Diana Taylor). In other words, something that is unstable cannot really serve as information—the "stuff we abstract from the flow of experience" (Hobart and Schiffman, 1998: p. 15) per se. In this sense, the mutability of a claim defies the logic of coloniality and its privileging of the archival inscription. Furthermore, they argue that the tokens and emblems of the earliest forms of writing (count and commodity)—the innovation of their combination (of noun and adjective, name and number) — figures the distinct caesura between writing proper and absolute orality.

17 Hobart and Schiffman's example of the storage of knot-tying as knowledge is embedded in the living practice of sailing, and thus has a lack of need for documentation. This is in contrast to the abstraction and objectification enabled by inscription, or by the maintenance of this knowledge by an autonomous class of professional knot-tiers.

18 "The great enemy of property is oblivion, since the loss of conscious mastery over time and succession leads inevitably to the breakdown of property. Thus the forces of oblivion are antagonistic to the self and property, while all the techniques of mnemonics are their essential allies" (Caffentzis 1989, pp. 53–54).

have figured historical documentary form factors — those genres of form which have themselves been designed to be historical.

The documentary objects I have explored in this experimental studio process are derived from a broad range of references, from cylinder seals and clay tablets inscribed with a cipher generated by a cryptographic hash algorithm, custom designed coins, and 3D-printed rulers, to photocopied editions of defunct currencies, to pdfs and photogrammetric scans. These narrate the colonial and capitalist document, and are organized and imbricated within four categories which represent techniques of immutability. I call these: "Clay," "Custom/Convention," "Coercion," and "Code."[19] I would not assert that these categories are definite, or even inarguable, nor are they necessarily progressively sequenced. Immutability, to be sure, is not absolute, either — there are always ways to undermine its techniques. Rather, these categories are prompts for generating reflection and speculating on an expanded notion of graphic design. To illustrate the conceptual tactics of the discursive objects I mentioned just above, I will share a brief exposition of a coin I designed and had minted. As a discursive design object, the intent of these is to index and embody each of the techniques of immutability I mention above.

Figure 1. Chris Lee, untitled, custom designed brass coins, edition of 5000, 2018.

"Clay" refers to the role of material in reinforcing the immutability of a document. Think coins minted in precious metals, monumental stone, and well, clay. Ancient Mesopotamian tablets may be overlooked as simply primitive, but clay (and stone) are unmatched as substrates in terms of longevity. Imagine that one wishes to establish a claim over a piece of farmland, and to extend that claim to one's future heirs. Inscribing this claim upon a clay tablet and baking it to set the inscription, perhaps sealing it in a clay envelope, would enable it to travel through space and time, and to resist the more immediate entropy and evanescent instability of the claim rendered aurally/orally. Furthermore, any attempt to alter the inscription would damage the substrate and indicate tampering, potentially invalidating the document.

The heads side of the coin makes reference to Hammurabi's Stele, the earliest known comprehensive legal code. The image is a replica of the image at the top of the stele. It depicts the King Hammurabi, receiving a rod and cord from the deity Shamash (the seated figure), god of the sun. The rod and cord passed from Shamash to Hammurabi represent surveyor's tools, authoritative standards for measurement and judgement. The inscription immediately underneath the picture reads: "Hammurabi, the king of righteousness, on whom Shamash has conferred right (or law) am I" (King 2008). The inscribed schedule of crimes and their appropriate penalties are thus rendered immutable in at least two senses — being authorized by a deity and not by the arbitrary will of a person, they are ostensibly beyond reproach and outside of politics, but also of course, protected by the stone substrate (black diorite) from the passage of thousands of years.

"Coercion," refers to techniques involving some kind of direct or indirect violence. It speaks to Gitelman's recognition of the entanglement of the document with authority and bureaucratic discipline, while being sharpened by Graeber's recognition of the violence this rests upon. Ivan Illich's (1980) recounting of the Spanish grammarian's advice to Queen Isabella, that the sword and the word (*armas y letras*) are consorts of empire is apt (p. 70).

The tails side of the coin reproduces an inscription found on some instances of early American paper money which was printed to help lubricate the local colonial economy. Printed paper money, being especially vulnerable to the kind of fraudulent and criminal printing that would undermine the note's validity (copying, and excessive printing, for instance), had to be protected in order to establish and maintain trust in the monetary system of the time. Since strictly graphical techniques themselves did not provide sufficient security, such inscriptions reinforced the triangulation of the relationship between the holder, the money itself, and the state, whose monopoly on the "legitimate" (legal) use of violence and power over life and death, is called upon to deter counterfeiters from taking the liberty to compromise the system of inscriptions (Hobbes 1651/2009).

"Custom/Convention" speaks to the process of standardization — the sedimentation of normative assumptions that enable sociality — for instance, the English language, the (French) metric system, Western musical notation, the Prime (Greenwich) Meridian, among others. Graphically speaking, it has much to do with forms made for the purposes of coordination — to register, measure, and compare the significance of marks made in relation to an infrastructural element (Krauss, 1979), like a measured coordinate grid, the staves of a musical score, the level equilibrium of scale, grammar. James C. Scott (1998) reminds us that standardization is a matter of conflict when

19 "Clay" is a bit obtuse here compared to the other category headers. However, each maps to a mineral metaphor: "Custom/Convention" = mineral as standard; "Coercion" = mineral as weapon; "Code" = mineral as conduit.

20 Sometimes these objects are described simply as a ring and a scepter.

he observes that "Every act of measurement was an act marked by the play of power relations." (p. 27). When it comes to documents and the claims inscribed thereupon, the establishment of and adherence to custom and convention are a matter of (il) legibility, (il) legality, and (il) legitimacy.

The third surface, the reeded edge, is a skeuomorphic security feature that refers to instances of coinage that were pressed in precious metals. There was a fraudulent practice called "clipping" where the edges of coins would be shaven or clipped to retain the coin's "face value" while reducing its actual metal content in amounts indiscernible to the inattentive holder. The reeded edge establishes a normative condition where its appearance, intact, would assure the receiver of the coin that it had not been clipped, and that it was valid currency.

Of course, none of these techniques ever achieve the absolute immutability and depoliticization they seek. There are always ways to subvert, challenge, and invalidate documents and the bureaucratic systems they constitute — motives which can themselves constitute imperatives for design and can include forgery and perhaps even destruction as designerly actions. For my purposes here, however, these briefly described instantiations of technique (material, orthographic, ideological, technical, etc.) simply represent efforts to resolve vulnerabilities in earlier forms of making claims, recording information, and reinforcing the integrity of these. To be sure, my concern is not with the infallibility of this or that technique towards the discovery of the ultimate documental form (as a techno-progressive historiography might cast the trajectory of the discipline it prescribes), but rather to use these precedents as a starting point for theorizing an expanded scope of concerns in the designing of documents that ranges from the discrete object to the diffuse system, and to figure a field of contestation where what is at stake is the question of what is remembered, claimed, known, and how. Neither is my intent to explore the document by way of advocating for a design pedagogy and practice that reifies colonial forms of historiography. Rather, it is to map the limit against which to launch explorations of a practice concerned with giving form to the storage and transmission of other ways of knowing — of making and reinforcing claims that counter those that have been inherited in the course of the administration of a capitalist/colonial world system.[21] The ethos of the pedagogical project I am trying to describe is partly framed by a sentiment expressed by Gayatri Spivak, recalled by Emily Lordi, that: "[an] academic field [is] a field of vision. It's about who and what you train yourself to see, look for, and listen to. So the field is not an object or a terrain that one masters, but a mode of seeking in the world that one cultivates endlessly."[22]

21 Again, Hobart and Schiffman's distinction between memory and commemoration implies that the colonial tendency is reflected in the abstraction, and critical reflection enabled by writing — objectification (in — form — ation) and stabilized knowledge is "captured," "seized," "grasped," "apprehended," "comprehended," "gotten," and so on. (p. 30)
22 @ejlordi (twitter)

Conclusion

My project is oriented politically by the anthropologist Laura Nader's call to "study up" (on those in power: Nader, 1969) — to direct the scholarly and designerly gaze towards those in power — to cultivate a meaningful understanding of power as the problem against which creative and critical experimentation and exploration is mobilized. Paolo Freire's concept of "naming the world" helps to frame studying up as the search for productive limits from which graphic design might be imagined as a praxis engaged in the production of emergent, emancipatory form. For Freire, the capacity to name the world is poietic and transformative. I understand naming thus as an ontoepistomological making of the world. To be sure, this capacity to name the world is not the sole domain of a commanding elite to be imposed on those that are subordinated to them. Naming, Freire reminds us, can also be undertaken by the oppressed as a matter of being in dialogue (even with the oppressor). Freire's description of naming as a recursive, discursive, creative act — where each new name becomes a problem that calls for another new name — is understood as a motivator of the creative impulse and constitutive of what he calls "humanization" (the elimination between the oppressed and the oppressor of the oppression that dehumanizes both: Freire, 2018)

Naming, as part of the vocation of humanization, thus gives the word *design, designing, designation* a more critical, and potentially emancipatory charge — perhaps even as a form of epistemic disobedience against the "imperial languages" (Mignolo, 2009). To this end, I propose that the a new series of questions orienting graphic design pedagogy towards studying, exploring, creating and reinforcing, through new and different techniques of immutability, or against immutability, other ways of remembering, knowing and claiming. Could these questions explore and generate forms of sociality that preclude the kinds of documental artifacts that are endemic to managerial tendencies and colonial institutions? Could historiography be about designing history, as a creative, narrative praxis and does that involve new kinds of writing, transmission, storage, retrieval and performance? At what point does it stop being useful to retain design as a disciplinary framework? At what point must its institutional and professional horizons be abandoned to meaningfully explore these questions?

The conceit of centering the document (as shorthand for ways of knowing and remembering) in graphic design history is that it approaches design pedagogy and practice as an abolitionist one. It privileges an affirmation and amplification of existing non-oppressive, anti-hegemonic ways of knowing and being, but is also tasked with exploring and giving form to radically divergent ones.[23] The praxis of teaching and learning graphic design ought thus to be fundamentally rethought in a way that centers these concerns. We might start, at least in the design school, with the abolition of the reductive informatics of grading — documents that overcode, bureaucratize, and discipline the pedagogical space of the studio. A pedagogy resonant

23 Recognizing the different degrees of urgency, the abolitionist character of this pedagogy and practice is inspired by Ruth Wilson Gilmore's formulation of prison abolition.

with a decolonial politics and ethics ought to eschew such punitive disciplinarity and affirm other illegible, and necessarily unaccountable (to an hierarchical, managerial, disciplinary gaze), ways of knowing and being, teaching and learning. It demands a different kind of sensitivity to plurality and new kinds of literacy that exceed the grammar of profession, commerce, and publicity.

This is not to say that what graphic design education ought to affirm is the imperative to immutability. Rather, the naming of this imperative, as a matter of studying up, serves as a technique of unlearning the prison of convention and unthinking the borders of the hegemonic colonial languages (Mignolo, 2009). This is not meant as a matter of "learning the rules to break them," in the way that David Theo Goldberg observes that Marx advocates for the British colonial development of India in order to set it on the path of an immanent socialist revolution (to achieve decolonization, we must first accelerate colonization! – Goldberg, 2001). Rather, unlearning and unthinking are simply about positioning the ostensibly immutable document as a ground against which to figure something more emancipatory. Walter Mignolo provides a concept called "re-existing" (Mignolo, 2017) which, for my purposes, I understand as a name for a creative praxis that explores and actualizes other ways of remembering and articulates decolonial counter-claims while asserting the validity of other ways of knowing. The task for a graphic design pedagogy thus figured may be to think with students on how to "re-exist" and/or to generate anew that which has been suppressed by the coloniality of the document.

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Strategic utopianism and the avoidance of dualisms: An interview with Martin Parker.

Martin Parker[A] — A — *Professor of Organization Studies, University of Bristol*

Jürgen Rudolph[B] — B — *Head of Research & Senior Lecturer, Kaplan Singapore; Editor-in-chief, Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching*

Stevphen Shukaitis[C] — C — *Reader, Business School, University of Essex*

Shannon Tan[D] — D — *Research Assistant, Kaplan Singapore; Journal Manager, Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching*

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Abstract

Martin Parker is a Professor of Organisation Studies at the School of Management, University of Bristol, the lead for the Bristol Inclusive Economy Initiative and a Distinguished Fellow of the Schumacher Institute. He made headlines with his call and his book to *Shut down the business school* (2018). Parker's prolific writings attempt to widen the scope of business and management studies, whether in terms of particular sorts of organisations (the worker co-op, circus, zoo etc.), or ways of representing organising (in art, cartoons, films etc). His recent writing has been about 'alternative' organisations (including a book on outlaws). His most recent books are titled *Life after Covid-19* and *Anarchism, organization and management*. In this wide-ranging interview, much of Martin Parker's fascinating oeuvre is discussed, including the afore-mentioned books and so much more: Parker's work in the Bristol Inclusion Economy Initiative, the dual character of the hidden curriculum in business schools, the incomplete decolonialisation of curricula, and important influences from Daniel Defoe to David Graeber. Despite the horrific pandemic and the impending climate crisis, Parker promotes anti-binary thinking and strategic utopianism.

Jürgen Rudolph (JR): Martin, thank you so much for agreeing to this interview. You're an extremely prolific writer and your publications cover unusually diverse topics, writing a book on *Alternative business. Outlaws crime and culture* (2012) and more recently one on *Daniel Defoe and the Bank of England* (2016). You are obviously actively questioning the more narrow confines of business schools and you have described your role as Professor of Organisation Studies as being "a sociologist in a business school".

Also, our congratulations on your latest book, *Life after Covid-19*, which was just published on 12 August! It is a collection of 17 essays from a variety of thinkers on a wide range of subjects and refreshingly anti-dystopian, you have described your own perspective as one of "relentless optimism" in a recent radio interview. Could you please give us an idea about your thoughts on the pandemic, how it has affected Higher Education (HE) and how Higher Education will evolve as a result of the coronavirus?

Figure 1: Martin Parker

Martin Parker (MP): Of course! There are a series of different questions in there, but we could just pick up the one about the Coronavirus and that book. So, when England locked down in March, I found myself doing a variety of things, in the middle of the ambient anxiety, doing things that I was quite enjoying. So, I was cooking more, I was starting to do a bit of gardening, I wasn't traveling nearly as much. I was having quite a good time, in a strange way, and felt slightly ashamed about talking about it, because it seemed like in the middle of the terror and the death and the pain and all the rest of it, that it was a bit indecent, that somebody like me – with a nice big house and a nice big garden and room to have offices, and no particular financial pressures, was able to behave like this.

So the book reflects the idea that I wanted to document that moment. And also, to think about the variety of ways in which a large number of people were starting to talk about COVID as a dress rehearsal for dealing with climate change. Because the kind of system changes, huge resource transfers, changes of habits and patterns and so on, that we were seeing was precisely the kind of thing that many of us have been arguing for years, was necessary in order to deal with the threat of climate emergency. So, just as we've been told that nothing could change, everything suddenly did. It reminded me of that moment in 2007 to 2008, when the financial crisis was taking place, with a similar sense of space, of possibility, of opportunity, as older seemingly enduring structures decayed, and were possibly providing spaces for other things to grow.

So it seemed to me that COVID provided a similar sense of that kind of narrative, of crisis providing opportunity, or something like that. The tragedy of the financial crisis of course was that everything just went back pretty much to normal. There were no serious attempts to rethink the global financial system. And my terrible fear now of course is that we're just trying to do the same kind of thing, that the #buildbackbetter ideas are having very marginal effect. And substantially, we're just moving back to a slightly lower carbon version of the same system, which is going to lead to really critical problems in a decade or so.

I can't remember the other bits of the question because it was a big one, wasn't it? [Everybody laughs.] Oh, universities! The COVID crisis exposed some of the fundamental inequalities which have allowed people like me to work at home and so on, whilst other people who are driving taxis and working in care homes were getting infected. So too did the crisis expose – particularly in the UK, I think – the financial instability of the system that's been built over the last 20 years, which is reliant on a particular model of the undergraduate leaving home for three years and paying substantial fees, and also building up substantial amounts of debt. And also the increasing reliance for virtually every UK University on the overseas postgraduate market. Most institutions are effectively trading on the Chinese one child policy. What's happening now is that the whole Ponzi scheme is being exposed as the rather unstable fund transfer that it always was.

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And now we have a position where lots of British universities are chartering airplanes, in order to fly Chinese students, presumably, so they can be locked in halls of residence in various British cities, paying £25,000 to do an MA in Finance or something. So COVID is exposing the real instabilities at the heart of the university system in the UK at the moment, which effectively has been privatised through the use of

Chinese students' fees. I think that those are probably the two most important processes that have taken place in UK HE over the last 20 years: withdrawal of state funding and its replacement by the Chinese student market.

JR: And when we think a little bit ahead, I mean, hopefully there will be a post-pandemic era: Do you see any lasting changes regarding higher education in the UK and elsewhere?

MP: I can't really speak for elsewhere. But in the UK, I think that there will be a number of interesting changes, and we can begin by thinking about their infrastructure. Many universities, for example, have been heavily involved in developing a variety of city centre campuses, and so on. My University, Bristol, is currently engaged in a fairly substantial development next to the railway station, which is the first time, it has kind of built off its main campus in its 150-year history. But that's by no means exceptional, lots of British universities are doing precisely the same kind of stuff and are engaged in various forms of property speculation as a result. Now, a lot of that stuff's going to start to look a bit [MP laughs], *unwise*, given that, say, the University of Bristol has been operating off kitchen tables across the south west of England for the past six months. So the idea of building large amounts of floor space really starts to look a bit dumb. And also, the last report I saw, was suggesting that rents, even now in city centre office space are starting to dry up substantially, because there's such an excess of supply. I'm not quite sure why universities would be engaging in these kinds of developments when they can effectively be renting much of the stuff that's already been built. So, you can imagine those kinds of changes might be taking place in terms of the way that the university thinks about its physical infrastructure.

The other big question, I think, is about the kind of globalisation of the university. In many ways – and I'm thinking here about globalisation, in terms of people, in terms of students and staff – I've been hugely positive about the sheer diversity of staff and students that we have been teaching in UK HE over the last 20 years or so. It's made campuses richer and more interesting and brought in a whole range of different perspectives and ideas. The problem with that is, it is also effectively revealing a financial model that requires financial flows from elsewhere, in order to keep the UK university system going. And that's largely because of the market advantage that we have, which is that we happen to speak the same language as the Americans, which is kind of useful because it means we've got something to sell, and of course, we've got great shopping in London, which many students are enthusiastic about.

This cosmopolitanism of the UK university campus, which is something that I'm very keen on, is something that's effectively being bought by a global system of student finance, which is something that I think is not only being revealed to be very fragile, but also something that increasingly feels to me like a form of neo-colonialism, in which particular forms of knowledge are being sold, despite all the talk about decolonising the curriculum and all the rest of it. But particular forms of knowledge are being sold in particular places and taught by particular kinds of people to the rest of the world, as if British higher education, with its Victorian badges [MP laughs], were somehow the measure of our civilisation and our advancement.

Despite all the talk about decolonising the curriculum, …particular forms of knowledge are being sold in particular places and taught by particular kinds of people to the rest of the world, as if British higher education, with its Victorian badges, were somehow the measure of our civilisation and our advancement.

And it is a profoundly retrograde way of thinking about knowledge. Indeed, and this is the real political danger here, you might argue that, say, people from Singapore should be encouraged to study in Singapore and to think about Singaporean traditions and ideas and all the rest of it. The danger of that, of course, is the turning away from cosmopolitanism, too. And I don't know how to balance that stuff, I want the university to be an open, diverse and varied place where a whole series of different traditions come into contact with each other. But at the same time, I don't want it to be part of this kind of colonial Ponzi scheme. I don't know whether that's very clear, but I don't think there's an easy way out of that.

JR: That makes a lot of sense.

Stevphen Shukiatis (SS): It's interesting, because I'm thinking, the former Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Singapore [Dr Toh Chin Chye; VC from 1968 to 1975, appointed by Singapore's founding father, Lee Kuan Yew], he tries to balance this by making a distinction, saying that, 'We've just become independent, we're very concerned about not recreating colonialism'. So therefore, 'we are very conscious to decolonise the Humanities and the Arts, because these are the political subjects, and they advance us'. But we're not concerned about how that affects business, engineering and infrastructure development, because those are 'non-political subjects'. And that's where you get the first year, Singapore is independent, it's also the first year it starts a sort of Institute of Human Resource Development, the development of all these technical, non-political subjects that arguably take up where colonialism left off by appearing to be non-political. It's almost like the division of what is considered to be political or not in the university is the fault line on which those things develop (see Sam, 2017; Shukaitis, 2018).

MP: That's a really interesting observation. But both you and I, Stevphen, would argue that all forms of knowledge are political, in that sense of positioning particular subjects' entitlements, statuses, capacities and so on. So any form of knowledge is an act of political stabilisation of some kind.

JR: In Australia – which I observe quite a bit, because my organisation is working with quite a few Australian universities – the STEM subjects are favoured over the Humanities, and the price structure will change dramatically. Humanities will see their fees about doubled, whereas STEM subjects will be

Figure 2: Ade Darmawan, "Singapore Human Resources Institute" installation as part of Singapore Biennale 2016: An Atlas of Mirrors, October 27 – February 26, 2017, Singapore Art Museum (SAM). Photograph by Stevphen Shukaitis https://www.singaporeartmuseum.sg/art-events/exhibitions/singapore-biennale-2016

made cheaper (Doidge & Doyle, 2020). And it's that whole idea that 'well, why would you want to subsidise a lot of government critics?' – which is the anthropologists and so on. Of course, there is a certain dominant ideology behind the STEM subjects.

MP: I agree. We should always be careful as soon as we start to make generalisations about the university. It's always worth asking: 'Does that apply to Dentistry or Particle Physics'? There are ways in which the Social Sciences, Arts, Humanities, standard lefty critique of whatever form of power the university is supposed to represent is often really about the Arts and Social Sciences and just has a kind of shadow version of the STEM subjects: Science, Technology, Engineering, Medicine, as baddies.

But of course, a lot of those baddies are people that we'd be quite keen on in other contexts, architects and engineers who build buildings; or dentists who know about how to mend our teeth; whatever it is, we need and want those forms of expertise and specialisation. One of the things that I'm often pushed back to thinking is that a university isn't necessarily one thing. It's a kind of strange coalition of things. And as soon as we start making big generalisations about it, they often don't really apply to all of it. For example, somebody I've been hanging around a bit recently, who does a lot of stuff on brains, he's a neuroscientist. And the forms of knowledge he's trying to develop are largely about brain functioning in a very material manner. And though there is a politics in that kind of stuff, and there's various involvement from companies with an interest in developing particular kinds of drugs or treatments, it's a much more contingent one. Interestingly, he does have a political view of the university, but it's not necessarily a political view which his particular discipline is at the heart of. It's more a kind of general condemnation of managerialism, or profit-making or property speculation or whatever it might be. But I think for me, particularly working in Schools of Business and Management, my condemnations of the University are also directly about the forms of knowledge that I have been complicit in reproducing in a whole variety of ways. So, there's an important distinction there.

SS: Have you ever read the book, *The anti-politics machine* by James Ferguson?

MP: Yeah.

SS: The way he talks about international development, where it's about technical expertise, where if there's a problem with it, the solution to problems are always more of the same thing. So, I'm particularly interested in forms of, let's say, expertise, which by removing themselves from having any legitimate politics, basically cut them off from any sort of criticism at all. I mean, there are certainly forms of knowledge which are embedded in expertise in a way, which is not necessarily always that problematic. I mean, I'm happy the dentists know what they're doing [all laugh].

MP: Yes, exactly. I know what you mean. But it seems like, if we homogenise a version of knowledge power, as if all forms of knowledge power are somehow equally troublesome, then there's a danger that a whole variety of forms of expertise, which are relatively benign, are also included as somehow fascist and authoritarian.

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And it seems to me that many forms of expertise are actually pretty useful and praiseworthy and need to be transmitted in effective ways in order that we can carry on doing some of the stuff we do. And that goes for everything from preparing food without poisoning people right the way up to an engineer who doesn't build a wind turbine that falls apart. Although we should be suspicious of everything, as Foucault tells us, it seems to me that there are forms of expertise which I think do not deserve the same kinds of critique as, say, market managerialism.

SS: If I were to risk journalising your work, which is always a big danger, I would say that one of your big things is actually trying to examine particular organising practices and how they work according to their own logic – rather than saying these are all bad – because there are all kinds of expertise. No, they're particularly localised forms of practice that follow a certain kind of logic, that don't necessarily correspond to the way we think of organising in general, but each follow different kinds of social logics. And I would say, one of your overall projects is trying to explore or expand our notion of what organising is, and what comes within that realm.

MP: Yeah, I guess. It's always uncomfortable, for me anyway, when somebody tries to summarise a body of work that I don't see as being particularly coherent. I was interested in

a variety of different things over the last 30 years. And so I wrote different things about different things. And maybe other people can see that more clearly. But sure, one of the things that I guess I keep coming back to, is this idea that the concept of organising needs to be expanded, rethought and so on. And the central trope in the *Shut down the business school* book (2018) is that whole idea that management is a narrow form of organising. Managerialism embeds particular sets of assumptions about a certain cadre of people doing certain kinds of things, for certain kinds of rewards – when actually *organising* is a much broader, more generous, more various concept that really should be the proper object of inquiry. Hence my suggestion that we should be demolishing the Business Schools and building 'Schools for Organising'.

JR: I would like to ask one more question about your latest book. Because I was saying earlier, that COVID book is refreshingly anti-dystopian, but then I also found a passage in the book, which does sound a bit more dystopian. And allow me to quote from the Introduction of your book: "As the virus has demonstrated, and many of the chapters in this book explore, we are not all in the same boat. If you have a garden, a nice house, money and work in a knowledge-based occupation, lockdown will not have been too painful. If you live in poor quality or overcrowded housing, are a migrant or from an ethnic minority background, or are in precarious employment, you are much more likely to die" (Parker, 2020, p. 2).

So, I'd like to ask, is your optimism based on the rapid reduction in carbon emissions and the return of wildlife? At the end of your introductory chapter, you write that the pandemic may be viewed as "a dress rehearsal, a warning, a reminder that the human relationship with the non-human (whether virus or planet) is at breaking point" (Parker, 2020, p. 10), this of course with reference to the ongoing catastrophic climate change. While this is of utmost importance, don't you think that events like the pandemic won't benefit the so-called one percent more than the other 99%, and make the gap between the Global North and the Global South even larger?

MP: Yes, those are possibilities. In another commentary, I've written about the way in which certain companies like Amazon and Netflix and so on, have been doing incredibly well out of this pandemic, largely because there's a set of big companies which have been providing the infrastructure for many of us to be staying at home and ordering takeaways, and watching Netflix and all the rest of it. The share values of those companies have been going up very nicely indeed. And the personal wealth of people like Jeff Bezos, Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg and others significantly increased during the pandemic.

So, in practical terms, I agree with you, and naive utopianism is not going to save us. The reason I keep on coming back to this idea, and it's a phrase I've used in other contexts, is to stress the need for a relentless optimism or a kind of strategic utopianism. I don't think we can do anything else. I think that those of us on the green left, who believe that another world is possible, just have to double down on that belief. Otherwise, you're just going to cuddle yourself in the duvet and cry, because there is no point in trying to do anything. I remember talking to Stevphen, probably 10-15 years ago when we used to work together, about the capture, recuperation or co-optation of different sorts of practices. And I remember at the time, Stevphen, you were saying something like, that co-optation is kind of inevitable, it just happens and it keeps on happening. But that doesn't mean that you don't keep on inventing something new and different. We can escape it for a while. And I guess I'd see that sort of relentless utopianism in a similar kind of way. But it would be sort of an act, an attitude, which just refused the pessimism.

The need for a relentless optimism or a kind of strategic utopianism… – I don't think we can do anything else… Otherwise, you're just going to cuddle yourself in the duvet and cry, because there is no point in trying to do anything.

So I understand that Jeff Bezos is probably going to make loads and loads of money from COVID, but that doesn't mean that the future is completely pointless. And we have to keep on having to think about different ways in which we can articulate these futures. And it's the sort of responsibility particularly of people who write and think and claim to have some voice on these things, to not just endlessly tell us that we are doomed, or that this piece of technology is not the answer, or that we can't replace all our energy demands with wind power, and so on. If we list the problems, then we're going to end up in a heap crying. So, we have to think about the future in terms of optimism and possibility, it seems to me it's the only really rational response. And there's a really interesting relation here to people who are now writing about this notion of nostalgia, solastalgia, a particular sort of malaise, a kind of ennui, about the possibility of any human life existing on this planet in any kind of way. And it's not surprising that people respond to that with all sorts of despair and mental health problems and question whether they should have children and all sorts of things like that. So, in which case, surely, we should use that kind of energy, not for despair, but for pointing at the future to make it different. This is the Extinction Rebellion point, isn't it? Make it into anger, make it into joy, make it into a signpost for the way that we would like the future to be. Sorry, was I making a speech? [all laugh]

SS: It's kind of interesting that you brought up the 99%, because I was thinking this morning about some parallels between Martin's writing and David Graeber's writing. And I think they're actually quite similar in terms of exploring value, practicing and exploring modes of organising, exploring ways of living, that are important to focus on – not because we're unaware of what's happening in terms of power and all the other horrible things that are happening in the world. That's certainly part of it. It's like that Gramscian phrase: "Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will". It's like, needing to keep that something that makes you wanting to get out of the bed, even if you realise that a big chunk of the day is going to be crap.

MP: To be compared to David Graeber is rather special. And yes, I think there's something in that because the parts of David's writing that I've really enjoyed have been precisely where he is kind of exploring the improbable, or laughing at the strange sedimentations of the everyday. My first discipline is Sociology, and I've always understood Sociology as being a particular kind of way of exposing the contingency of the way we live our lives now, noting that since we are making it all up as we're going along, then maybe we can make it up in different sorts of ways. And a lot of David Graeber's writing – though from Anthropology, not from Sociology – shares that sense of the social as being contingent, and consequently, changeable.

SS: I think you both have similar personalities, you're both highly intelligent, very clever people who are also wonderful, lovely to talk to, and self-effacing in a very good way. And I think there's also a deeper link: A lot of David's work is based upon the idea that, for instance, our notions of Anthropology are overly state-centric, and we don't actually see forms of organisation which are outside of the state. You're making a similar move around 'managerial over-narrowly-focusedness', if that's a word. So I think there are similarities and interesting parallels.

MP: That's right, and I was just thinking about other moves in my writing. I don't do this consciously, but if you've written a lot over a long period of time, you keep on turning back and crossing the same territory in different kinds of ways. It's always struck me as strange that people like, say, Giddens, Habermas or Bourdieu, they seemed to unfold a theory. And it's almost as if they find its germs in their 20s. And then they write their big books and so on. I don't have any investment in big theory but more of a sense that there are particular problems that come up in different ways, through thinking about different materials. You can almost imagine it as a series of tracks with particular kinds of densities in certain places as they cross, you cross and recross? And the diverse variety of ways we think about organising is one of them. But that also then spins off into other sorts of ideas, which are more to do with expanding the sorts of evidence that we have for thinking about organising. And one of the papers I was thinking about when I said that was one I did recently on tower cranes (Parker, 2017), because I've always thought tower cranes were really beautiful things. They kind of excite and scare me in equal measure, and I also got kind of obsessed with that figure of the tower crane driver hanging over the city in an illuminated cab at night. Like Batman, what an amazing idea.

Then I thought about the tower crane as a form of organisation, a particular assemblage of materials, and human beings and money and all the rest of it. And then I began to assemble a philosophy or social theory of organising around that object. So, what makes that assemblage possible? That kind of assemblage of human and non-human stuff, very influenced by network theory. If we have a more generous philosophy, a sort of physics of organising, then I think that's going to make it easier for lots of us to understand different sorts of people, materials and practices that are being organised.

JR: Absolutely! You are originally a sociologist and anthropologist that, as I seem to remember you said somewhere, "*accidentally*" ended up in a business school. Could you please tell us a little more about your early biography, what was your schooling, childhood and youth like and what made you study the subjects that you offered at University? How did your own educational experience influence your own views on teaching and learning? I hope it's not too intrusive a question.

MP: This is the Tristram Shandy moment.

JR: [chuckles] I love Tristram Shandy.

MP: [Jokingly:] I was found in a supermarket carpark. [All laugh.] I was very lucky in the sense that my dad was, what we would call in England, an extramural teacher. So he taught adults and was based at Birmingham University. So I grew up in a house where academic ideas were very much valued. And I felt very easy with that kind of environment, with that sort of habitus. And I think that meant that I've been able to – because of a certain kind of class privilege, I suppose – play in the university relatively easily because it's a place that I've been at home, in and with, since my earliest memories. It's where my dad was. I remember going with my dad to university, and him taking me to the senior common room where there were all these kinds of strange, mostly white, mostly men in tweed, smoking pipes and reading newspapers and stuff like that [laughter]. And so, I suppose at some point, I must have thought, maybe one day, I could smoke a pipe and wear a tweed jacket as well.

When I was at school, I was really attracted to Sociology because I imagined it to be like an applied form of politics or something. I wasn't very interested in politics in terms of the way that politics was taught in UK schools at the time, which is basically a kind of history of institutions really. But I was very interested in the idea of the everyday world as being political and I'm not quite sure where that comes from. But I remember being so excited when I came across the U.S. symbolic interactionists, all showing us something about the ways in which the everyday is constructed.

SS: Cultural Studies maybe?

MP: Yeah, that's later though, I came across Cultural Studies in my Master's degree in Sociology. I mean, a lot of the Birmingham stuff had happened, and I remember reading a bit of it. *Resistance through rituals* [by T. Jefferson, first published in 1975] I think it was, but it wasn't part of the core sociology curriculum or anything. But what excited me, Stevphen, was the people like [Erving] Goffman and [Howard] Becker and stuff like that. So it's a bunch of really smart Jews who were just observing the social world with such forensic detail. When you're a teenager and you're terribly conscious of your body and your gaze and your language and all that kind of stuff, and then you start reading people like Goffman and Becker, it sounds like they're doing the same thing. [MP laughs.] So, I love that stuff. I was really interested in it as well as, of course, the usual British predilection for sort of a morbid interest in the symbols of social class. But then I ended up doing a weird undergraduate degree in Anthropology and Cognitive Studies, which was composed

of artificial intelligence, linguistics, philosophy of mind and various other things. And then did a Master's in Sociology and a PhD in Sociology. And the only reason I ended up doing Organisational Sociology was because that was what the PhD was funded to do. So I wasn't particularly interested in it as such, but I kind of twisted it because the concept of organisational culture was becoming interesting at that time. And because of my anthropological background, but also because I'd come across Cultural Studies in my Master's degree, I started to apply some of those tools to the incredibly shit writing on organisational culture in the mid-1980s. Trying to rethink the relation between culture and organisation from an anthropological or cultural studies perspective.

JR: My next question also picks up threads that we have already touched upon when Stevphen was quoting Gramsci: There is a tension between what has been described as reproductionism versus pedagogism. Schugurensky (2014), in a book on Paolo Freire, has described pedagogism as the naïve optimism that places excessive confidence in education as the main remedy for all social problems. The opposite of pedagogism is reproductionism, i.e. the paralysing pessimism that results from arguing that schools are nothing else than tools of the capitalist state to reinforce social inequalities. In your work, you occasionally cite Ivan Illich's (who I am also very interested in) *Deschooling society*, I would say Illich is perhaps more in the reproductionist camp? What are your thoughts? Does education (within current educational systems) have the potential to build a better, more democratic society?

MP: The answer is yes, of course it does. You'd be daft to give up on the idea of education. But stepping back, when somebody offers you a dualism, it's usually a good idea to interrogate it a bit before you choose. Because it seems to me that either position in the question is a pretty dumb one – in the sense that, if you take the first position, the idea is somehow that we can kind of just educate and qualify our ways out of the problems that we face, is clearly stupid, given the kind of conversation we've had earlier about the complicity of the higher education system with a whole range of manifestations of the same sorts of problems we'd need to address.

> ***You'd be daft to give up on the idea of education.***

So, no I don't think universities are going to save us by providing us with some perfect form of education. But at the same time, if you just want to go for the idea that all forms of education are characterised by corruption and the reproduction of elite privilege, then you've got kind of no way of describing any processes of social change. It just seems like a bizarrely structuralist version of the iron cage of ideology.

So somewhere in between has to be the sensible position, doesn't it? A profound suspicion about what education institutions do; how they reproduce knowledge; the positions that they provide for us; and the mechanisms that they use to produce knowledge, but at the same time, preserving a sense that universities do provide a whole range of different spaces for people to do different things. The obvious reference here, and particularly given people that both I and Stevphen know, is Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's idea of the 'undercommons' (Harney & Moten, 2013). And I really like almost the architectural metaphor in that term, the idea that the institution of the university is a place where you can find all sorts of spaces and holes and rabbit warrens in order to do interesting stuff.

So for example, at the moment, half of my work involves a set of projects with a variety of green and left activist groups across the City of Bristol. And I'm expropriating the resources of the university in order to try and connect us to a variety of people who I think are doing good things in co-ops, low carbon initiatives, industrial democracy and a whole variety of things. But the university is quite positive about that, because it sees it as part of its civic engagement remit, and so on, which is largely how I'm getting a lot of this stuff funded. And that's just fine, they can use that as part of their corporate social responsibility branding. At the same time, it seems to me that I might actually be doing something useful for a variety of organisations that I feel positive about, by getting them rooms and sandwiches and money and expertise and the possibility of bidding for grants and things like that. So, I think I can use the university and be suspicious of it and do some useful stuff at the same time. So basically *'yes!'* is the answer. And I refuse the dualism.

> ***I think I can use the university and be suspicious of it and do some useful stuff at the same time… And I refuse the dualism.***

SS: If I can tell an anecdote that I think illustrates the same idea: When I was starting my PhD in 2004, I was having a chat with Martin. And I asked him, 'Martin, what's Critical Management Studies? I don't understand it'. He explained to me what it is. And his answer was perfect: 'Oh, I don't know. What do you want it to be? Make it that'. [MP laughs.] And it's a perfect answer at two levels. One, it was a bullshit answer. He clearly knew what it was, he spent 10 years writing about it, right?

> ***I asked him, 'Martin, what's Critical Management Studies? I don't understand it'… His answer was perfect: 'Oh, I don't know. What do you want it to be? Make it that'***

MP: [mock-threateningly:] You're calling your supervisor a bullshitter?! [Everybody laughs.]

SS: A very good bullshitter, but a bullshitter. But you're deliberately putting off answering the question with what it actually was. Because saying what it actually was would limit what it could be. So you were sort of delaying this sort of reproductionist argument, you might say, by saying, 'How can we use this space? How can we create this space? How can we use these resources to do something actually exciting, rather than worrying about what it properly is, or should be?'

MP: Absolutely. And you ran with that, right? But I guess I was also understanding you in terms of the idea that if I put you in some kind of box, you're just going to kick it over anyway. So, what's the point of me saying 'it's this, this and this, go away and read Alvesson and Willmott [(Eds., 2003)], and then come back and tell me what they said', like that would work? [SS and MP laugh.] CMS, from the early 1990s onwards, was for me a really exciting space that opened up all sorts of possible conversations. And over the intervening nearly 30 years, those spaces have gradually become more and more institutionalised and sclerotic. There are journals, and there are the standard citations and all this kind of stuff, I am not really interested in it anymore. But that doesn't mean it wasn't really useful at the time. It was wonderful. I remember going to the first Critical Management Studies conference, it must have been sort of mid-1990s or something, I suppose, and just meeting loads of people who were interested in the kinds of things I was interested in, and it was great. It was really good.

SS: Was it back when Britpop was exciting?

MP: [MP bursts out in laughter.] It was the Beatles and The Rolling Stones, you young person! [All laugh.]

JR: You use your critical-sociological perspective on the business school itself. Your early 'attacks' on the business school can be found in your book published in 2002, *Against management*. They sort of culminated, if I understand this correctly, in 2018 with *Shut down the business school* (that I had the pleasure to review in JALT).

MP: Thank you!

JR: The first part is a devastating critique of the business school, the second the development of an alternative School of Organising that could replace the B-school. Could you please elaborate?

MP: Yes, of course. So, if I can summarise the argument very quickly, essentially, it's the idea that the business school, to put it very directly, is a kind of ideological finishing school for capitalism.

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So what does the business school do? It teaches capitalism. And I do make that argument a number of different ways. But I think, probably the crucial one is to say that effectively the business school substantially ignores all the alternatives to capitalist practices, makes the corporation into the kind of poster kid of organising, makes management into the kind of key organising principle for human beings, embedding certain notions of hierarchy, and suggests that growth is the only economic principle that matters.

Now, that's a very quick overview. But essentially, what I try and do then in the sort of the hinge of the book – and this is stuff I was doing back in the *Against management book,*

The business school substantially ignores all the alternatives to capitalist practices, makes the corporation into the kind of poster kid of organising.

you're absolutely right – is to disentangle management from organising more generally. So in other words, to say that organising is the concept which is of most use to us here, in trying to understand how people and things come together to do stuff. Management is a particular instantiation of organising. So we need to put management in its place, and explore the wide variety of ways in which organising can happen.

And when I'm doing talks, one of the ways in which I illustrate this is with reference to another of the books in that series which was a dictionary of alternatives and utopianism that I did with a couple of friends. And the idea of this book originally was that it was going to be a kind of gigantic Encyclopedia of different ways in which we could think about organising. It was going to include actually existing intentional communities and utopias, as well as fictional utopias and examples from organised crime and terrorism, and different green sustainable practices, whatever we could think of. And one of the entries was going to be 'Management', which we could describe as 'a particular practice that was of interest to business schools in the late 20th century'. [MP laughs.]

And we produced this gigantic manuscript, which was about a quarter million words long. And then we sent it to Zed Books, the publisher, and they said, 'This is way too long for us to publish, you got to cut loads of it out'. So it ended up as a big book, but it should have been twice that size. And, potentially, I imagine that if you can use the pretentious theoretical term here, as a kind of *rhizome* that would just connect all sorts of stuff. In fact, Stevphen, I was going to employ you to build a website in which people were going to add examples of organising, remember this, and we managed to get permission from Zed to do it?

SS: Yeah.

MP: So the idea was, it would just kind of grow with more and more people adding more and more stuff to either a sort of political-intellectual project or an artwork. But it was just going to be one example amongst lots of others. And then that's essentially how I came up with the argument in the *Shut down the business school* book. What we've got to do is imagine a 'school for organising', which teaches, or helps us to learn from a whole variety of different organising practices, anthropological, sociological, historical, geographic, whatever they might be, in order that we can think about the sheer diversity of things that we might need to do to address the various crises we face. So, organising becomes a way of teaching people how to use a wide variety of different kinds of tools, in order to deal with different kinds of circumstances, rather than thinking about a one best way to reproduce a particular form of global capitalism.

SS: I suppose one way to reframe the move might be following the saying that we're provincialising Management

by saying 'it's one system rather than being a universal one'.

MP: Absolutely. And I think that's a really nice way of expressing it. So yes, there may well be occasions when we want to use aspects of managerialism to address some of the things that we want to do, but we need to be quite specific in thinking about possible alternative ways of doing what we do. So, for example, it seems to me that if we are dealing with complex logistical problems, then using tools of operations management makes a lot of sense to do this stuff effectively. But that's not the same as saying 'Amazon's great', right? [MP laughs.] Those are two different statements. And we need to disentangle them. And I suppose the phrase I keep coming back to now, which I guess in some ways captures a lot of what I've tried to do in terms of what Stevphen said earlier, is 'organising is politics made durable'. This is to twist a phrase from Bruno Latour about technology as a kind of a sedimentation of a particular set of political assumptions. But I like that idea of us treating organising as a way of thinking about the political and every particular instantiation of organising, therefore, as something we should assess on political terms. And that means asking: 'What's it doing for us? What kind of positions does it produce? How much carbon does it produce?' Or whatever evaluations we might want to make of it at the time.

JR: You speak of the hidden curriculum. In the context of business schools, I believe the hidden curriculum takes on a dual meaning. First, the agenda of corporate capitalism is somewhat hidden: the curriculum largely offers a corporate capitalist, neoliberal perspective that downplays 'externalities' such as climate change, environmental destruction and degradation, and the hegemony of transnational multi-billion dollar enterprises, raising the question whether B-schools provide education or ideology. The second part of your argument of a hidden curriculum is perhaps less obvious – and we have started to talk about this of course – but you have developed the theme of alternative organisations extensively in various publications. You just told us the quite unfortunate story about the publication of the dictionary, it would have been so great to have the long version actually.

There are cooperatives (that employ millions globally), communes, tribes, local exchange trading systems, collectives, sociocracies, mutual societies, to mention but a few. Together with co-editors, you have published *The dictionary of alternatives. Utopianism & organization* (2007) and *The Routledge companion to alternative organization* (2014) that explore many alternative organisations through a great variety of historical and geographically diverse instances.

You have compared B-schools that ignore alternative forms of organisation with history departments that only teach about certain centuries at the expense of all others or a geography department that only talks about two continents instead of the whole world. Could you provide us with some of your favourite examples of alternative organisations (in Parker, 2018, you for instance discuss the Suma co-op case study) from an industry of your choice? And in terms of HE, what are some of the interesting projects that come close to your own theoretical approach? Mondragon or perhaps the Bristol Inclusive Economy Initiative (that you have already started to talk about)?

MP: The latter is probably the most helpful one to concentrate on in the sense that what I'm trying to do now after my endless complaints about the business school is to see how we might be able to use the business school, and a particular discourse about the Civic University and civic engagement. So when I arrived at Bristol, I was given the opportunity to repurpose an existing research unit, and turn it into a sort of alternative economy unit. But I was also very concerned that this would not simply be a bunch of academics going out to find out what the co-op is doing, and then coming back to their offices and writing a paper in a journal about it. I wanted it to be an initiative, not an institute, an initiative that pushed forward a variety of co-produced projects, in which I got academics who are committed to various kinds of green, left politics to engage with a variety of organisations in their city that were doing the same. Now Bristol is really fantastic in this regard, because it's had a very long and honourable tradition of radicalism, particularly of green politics, and lots of key green institutions are based there. And there is also a great deal of engagement in ways of thinking about how business practices in the city might be changed in order to address local inequalities of class, gender and ethnicity, as well as carbon emissions targets and so on.

Now, on the one hand, you can talk about business approaches such as the B-Corp [private certification of for-profit companies, distinct from the legal designation as a Benefit corporation]. A B-Corp doesn't necessarily have to change anything about its organisational structure, its forms of ownership, management, control, and so on. But it does have to commit to reporting on a wide range of different social value indicators, whether those be wage multiples, or carbon emissions, community engagement, or whatever it might be. And so we've been trying to think about ways in which we can work with the B Corp movement, in order to encourage more and more British organisations to take on that particular form of certification. It's basically like a Kitemark, if you see a B Corp organisation, that they've at least tried to do something good about the world that they have it.

On the other hand, you can think about much more enduring ways in which forms of ownership or control can be, as the cliché goes, 'baked into' the way an organisation is constituted. And it's those that I've always been most interested in. We are then referring to various forms of employee ownership of which the purest model, of course, is the worker cooperative.

So for example, in Bristol, one of the organisations we've been talking to is the Bristol Bike Project. This is a tiny co-op that employs about ten people, and it sells and repairs bicycles, which seem like pretty good things to me. And they give away their surplus as free bikes to people who can't afford them in order that they can travel around the city without having a car. It's a tiny organisation, and they don't really have time to engage with the university because they're too busy mending bikes and running the organisation.

So that presents some really interesting problems. So, first of all, can the elephant of Bristol University helpfully hold hands with the tiny little mouse that is the Bristol Bike Project? If that's the case – and that's an open question for me – what helpful things can we do for them? How can we assist them? When I was talking to one of their coordinators about this stuff, she was telling me that the things that they were most interested in knowing about were marketing, accounting, and strategy. These seemed to be the practical forms of knowledge that might help them think about how they grow the business, make it more enduring, build up a bit of a cash surplus that can see them through hard times, whatever it might be. So actually, what they want is quite prosaic, but they can't afford to pay for it, and neither have they got the time to do it. So, one of the things that you might need to do is to pay them to have time to talk to you, or provide services for free. Some of my colleagues have used this contact to offer some free training on accounting for a variety of co-ops in the city. More generally, how could the university set up a pro bono business advice clinic to co-ops and mutuals of different kinds that can't afford to pay for some shiny consultants coming in – and probably, ideologically, wouldn't feel very comfortable with that anyway? How can the knowledge that we presumably have about organising help them understand how they do their organising a bit better? And, of course, they can define better in whatever way they want to.

Again, this goes back to you, Stevphen, this conversation is rotating as much around you as it is about me. So do you remember us meeting in London once, and you had just been to an anarchist bookshop, I think, and were coming back with a great big pile of books, and were furious because they were closed because they had not done their rota properly, or something like that. And then we started talking about writing a book called 'Management for Anarchists'. It was going to be pitched as 'this is what you've got to do in order not to lose money, stupid!', stripping out all the shiny turbo capitalist rubbish and just describing some techniques. So we just describe aspects of organising in quite prosaic terms. This is what double entry bookkeeping looks like. This is why it's a good idea to have a rota, or to be thinking about what you want the business to look like in a year's time.

So a very simple and direct form of advice. I guess that's where I am at the moment. How do we find useful ways of helping alternative economy organisations do the stuff that they want to do? And sometimes that will be about using the knowledge that's usually sequestered within the university and you only get for money. Sometimes it's going to be about holding hands with them, because sometimes they are quite keen on bidding for various forms of funding, or researching the impact of their products or services. It's sometimes very useful to them to be associated with an university when they do that, to say that they're academically accredited and that their evaluation report has been signed off by professor such and such, those kinds of things. So we can pick our allies, we can find the people that we want to work with, and help them to grow, help them to thrive in various ways. I think that's a way of using the institution productively.

JR: Earlier, you were talking about Critical Management Studies, and that it was very exciting in the 1990s. I have a question, which goes back a lot further than the 1990s. And I'm also using a quote, when you are quoting the novelist Daniel Defoe. In 1731, Defoe suggested that: "I think our meer scholars are a kind of mechanicks in the schools, for they deal in words and syllables as haberdashers deal in small ware. They trade in measure, quantityes, dactyls, and spondaes, as instrument-makers do in quadrants, rules, squares, and compasses; etymologyes, and derivations, prepositions and terminations, points, commas, colons and semi-colons, etc. Are the product of their brain, just as gods and devils are made in Italy by every carver and painter, and they fix them in their proper stations in perspective, just as they do in nitches and glass windows" (Hamilton & Parker, 2016, p. 89). Would you say that this characteristic of the scholar as "a kind of mechanick" still largely applies in 2020?

MP: I think it does. I've been fascinated by Defoe for a bit, because he's such an interesting and mysterious character. And lots of the things that are attributed to Defoe probably weren't written by him either. So Defoe is multiple in some senses, with lots of possible and lots of mysterious things about who he was and why he wrote. But he was quite interested in business and organisation. And he was writing at a moment when ideas about business, adventurers and projecters were starting to coalesce. And so that's what that book is about, about that moment when capitalist enterprise is coming into view. I like his simultaneous scepticism and optimism about institutions. Defoe is very often highly critical, as a dissenter, of established institutions, such as the Universities of Oxford, and Cambridge. But at the same time, he sees modernising institutions, and particularly entrepreneurial practices as very exciting developments that might produce a different kind of world. So, in some senses, that's quite a modern way of thinking. He is suspicious of the past and imagining the possibilities of the future.

But going back to the particularities of that quote, in a way that the university has developed as a kind of an internal language game. And my sense is that though there are certain things I would want to defend, perhaps some ideas about 'scholarship', during the duration of my career these ideas have been suborned to a particular version of a kind of very narrow language game, like Hermann Hesse's glass bead game, where we publish articles written in highly exclusionary language which are only ever read by a tiny number of people who also speak that language.

It's a complicated puzzle that only the adept can play particularly well. And I've been the beneficiary of that stuff. Undoubtedly, a lot of the things that I've published have been in precisely those journals that nobody ever reads. And it's been good for my career in a variety of ways. But I'm increasingly feeling that there's a certain circularity in those contributions. And I suppose, annoyed, too, that so many people associated with supposedly critical positions – and I'm not just thinking about Critical Management Studies here, I'm thinking about supposedly critical people, right the way across the Arts and Social Sciences – somehow think that writing an article in some recondite journal is a sufficient form of politics. I just don't, I really don't anymore. I don't get that version of the political, it seems to be self-

indulgent and ineffective. And I want to spend much more time not doing that than doing it.

That being said, because I don't like the dualism, one of my next projects will be as obscure as you get. So one of the things I want to do is to write a big good book on the philosophy of organising. Because it seems to me that organising is not a term that philosophers have ever really thought very systematically about, with the partial exception of Deleuze and Guattari and Michel Serres. But there's a really interesting conundrum there for me, but I think I have to address in quite scholastic ways. And that's not a book I'm imagining being highly impactful. I would be writing it for me, and a very small number of people like me, but that's kind of okay, too, I think. It's just a generalisation of that practice that I think I'm finding so difficult at the moment. And also its complicity with, effectively, the construction of big international publishing firms that have done enormously well out of proliferating the variety of journals that we all publish in, and they're doing very nicely from because we and our readers have to pay to get access to our work.

JR: Absolutely! Actually, that's completely related to the next question that I would like to ask. Because it's about journals and knowledge production and so on. You have been the Editor-in-chief of *Organization*, you sit on various Editorial Boards (e.g. *Journal of Change Management*) and you are extremely well-published (you have a staggering near-10,000 citations on Google Scholar). We also read with great interest on your website that one of your future projects is to write a history of journals. What are your views on Open Access publishing, author processing charges and other such fees, Creative Commons licenses? And how about journal impact factors, h index, i-10 index, Altmetrics and other metrics that supposedly measure the quality of academic publications?

MP: Yeah, it's interesting, isn't it? I publish a lot and I've also been very critical about the publishing system. I think we can talk about this in substantially two different ways.

One of them is to consider the way in which a particular kind of knowledge publishing system now benefits a number of the actors within that system, whether you're talking about the huge knowledge companies, who might own a whole variety of different knowledge assets. And there's about five of them in the world, Thompson Reuters, Wiley, Ingenta and various others. And our little journal was just one part of the knowledge assets that they're involved in and trading on. So in that sense, we're a very small part of a much bigger thing. There's all sorts of other forms of data that they're interested in, like stock market prices, or property values in different cities, knowledge assets, or whatever it might be. These big corporations now monetise the knowledge that academics produce.

The other consideration is to think about how academics have internalised particular sorts of ideas about their value and their role in terms of journal publication. And that's been particularly intense, I think, probably more than any other country, in the UK during my career as a result of the Research Assessment, and then Research Excellence exercises. So many of the academics who are my colleagues and peers now really are defined, and define themselves, in terms of their success at publishing in a small number of journals. So, being adept at that particular kind of game brings rewards, in terms of promotion and status. And that seems to me to be terribly unproductive in terms of either getting heard or developing work that can attach itself to the world in productive ways. As I said, it's a glass bead game, an internal conversation between academics. So I am profoundly suspicious about those kinds of practices. And particularly in the context of a general information economy, where we can have a whole variety of forms of knowledge and information, whether fake or useful, at the click of a button. I'm not quite sure what the future of the academic as a knowledge specialist is, in those kinds of contexts.

Lets take the example of COVID again. During early lockdown, I was reading a lot of the commentary and there were many excellent people writing really interesting and effective things. But most of them were political activists, journalists, bloggers and so on. Some of them were academics, but only some of them. And most of the academics were writing things that were much more specific and targeted, and about a particular aspect of COVID. So we really are only one player in the knowledge marketplace. And maybe we need to find ways of not muffling ourselves in the ways that we do currently. Finding ways of communicating more effectively.

Now, you talked about the kind of fact that I write a lot, and the reason I write a lot is because I really enjoy writing. For me writing is a practice that I've always found joyful and life-enhancing. So, I do a lot of it, because it's fun for me. Many academics now, I think, have been schooled into a form of writing that is a kind of writing in advance of pain. A writing which expects that you're going to be smacked by the big brother fairly soon. And as a result, their writing is very often quite stilted, quite specific, quite caveated, and coded in various ways, and ends up as a particular kind of language that's very internal, very difficult to get a handle on if you are outside the community. So it produces prickly texts. You can't really kind of land on them and find a home in it easily. So I think we need to teach academics how to write, I think we should all have mandatory courses in the PhD on how you communicate effectively. How do you write like a journalist? How do you write an 800-word piece for *The Conversation*? Or a decent blog entry? Or maybe even a popular book of some description that might actually get some sales? How do we do that stuff? Rather than writing this incredibly dense and often repelling prose?

JR: Yeah, I got this book by Billig, *Learn to write badly. How to succeed in the Social Sciences* (2013). And I think that also describes the situation very well.

MP: Yeah, that's a really nice book, Billig talks a lot about the ways in which particular sorts of sentence constructions and neologisms and phrasings allow us to recognise what academic work is like, what it does, as a particular kind of genre, almost. But that genre is so obscure and technical that the vast majority of people just can't get it. Just a quick anecdote on that. Many years ago, now, I wrote a book about pirates and outlaws and things (Parker, 2013). And I thought I'd written a real page turner, it's going to be a breakthrough book. Me and Naomi Klein, we're going to be

hanging around together pretty soon. And then my friend Kay, who's a really smart woman, not an academic, said 'this looks interesting, I'll have a go at that'. And she downloaded it and then emailed me a week or two later, saying 'I'm sure it's very good and everything, but I don't read books with references'. Now I'm a reasonable writer, and it was an interesting topic, but it's so hard to write something that really does appeal to a wider range of people. I don't know if *Shut down the business school* is more successful in that regard. I was very keen on trying to write that in as open a way as possible. But I don't know whether it's successful or not.

JR: In my opinion, very successful.

MP: Its not just about writing of course, because there are a variety of things that we need to do to the promotions criteria and appointments and the ways in which we think about academic labour and all the rest of it, in order to change the evaluations that academics have of each other and of themselves. But also, I think that there are kind of some practical tools, some ways in which we can help people think about writing as being fun, as being joyful. I've supervised many PhD students over the years, and only a very few of them would talk about writing positively. They were writing in advance of the idea that Professor Parker was going to give them a kick in the head after I told them that their referencing was wrong. I don't think you were ever particularly worried about that, Stevphen! But the idea that you're writing defensively, rather than expansively seems such a poor place to start from, if you want to open up ideas for a reader.

SS: I think you could expand that model to publishing as well. Publishing, like writing, should be an act of joy. It's something you do with others, where you protect a library and open up a space for being together rather than publishing so someone can kick you in the head.

MP: I think that's true. And it means that the economy of books and journals is kind of important, isn't it? Because there are a variety of university and radical publishers who have continued to produce excellent books and will continue to do so. The forms of publishing we're talking about are basically those which are mostly owned and controlled by a series of large conglomerates. And many of their kind of structures now effectively mean that they need to sell X number of copies in order to pay for a large infrastructure of distribution and marketing and all the rest of. And that means that they tend to go for safe stuff, they tend to reproduce things, which they know will sell in lots of different territories in reasonably big quantities. That's not a universal rule. But it's a general tendency, isn't it? So, one of the metaphors I quite often use in this regard is the idea of the rock tumbler. So you might start off with a really beautiful argument or book or idea or article. And then you put it into the kind of the rock tumbler of publishing, and it gets all these edges knocked off. And then it comes out smooth and harmless, and it can find itself a home within the economy of academic publishing. And very often, that means that you might start off with something good, but after the editors and the reviewers had a go at it, then it's just as bland as everything else.

JR: Is your alternative/complementary textbook on *Anarchism, organization and management. Critical perspectives for students* (2020) an effort to create sort of an alternative, 'parallel universe' curriculum – in case the business school does not get shut down, at least students can read your text parallel to the 'Organisational Behavior' (an Americanism that we also dislike) etc. standard vanilla textbooks?

MP: Yeah, that was definitely the idea. So this project started with two PhD students at Leicester, both of whom were influenced by anarchist ideas in various ways. And we talked about the idea of a textbook, and it's got text boxes and quick explanations of Kropotkin, Goldman and all the rest of them. And it's addressed to second- or third-year undergraduate students, and the idea was that you could recommend this as well as the U.S. textbook. That was what we were trying to go for. Here's what you need to know in order to pass the exam, but why don't you read this stuff as well, because that might be interesting? So, a fairly obvious example. So this is what they tell you that leadership is and why leadership is important and all that kind of stuff. But in our 'dark side' text, this is what anarchists have thought about leadership, it doesn't mean leadership is a redundant concept. You can think about it in a variety of different ways, temporary, collective, distributed or whatever. So yes, it was an attempt to think seriously about how we might talk to students about some of the ideas that they're not presented with. The problem was that the book came out just at the start of COVID. And so effectively it has been buried beneath the virus. So we've talked about trying to do some other kind of launch event later, just because we really do want it to be used. It wasn't meant to be a kind of vanity project, just sitting in Routledge's warehouse gathering dust.

JR: I think it's very nice book. And I certainly enjoyed reading many of the entries, because it really makes you think! I've been teaching these things for one or two decades. And it's so important to have an alternative perspective on it, and to critically question all these concepts.

SS: Martin had made a similar earlier effort in, I think, in 2005, with your book *For business ethics*, where you were trying to say: Here are what you need to know about business ethics. And here's how you can push that in a sort of more useful direction.

MP: Yeah, I think that's probably true. It's a similar kind of project, I actually hadn't thought about that. It's worth just kind of going back to anarchism, because it does seem to me that anarchism is the purest example of the idea that organising is contingent on circumstances. Because the stupidest thing you can say about anarchists is that they're not interested in organisation, that they don't believe in organisations, when they are absolutely committed to thinking about organising, but making it present in a way that allows them to complain about the aspects of it, they don't like very much. So in a sense, it's the best form of organisation theory we have, because it takes organising seriously. And it absolutely embeds that notion of organising as politics made durable. And the debates between a whole variety of different sorts of anarchists are very instructive in terms of different ways in which you might think about the

various rights, privileges and entitlements of human beings, whether individuals or collectives.

JR: Thank you so much for sharing your views and experiences, and summarising your work for us. Earlier, we already talked a bit about your exciting project to write a history of journals that I find super interesting, because as an editor of a very small and humble journal, I like to think about these things also from a historical perspective. And I certainly love to hear more about that particular project. Any other future projects? I mean, you already mentioned the philosophy of organising.

MP: Of course, I've got a long list of imaginary books I can bore you with, The journal one I would like to do at some stage. It would be a kind of Foucauldian history of knowledge practices, I think, that's what I'd be interested in doing is kind of trying to understand how the idea of the journal sedimented particular ideas about social class, but also masculinity and ethnicity and so on. Certain ideas emerging in coffee shops in cities across the global North produced this notion of the journal as a really interesting mechanism for an additive version of knowledge – in which you could say something like this. Dr. Boyle did this experiment last year, and he seems to have produced these particular kinds of outcome. So what if we did this kind of experiment? So I took Dr. Boyle's work, and then I did something else. And then, people could actually start to read about this project of building knowledge, which is certainly easy to criticise in lots of different ways. But it was also an extraordinarily world-changing way of thinking about how you collect the world together. So I don't just want to criticise some big corporation for making money from journals because I'm interested in the ways in which the idea of the journal also allowed for a very productive form of knowledge accumulation.

But there's loads of things I want to write about, and I won't have time to do them all. What I tend to do is I get interested in something, and then I start collecting piles of things on it, books, articles, comics, and all sorts of stuff. And then about five years after I thought of the thing, then I start to write digesting all the fragments as I go along.

> ***What I tend to do is I get interested in something, and then I start collecting piles of things on it, books, articles, comics, and all sorts of stuff. And then about five years after I thought of the thing, then I start to write about it.***

So the thing I'm writing about the moment or will be, on weeds. I got really interested in the idea of the weed as a concept, and particularly thinking about it in terms of relationship between organisation and disorganisation. And I think its an early foray into the philosophy of organising project. I've been reading lots of contemporary nature writing, and noticing the way that they think about disorganisation, disorder and cultivation. And I think it also kind of reflects my ambient horror about the climate crisis stuff too. I've never been particularly interested in trees and now I am trying to notice them a bit more. And then there's a variety of other projects. I'm going to write something on comic books because I've always been interested in them, and there's another Foucauldian book on the history of institutions. I've done work on the circus, and the zoo and they have been shadowed by Foucault's idea of the 'great incarceration' in which he writes about prisons and schools and hospitals and so on. I want to expand that argument and talk about the 'great institutionalisation'. So this is pretty much the same moment when we're seeing prisons and hospitals and schools and so on emerging. But add to that museums and art galleries, archives and opera houses, universities and zoos, and parks, and a whole range of ways in which things have been collected together, and encased for particular sorts of rather specialist purposes. And I'd like to write something on that, but that's a gigantic project.

JR: And is there anything that we have not discussed yet that you would like to raise?

MP: This is like the job interview question. At this point, would you think worse of me if I say no?

JR: No! [all laugh]

MP: Because at this point in the job interview, the panel are thinking: I really hope he doesn't ask another question, because I want a wee.

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Education's state of hegemony: Considering the contemporaneity of 'conscientisation'

nelson ang[A] [A] *Educator*

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Introduction

> I have always challenged the essentialism reflected in claims of a unitary experience of class and gender, inasmuch as it is assumed that suffering is a seamless web always cut from the same cloth. Oppression must always be understood in its multiple and contradictory instances, just as liberation must be grounded in the particularity of suffering and struggle in concrete, historical experiences, without resorting to transcendental guarantees.
>
> - Freire, 1993, p. x.

With greater access to education today than ever in history (Unicef, 2021), could hegemony continue to persist? Is a critical pedagogy still relevant and necessary?

Giroux (1988) contended that Freire's continued relevance as a viable alternative to the stasis of existing practice is constituted in his adroit combination of the "language of critique" and the "language of possibility" (p. 108). Freire believed that traditional education is aimed at domesticating learners into accepting oppressive structures; a form of dehumanisation. Whilst more people now have access to education, students are denied an education that is rooted in "a deeply civic, political, and moral practice – that is, pedagogy as a practice for freedom" (Giroux, 2010, p. 715). Instead, formal schooling, especially in institutes of higher learning, is rapidly being subjugated to the service of economic purposes and standardised testing. Indeed, Freire's alternative educational approach is aimed at liberation that combined study circles (called 'culture circles'), lived experience, work and politics (Schugurensky, 2014, p. 21). In so situating students' struggles in the particularities of their individual circumstances, Freire avoided the pessimism of being fraught with the might of systemic oppression, thus restoring the possibility of agency (Giroux, 2010).

The thoughts articulated in this text are the result of my 'critical encounter' with Freire; a dialogue that demanded me to believe that human agency can bring about transformation (McLaren & Leonard, 1993). I "will be satisfied if among the readers of this work there are those sufficiently critical to correct mistakes and misunderstandings, to deepen affirmations and to point out aspects I have not perceived" (Freire, 1970, p. 39).

Conscientisation

> … Freire's project of democratic dialogue is attuned to the concrete operations of power (in and out of the classroom) and grounded in the painful yet empowering process of conscientisation. This process embraces a critical demystifying moment in which structures of domination are laid bare and political engagement is imperative.
>
> - West, 1993, p. xiii.

The pain of conscientisation probably lies in an irrational fear of freedom. A fear that those who possess it are reluctant to admit to, or otherwise unconscious of, and mis-recognising the status quo as self-existent, to be preserved and protected. Conscientisation then stands accused of fueling a "destructive fanaticism" that threatens an illusionary freedom (Freire, 1970, p.35).

Liberation from oppression or to become oppressor?

The violence of dehumanisation afflicts both the oppressed and the oppressor; losing and stealing humanity equally denies the vocation of being. Emancipation is therefore necessarily a process of humanisation, a recovery of humanity, which can only be led by the oppressed for the liberation of both the oppressed and oppressor (Freire, 1970).

> But almost always, during the initial stage of the struggle, the oppressed, instead of striving for liberation, tend themselves to become oppressors, or "sub-oppressors."
>
> - Freire, 1970, p. 45.

Unfortunately, prolonged immersion in the structures of domination confuses the oppressed into believing that to be human is to be the oppressor; a distorted model of humanity prescribed, which stems from internalising the image of the oppressor and perhaps an as-yet surfaced fear of freedom (Freire, 1970). This fear of freedom causes the oppressed to desire to become an oppressor or accept their lot as the oppressed. Conscientisation breaks this fear, painfully. However, Freire did not intend for this realisation to be instantaneous or a mere point in time. Conscientisation is a continuous process of searching beneath the surface and revealing the hidden (Roberts, 1996). This process is praxis.

Praxis

> Functionally, oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it. This can be done only by means of the praxis: reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it.
>
> - Freire, 1970, p. 51.

Conscientisation is necessarily transformational. Reflective action must therefore not be reduced to a collection of techniques or strategies; rather, it ought to be imbued with a critical consciousness that is translated in a praxis (Estrela, 1999). The tendency is for oppressive realities to drown the consciousness of those living within such that change is not effected. Praxis calls on the subjectivity of the oppressed to critically intervene by objectifying the reality and acting upon it. This action is dialectical to a reflection of a concrete experience that is brought into greater clarity through dialogues (Freire, 1970).

Banking method and dialogic

Education is a human endeavour that has far-reaching consequences. Teaching and learning cannot be reduced to a mechanical transfer of quantifiable facts from the teacher to student; rather, they are profound social actions that could empower or domesticate (Shor, 1993). The classroom as a lifeless conveyor belt of neatly packaged knowledge domesticates not only the students but the teacher as well.

Banking method

> … Education is suffering from narration sickness.
>
> The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalised, and predictable. Or else, he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to "fill" the students with the contents of his narration – contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. Words are emptied of their concreteness and become hollow, alienated, and alienating verbosity.
>
> The outstanding characteristic of this narrative education, then, is the sonority of words, not their transforming power…
>
> - Freire, 1970, p. 71.

The banking method assumes that the students are empty vessels that require filling up with pre-determined narrations. Good teachers then fill students up completely and good students do not resist such a filling up. The banking driven classroom mirrors oppressive society inasmuch as the teacher is autonomous, authoritative, and hence the "Subject of the learning process" whist the student are mere objects and required to remain meek (Freire, 1970, p. 73).

Dialogic

> As we attempt to analyse dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something which is the essence of dialogue itself: the word… There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus, to speak a true word is to transform the world.
>
> - Freire, 1970, p. 87, emphasis in original.

Freire (1970) sees the word as constituting reflection and action, hence it is effectually praxis. Unfortunately, unauthentic word degenerates into alienated and alienating verbalism because it renders reflections impossible and deprives actions. Untruths dichotomise reflection and action because the word, being false, is powerless to denounce the world, vacating any commitment to transform the world, thereby negating actions. Conversely, preoccupation with actions begets activism and renders dialogue impossible because reflection is impeded.

Human existence is predicated on the naming (with word) and problematising (hence requiring renaming) of the world; a dialectical creation and re-creation. The foundation of the word is love thus positing the necessity of the subjectivity of the individual, which cannot otherwise exist under domination (Freire, 1970). However, some are precisely denied the word, their voice. Freire proffers a problem-posing education, which is "key to critical dialogue" (Shor, 1993, p. 26)

In such a problem-posing education, both teacher and students ask questions; particularly, students question answers vis-à-vis the more familiar answering of questions. In this way, students are active in their learning as they "experience education as something they do, not something done to them" (Shor, 1993, p. 26). Students then cease being the empty vessels that require filling up.

Situating Conscientisation in the 21st Century classroom

In considering the contemporaneity of Freirean conscientisation, we must avoid domesticating Freire and reducing his pedagogy to mere methods, a "fetish of methods" (Aronowitz, 1993, p. 8). Rather, Pedagogy of the

Oppressed is a social theory, a philosophy, and a praxis of politics that transforms through "helping students achieve a grasp of the concrete conditions of their daily lives, of the limits imposed by their situation on their ability to acquire what is sometimes called 'literacy'…" (Aronowitz, 1993, p.9). There is genuine convenience, hence temptation, to equate this literacy with improved mobility. Freire's problem-posing education is predicated on the development of a criticality so as to be able to view "the world not as a static reality but as a reality in the process, in transformation" (Freire, 1970, p. 83). This is from whence the American experience takes an unfortunate "phenomenological progressive" turn, imbuing the pessimism of the impossibility of social transformation, thus believing erroneously that salvation is possible only for the individual (Aronowitz, 1993, p. 11).

Across the pond, in a study on European students' perspectives on the purpose of university, 295 students across six European countries – Denmark, England, Germany, Ireland, Poland and Spain – were surveyed (Gupta, 2021). It was found that gaining decent employment, personal growth, and improving society were the most common purposes of university proffered by the students surveyed. It was also observed that these perspectives varied according to the amount students had to pay for their studies; the more they had to pay (England, Ireland, and Spain), the likelier they were to perceive employability as the main outcome of university education. Further, the researchers saw "a shift from a conception of higher education as an investment to help move up a social class to viewing it as insurance against downward social mobility"; with a university degree seen as necessary to avoid low-skilled jobs though the students believe it is insufficient for the higher-skilled ones (Gupta, 2021). Whilst gainful employment glosses an illusion of improved mobility over the perpetual domination of the students, they remain meek in acceptance of the jobs granted to them, the ontology upon which the banking driven classroom mirrors itself. People's fulfilment is tied to the possibility of creating their own worlds with labour that they are able to direct; otherwise, dehumanisation persists because "work that is not free ceases to be a fulfilling pursuit…" (Freire, 1970, p. 145).

Meanwhile, students from Denmark, Germany, and Poland, who pay less for their studies, were more likely to associate personal growth and societal improvements with university education. In particular, the students believed that university enables them to contribute towards "a more enlightened society, by creating a more critical and reflective society, and by helping their country to be viewed more competitively worldwide" (Gupta, 2021). Is praxis only possible if someone else is footing part, if not all, of the bill?

Are these sufficient purposes for the university today? Given the marketisation of higher education thus competition for student-consumer dollar, would a seat be afforded at the table for Freirean praxis? The answer is no and the structure will not pay for its own destruction. However, praxis does not constrict itself within a phenomenological pessimism that acquiesces to individual salvation (Aronowitz, 1993). To be Freirean is to reorder society; consciousness must never stop.

> Any attempt to "soften" the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity; indeed, the attempt never goes beyond this. In order to have the continued opportunity to express their "generosity", the oppressors must perpetuate injustice as well. An unjust social order is the permanent fount of this "generosity", which is nourished by death, despair, and poverty. This is why the dispensers of false generosity become desperate at the slightest threat to its source.
>
> - Freire, 1970, p. 44.

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Neary, M. (2020). *Student as producer*. Zero Books.

Mohamed Fadhil[A]

[A] *Lecturer, Kaplan Higher Education Institute Singapore*

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The core of *Student as producer* lies in its revolutionary curriculum, a manifesto wrapped around an exacting critique of the law of labour, that is the organising principle of capitalist work. The author Mike Neary aims his accusation primarily at the law of labour for ignoring the intellectual and educational needs of students in favour of pandering to the needs of the capitalist state and economic prosperity of the elite. Neary extends this criticism to the institutions where he observes the law of labour to be enforced, institutions he terms as capitalist universities. His account situates itself in a significant period in higher education in the United Kingdom, sandwiched between the student protests and urban riots that erupted in England in 2010-2011 and the 2017 General Election. These protests and riots were held in support for a government-supported higher education and other progressive social policies, as part of a new socialist political project. The design of the revolutionary curriculum in this book involves unlearning the law of labour and redefining the institutions through which this law is enforced. The institutions the author refers to include universities that he identifies as one of the primary sources for the sustenance of the capitalist system.

Mike Neary was formerly the Director of Research in the School for Social and Political Sciences at the University of Lincoln. He headed the *Student as producer* initiative at the university and suggested that students should move from being the object of the educational process supporting the capitalist economy to being its main subject (Jack, 2016). His critical reinterpretation of Marx's social theory forms the basis of most of his research work and writings. In his proposal of revolutionary teaching, he argues that students should not only be consumers of knowledge but instead, become its producers. This, he explains, can be achieved by engaging in meaningful, generative work alongside the university's faculty. His main aim is to establish a post-capitalist university, grounded historically in the radical practices and culture of the co-operative labour movement. Referencing the work of Russian legal theorist, Evgeny Pashukanis (who was denounced and executed as a Trotskyite saboteur in 1937), *Student as producer* seeks answers by examining how cooperatives can come together, united by a mutual sense of common purpose and social wellbeing. He suggests that this theory ought to be applied to "various aspects of pedagogy, criminology, and political sociology to create curricula for revolutionary teaching that will support activists looking for opportunities to engage critically with higher education" (Neary, 2021, p. 3) and remove them from the shackles of capitalist ideologies. He argues that the answer to the question of how revolutionary teachers impart knowledge lies not only in the idea of implementing critical pedagogy but in fact, can be found in the reconstructing of a knowledge economy at the level of society. This is necessary as Neary suggests that capitalist production had transformed the world into a "global labour camp" (p. 3). This is a disturbing phenomenon that Neary argues has to be addressed and unlearned.

This book can be considered as a manifestation of Neary's critical reinterpretation of Marx's social theory. The first chapter begins by orientating the reader about the curricula or the course of action needed to initiate a revolution in the university, followed by the second chapter which presents the author's personal perspective in the wake of the protests in the United Kingdom. The second chapter underlines the main aim of the book as a resistance necessary to counter the assault on higher education and the political economy. This chapter also delivers a harsh critique against the police whom Neary accuses of supporting the capitalist regime instead of upholding democracy and justice. The third chapter builds upon this critique and defines the author's reinterpretation of Marxism in Walter Benjamin's "The author as producer" (1934).

In the next chapter, Neary presents the reformist ideas of revolutionary teachers such as Freire, Ranciére and Allman. Neary ends this chapter highlighting that Freire's ideas about education resonate most with the ideas presented in *Student as producer*. In the fifth chapter, the author consolidates all his arguments from the earlier chapters highlighting that the co-operative university is not the end goal but merely a step in establishing the democratic principle towards the ambition of realising "a communist future", free from the fetters of the capitalist economy (p. 40). Finally, in the last chapter, aptly titled "Afterword: authority and authorship", Neary proposes his version of the police which he terms as the 'not-police'(p. 250). He describes this version as a new form of social institution needed to defend a society attempting to deny authoritarianism and responsible for executing the pedagogic function to sustain common

purpose and social defence.

Student as producer proves itself to be an acerbic and captivating critique of capitalist education systems. The individual arguments in each chapter have been seamlessly weaved into a coherent narrative to restate the meaning and purpose of higher education by reconnecting the core activities of universities. Some parts in this book remind us of Professor Raewyn Connell's work *The good university*, where she similarly argued for reforms in higher education and highlighted the importance of involving all stakeholders to create an inclusive research and learning environment working towards authentic knowledge production (Connell, 2019; Irving & Connell, 2016). *Student as producer*, to a large extent, emphasises the role of the students as collaborators central to the production of knowledge. However, the author responsibly acknowledges that this idea is not new and in fact, constructed upon the ideas of thinkers such as Freire and Allman.

Despite proposing a radical reform movement in proposing a co-operative university based on democratic foundations as described in chapter five, the book fails to take into consideration the different contexts and cultures global universities are situated in. While the idea of liberating the critical collective intelligence of society as a form of "intellectual emancipation" (Neary, 2020, p. 43) may be courageous, the political inclinations in one country are likely very much different from that of another (Altiparmakis, et al., 2021). In a predominantly capitalist world adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic (Carnevale et al., 2020; Kolodko, 2020), the idea of universities as a revolutionary instrument in the UK and elsewhere sounds far-fetched. In my opinion, universities, in capitalist systems or otherwise, continue to provide excellent contributions and ought to be lauded for their resilience in adapting to the changing norms in the wake of the pandemic. Such revolutionary ideas however, ought to be considered through a lens of scepticism and the attention instead, shifted towards the introduction of progressive reforms to facilitate and support universities adapting to the new normal of the COVID-19 pandemic world.

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McLaren, Peter (writer) & Wilson, Miles (illustrator) (2019). *Breaking free. The life and times of Peter McLaren, radical educator.* Myers Education Press.

Jürgen Rudolph[A]

[A] *Head of Research & Senior Lecturer, Kaplan Singapore; Editor-in-chief, Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching*

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Not being allowed to read comics during my childhood, it is unsurprising that I have ever since enjoyed reading them and that I was attracted to this comic book about a critical pedagogue, Peter McLaren. The book is an attempt to further popularise McLaren's astonishingly prolific writings and to initiate especially younger readers who may be unfamiliar with his work and life. Undoubtedly, author Peter McLaren and illustrator Miles Wilson (a young artist and filmmaker who is pursuing a Master's degree in film editing) had fun putting this entertaining, yet controversial, book together.

The autobiographical subject of the book deserves a brief introduction. On the surface, Peter McLaren's (born 1948) biography reads fairly standard for any outstanding academic. He is a Canadian scholar who has authored and edited more than 40 books and hundreds of scholarly articles and chapters. McLaren left Canada in 1985 to teach at Miami University where he worked with Henry Giroux, another well-known critical pedagogue. Later appointments were at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and Chapman University. At present, McLaren serves as Distinguished Professor at Chapman University, where he is also Co-Director of the Paulo Freire Democratic Project. He is also Emeritus Professor at UCLA and Miami University of Ohio, amongst other impressive accomplishments and accolades (see McLaren and Jandrić, 2014).

It is, however, less standard that McLaren also happens to be a Marxist humanist and a critical pedagogue. The book cover immediately gives this away: the top part of the suitably colourful front cover shows Mount Rushmore-like some of McLaren's hero(ine)s: Karl Marx, Paulo Freire, Angela Davis and Che Guavara. While this is not the place to review McLaren's massive oeuvre, it is useful to briefly refer to some of his key works, if only to ascertain that we are dealing with a serious yet iconoclastic educationist. McLaren taught working-class immigrant and minority group children in an inner-city elementary school in Toronto's notoriously violent Jane-Finch Corridor from 1974-1979. *Cries from the Corridor*, McLaren's book about his teaching experiences, was one of the top ten bestselling books in Canada in 1980 and initiated a country-wide debate on inner-city schools. Later, McLaren transformed his earlier work into perhaps his most famous book, *Life in Schools. An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education* which is currently in its sixth edition. In-between the two books, McLaren also transformed himself "from a liberal humanist… to a Marxist humanist" (McLaren, 2003, p. xxxi). In 2006, the right-wing Bruin Alumni Association identified McLaren as the "most dangerous professor at UCLA", placing him on the top of a list of 30 left-wing professors who became known as "the dirty thirty" (Fassbinder & McLaren, 2006; McLaren, 2021).

McLaren's first major scholarly publication, *Schooling as a ritual performance. Towards a political economy of educational symbols and gestures* (first published in 1986), was based on his PhD dissertation. From around 1994, McLaren broadened the scope of his writing from being an educational theorist (whose writings were largely directed at schooling) to additionally being a critical political economist. McLaren has written much about Freire and is strongly influenced by the Brazilian educationist. Both authors exemplify the inextricable interrelatedness of continual theorisation with critical praxis.

Figure 1: A Teachers College building (in La Escuela Normal Superior de Neiva) named after Peter McLaren in Neiva, Colombia. Source: Chapman University, https://blogs.chapman.edu/education/2017/08/24/teachers-college-building-named-after-dr-peter-mclaren/.

The comic genre necessitates condensation. *Breaking Free's* four-page preface precedes 103 autobiographical comic-book-style pages that are divided into eight periods. Part 1, "Early Life", wittily describes McLaren growing-up as an only child in a working-class neighbourhood in Toronto, before his father's career enabled the family to move to Winnipeg. Part 2, "Hippie Days" chronicles McLaren's hitch-hiking through the U.S. as a young adult, looking for like-minded spirits who were also opposing the Vietnam War (or American War, as the Vietnamese call it).

Part 3, "College Days", is less about McLaren's studies at the University of Toronto in the early 1970s, and more about his solidaric sentiments with Black Panthers like Angela Davis and Malcolm X, and his being angered by the disproportionate number of people of colour being recruited in the infantry and sent to the front lines of the American War. Musical favourites were protest singers Woody Guthrie and Bob Dylan and blues musicians Robert Johnson and Muddy Waters.

"Teaching Days" (part 4) is only three pages short, while part 5 ("Working with the Corridor kids") is disproportionately long at 32 pages. The fourth chapter reconstructs McLaren's conscious decision to teach working-class students, having realised that parental wealth and social power were strongly correlated with student success and that he could have more impact working with underprivileged children. In chapter 5, McLaren narrates his experience of teaching students from grade two all the way to grade eight for five years. This was an extremely trying period of his life, as most of the kids were from poor, dysfunctional, often single-parent families, with their parents often holding two or even three jobs simultaneously to make ends meet and the children facing hardship at home and violence in the streets. Given the children's background, it is unsurprising, that he encountered rebellious students on an almost daily basis. During the first few weeks of his teaching in the Jane-Finch Corridor, McLaren was faced with the decision "to change my entire approach or sacrifice my stomach" (p. 52). The teaching experience led to the publication of his first book, *Cries from the Corridor* (McLaren, 1980). The chapter ends with an illustration of Brazilian liberation theologian, Dom Hélder Câmara and his quote: "When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist" (cited in p. 65). McLaren's first book provided a vivid description of the working class school in inner-city Toronto, but in his own analysis, it fell short in providing "an explanation for why those kids were so ferocious and a much deeper analysis of structural racism and class warfare in a capitalist society" (p. 65).

The drawing that starts off part six ("Graduate study") is clearly an homage to the poster for Stanley Kubrick's controversial *A clockwork orange movie*. One of the classic film posters of all time that shows a vicious-looking Malcolm McDowell wielding a glinting knife is transformed into Peter McLaren brandishing a giant pencil. To describe the character Alex (played by McDowell) as an enfant terrible would be an understatement, but in this chapter, McLaren certainly also has some shock value by focusing his own major theoretical influences on the seemingly contradictory duo of Marx and Jesus. After having grown up as an evangelical Christian (McLaren, 2019), his Christian beliefs now appear to be much closer to Latin American liberation theology. In McLaren's interpretation, there is no contradiction between Christianity and Marxism, as "Jesus maintains an intransigent condemnation of the rich" (p. 68). McLaren's fascination with Marx is explained as follows:

> "Reading Karl Marx helped me question why the United States has the largest defence expenditures in the world, the highest level of economic inequality among developed countries, and the world's greatest per capita health expenditures... and, why – among developed nations – does the U.S. have the lowest life expectancy. Why does such a rich country have the lowest measures of equality of opportunity?" (p. 68).

References would be utterly misplaced in a comic book, but to my astonishment, some quick Google searches confirmed all the above claims. It may be added that many countries that are not classified as 'developing countries' may do worse in terms of economic inequality and life expectancy.

Part seven is titled "Professor days" and continues with meetings with major leftist theoreticians who influenced McLaren. A page each is dedicated to Paulo Freire and Antonia Darder (see my other book review in this JALT special issue: Rudolph, 2021), and this section is populated with many other leftist intellectuals that McLaren encountered and admires (including a powerful critique of the mass media by Noam Chomsky).

The section concludes with McLaren's work in Mexico, Central, and South America, some of it with indigenous communities. It once again shows that McLareen is quite an unusual Professor. While I am intrigued by McLaren's re-interpretation of critical pedagogy having to include learning "from our indigenous ancestors" (p. 81) and his support of indigenous people like the Rarámuri (in the Mexican state of Chihuahua), he also has more controversial associations. For instance, a meeting with the late Venezuelan autocrat Hugo Chávez (1954 – 2013) is uncritically narrated – and later in *Breaking Free* (p. 85) as well as in other writings, McLaren stated his very vocal support for Chávez (McLaren, 2019, 2021).

The final section, entitled "Days of Rage" has another intriguing cover image, this time McLaren replaces Argentine revolutionary Che Guevara. Days of Rage originally refers to a series of violent street protests organised by the Weathermen (a faction of Students for a Democratic Society) in October 1969 in protest against the Vietnam War. Another reviewer had also been puzzled by this title, as McLaren is non-violent and would not call for violent street protests (Whitcomb, 2020). However, McLaren has written about "critical rage" (2019) that would appear to be peaceful.

A surprising six pages in the book's final section are dedicated to McLaren's friend Joel Kovel, the colourful founder of eco-socialism, and his works. In 2014, McLaren became Distinguished Professor at Chapman University and

Figure 2: A Venezuelan mural with Hugo Chávez, Simón Bolívar (19th century-Venezuelan liberator and Latin American independence hero), and Nicolás Maduro. Source: Cuotto, 2020.

continues to work there with other Freirians for common goals (he was writing these lines, while Trump was still President):

> "We must fight fascism, anti-semitism, racism, ableism, sexism, homophobia and the coloniality of power at every turn… Right now is a crucial time to fight fascism all around the world and to save the planet from humans who deny climate change and destroy the biosphere on a regular basis" (pp. 95-96).

In the Epilogue, McLaren distances himself from the Soviet Union and "former Eastern Bloc police states", as they were "state capitalist" and not truly socialist (p. 101). The book ambiguously ends with the call to break free and rebuild the world.

Many readers will disagree with McLaren's politics. To choose but one example, I was disturbed by his silence on Chávez's autocratic rule, the latter's muzzling of the media and destruction of an independent judiciary as well as his corrupt, incompetent and dictatorial regime. While Chávez, in 1998, was elected President on his promise of poverty alleviation, the Bolivarian socialist soon turned autocrat and modelled Venezuela's political and economic system after Castro's Cuba. Chávez befriended dictators such as Saddam Hussein, Robert Mugabe, Muammar Qaddafi and Bashar Assad and his chosen heir Nicolás Maduro further impoverished the oil-rich country (*The Economist*, 2013a, b). Economic mismanagement and political repression led to an exodus of millions of Venezuelans – "the biggest movement of people in Latin America's recent history" – as well as hyper-inflation, increased infant mortality, food and medicine shortages and increased poverty (*The Economist*, 2018a, b, 2019). McLaren does not only have misplaced sympathies for Chávez's autocratic regime but also for communist Cuba.

Academic freedom of expression is an important ideal, and the author, this reviewer and readers may have to agree to disagree on some of McLaren's political thoughts. All in all, *Breaking free: The life and times of Peter McLaren, radical educator* offers an artistic retelling of the life and key works of McLaren and questions the reduction of education to

Figure 3: The consequences of *chavismo*. Shoppers queuing outside a store for government-subsidised products in March 2014. Source: Wilfredo. Creative Commons license CC0. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shortages_in_Venezuela#/media/File:Escasez_en_Venezuela,_Mercal.JPG

mere classroom practices. Peter McLaren has certainly lived an interesting life, and in line with the ethos of critical pedagogy, his work deserves a critical reading that avoids automaton conformity. This comic book presents as good an introduction as any to McLaren's massive oeuvre.

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Darder, Antonia (2018). *The student guide to Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury.

Jürgen Rudolph[A]

[A] *Head of Research & Senior Lecturer, Kaplan Singapore; Editor-in-chief, Journal of Applied Learning & Teaching*

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Probably the two works which have elicited the most exegeses (not always 'critical interpretations') of all writings produced through the ages, are the bible and Karl Marx's works. While Brazilian educational philosopher Paulo Freire's famous work is nowhere near as popular as those two, Freire established himself with the publication of *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, as one of the most radical and important educational thinkers of the last century. In terms of the bible and *Das Kapital*, it is one of the apparent contradictions of Freire that he was both a Catholic (in fact, a co-founder of the Liberation Theology movement in Latin America) and a Marxist humanist.

Such apparent contradictions, however, could be perceived as an implicit opposition to a narrow Aristotelean logic and an embrace of what Erich Fromm, in *The art of loving* (1956), called paradoxical thinking. In other words, Marxism and Christianity could be seen as A and non-A excluding each other, but in Freire's thinking, they may have been part of the paradoxical rationality of the decolonising mind. A slightly different explanation of the peaceful co-existence of the two -isms (Catholicism and Marxism) in Freire's thinking is provided by the early epistemologist of the South himself: "God led me to the people, and the people led me to Marx" (cited in Schugurensky, 2014, p. 98). And according to Freire's widow, who is interviewed in the final chapter of the book under review: "Paulo… acknowledged the influence of the church on his thinking, but he also critiqued the traditional church, which merely reproduces the fear of God and intimidates and mistreats, castigates and punishes the people" (p. 160).

The publication history of *The pedagogy of the oppressed* is rather fascinating. Despite Freire writing in (Brazilian) Portuguese, the book was first published in Spanish (1968) and in English (1970). At that time, Brazil was at the height of a dictatorship and not only was it completely impossible to publish the book: Freire had been forced into exile, his work could not be discussed at universities, and even his very name was unmentionable. Thus it took till 1974 that the book could finally be published in Brazil.

Figure 1. The Penguin edition of *Pedagogy of the oppressed* features the above cover art by an uncredited artist (photo by the author) that at a glance, looks like a gun and is of course meant to resemble one. A more careful viewing reveals that it is a very sharp pencil fixed with a rubber band on a triangular piece of wood. Not only is the pen mightier than the sword: The pencil is mightier than the gun?

Antonia Darder's generally excellent student guide (that rightfully regards Freire's most famous book, *The pedagogy of the oppressed*, as worthy of exegesis) is meaningfully enhanced with a foreword by Donaldo Machedo (the translator of many of Freire's works and a leading Freire expert in his own right), and an enjoyable and informative interview with Ana Maria Araújo (Nita) Freire (Paulo's surviving second wife) from 2016. Antonia Darder is a Puerto Rican and American scholar, artist, poet and activist. She holds the Leavey Presidential Endowed Chair in Ethics and Moral Leadership in the School of Education at Loyola Marymount University.

The student guide proper kicks off with a succinct, yet insightful biographical sketch ("Lived History") which is accompanied by a dozen of well-chosen black-and-white photographs throughout Freire's vita. Freire's biography is well-known and it is unnecessary in our current context to reconstruct it. Apart from the chapter in Darder's book, a more detailed insight can be gained in another Bloomsbury publication, Daniel Schugurensky's *Paulo Freire* (2014). Freire's biography has been broken down into three main periods: Early Brazil (1921-1964); Exile (1964-1980) and Late Brazil (1980-1997). Parts of Freire's childhood were

characterised by poverty and the dehumanising and humiliating experience of hunger. To cite Freire: "I didn't understand anything [in school] because of my hunger. I wasn't dumb. It wasn't lack of interest. My social condition didn't allow me to have an education" (cited in p. xviii).

The book's second, well-structured chapter focuses on Freire's "Intellectual History" and is organised in three main sections with further subdivisions. The main inclusion criterion for discussing certain traditions and authors was whether or not Freire is citing their works in *The pedagogy of the oppressed*. Chapter 2's sections are: (1) Early influences (sub-divided into: radical theological influences, Latin American philosophy, existentialism, and phenomenology); (2) revolutionary influences (Marxism; Marxist intellectuals; critical theory; and anticolonial theory); and (3) educational philosophical influences (Henri Bergson; John Dewey, and Pierre Furter).

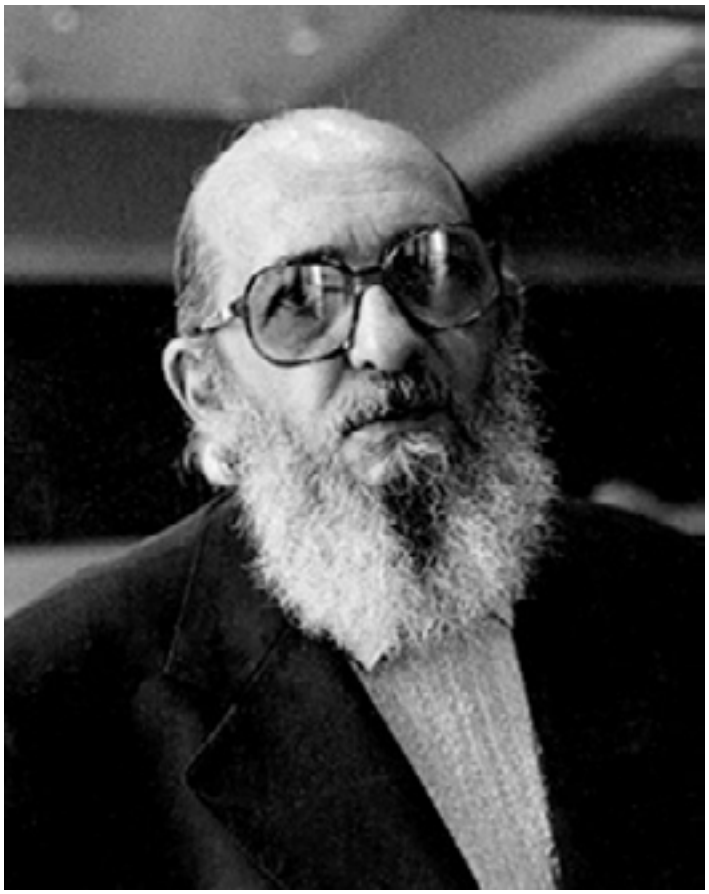

Figure 2. Paulo Freire started to sport a big beard from around 1970 onwards. This photo from 1977 was taken by Slobodan Dimitrov (CC BY-SA 3.0 license).

In chapter 2, just as for the remainder of the book, there are too many interesting passages to discuss within the narrow confines of a book review. The parts that interested me most, and that I knew relatively the least about, were the succinct introductions to Frantz Fanon's and Albert Memmi's postcolonial theories and their divergences. Memmi, a Tunisian Muslim and son of a Jewish-Italian father and Berber mother, aptly described the economic and ideological phenomenon of colonialism as akin to fascism, with racialised violence being its instrument of human oppression.

Chapter 3 provides a helpful dialogue with the book, reconstructing its main themes chapter by chapter. It focuses on the many key concepts that can be found in Freire's seminal text: in chapter 1 of the original text, some of Freire's key concepts are humanisation as an inescapable concern; alienation as the colonised mentality of oppression; the oppressor-oppressed contradiction as a tragic dilemma; and pedagogy as revolutionary praxis. In chapter 2 of *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Freire set out to unveil how education functions as an instrument of oppression. He introduced his famous *banking concept of education* in which "knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those who they consider to know nothing", with people consequently being turned into automatons (p. 108). Freire counter-proposed a *problem-posing pedagogy* in which dialogue is indispensable and that aims at reinventing education for the practice of freedom. One of the trickiest and most important terms in Freire' terminology is conscientização, a term often kept untranslated in its Portuguese original. It is perhaps best translated as 'critical consciousness' (a better choice than the somewhat clumsy 'conscientisation'?).

Freire, in chapter 3 of *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, discussed the dialogics of the word and naming the world and provided a methodology of conscientização so that people can become masters of their own thinking. In Freire's final chapter 4, he unapologetically asserted the revolutionary nature of his approach, arguing for the "umbilical cord of magic and myth which binds [us] to the world of oppression" to be cut and for the oppressed to unite (Freire, cited in p. 146). Darder's final chapter comes in the form of an interview with Freire's widow, in which Madam Freire sheds useful light on the impact, influences and legacy of Freire. Compared to the dense prose of the previous chapter, this one makes for enjoyable reading.

To this open-minded reviewer, much of Freire's life and his works in general – and much of this student guide – are intriguing and well worth our critical consideration. To me, however, the nefarious 20th century trio of Hitler, Stalin and Mao are a red flag. While Freire has thankfully nothing nice to say about the first two evil dictators, he has written approvingly on Mao Zedong's misnamed 'cultural revolution' (following the catastrophe of the 'Great Leap Forward' (another gross misnomer) during which tens of millions of Chinese died of starvation). In 1968 (when *Pedagogy of the oppressed* was first published), the horrors of Maoism were still relatively unknown, so Freire and other contemporary leftists might be forgiven for their enchantment with Mao as a result of their ignorance of the horrors of the Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap Forward. In *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Freire argues that "the culture of domination" needs to be "culturally confronted" and links this to the following approving footnote: "This appears to be the fundamental aspect of Mao's Cultural Revolution" (Freire, 1993, p. 28, fn. 10).

I have even greater difficulties with Freire's statement from 1974, made two years before Mao's death and at a time when the horrors of the Cultural Revolution had become

more well-known. Freire wrote in a difficult-to-access article, entitled "Conscientisation", that revolutionary changes of the "infrastructure" of society are usually not accompanied by a concomitant change of the "superstructure: While Freire is at least critical of Stalin (who, as Freire sarcastically writes, finally "solved" the problem "by shooting down the peasants"), he comments: "It is also the problem that Mao Tse-tung had and has, but he came up with the most genial solution of the century: China's cultural revolution" (Freire, cited in Khakpour, 2020). My difficulties become immense when more than ten years later, in 1985, Freire writes in his *Politics of education: culture, power, and liberation*:

> "One of the great merits of the Chinese Cultural Revolution was its rejection of static, antidialectical, or overconservative concepts of China's history. Here there seems to be a permanent mobilization of the people in the sense of consciously creating and re-creating society. In China, to be conscious is not a slogan or a ready-made idea. To be conscious is a radical way of being, a way characteristic of humanity" (Freire, cited in Khakpour, 2020).

Figure 3. A scene from the ballet *Red detachment of women* (1972 production), one of the model dramas promoted during the Cultural Revolution. Photo by Byron Schumaker (public domain). Source: https://web.archive.org/web/20051227194520/http://www.gmu.edu/library/specialcollections/acsnic6_13_8f.jpg

With Freire himself failing to distance himself from the horrors of Maoism, some critical evaluation of Maoism in Darder's only recently-published book would have been most appreciated. Otherwise, the accusation could be made that the critical Left somewhat fails to criticize even the most disastrous leftist ideas that led to incredible suffering and deaths of millions. Uncritical exegesis could easily turn into hagiography. In particular, I am referring to a footnote that links Althusser's critique of education to Mao (p. 61) and the discussion of "cultural revolution as living praxis" in Freire's chapter 4 (pp. 147-149).

To be sure, my major disappointment in terms of admiring references to Mao's Cultural Revolution is more with Freire himself rather than with Darder's book. I have, however, also other minor issues with the book under review. The book largely omits Freire's and Ivan Illich's mutual influence on each other. Perhaps Gabbard in his *Silencing Ivan Illich Revisited* (2020: that I reviewed in another JALT issue – Rudolph, 2020) was right after all that Illich has been excluded from the canon of educational philosophy, also in the context of Freire? Another area for improvement would be to reference better. Darder's Chapter 3, in particular, does not provide any page numbers to *The pedagogy of the oppressed* which would have made it so much easier to cross-reference to the book that the student guide studies.

At around 200 pages, this is a relatively slim tome. I would have found it useful to also make more comparisons between *The pedagogy of the oppressed* and other works by the prolific Freire. In particular, Freire's *Pedagogy of hope* (1994) is a revisiting of his earlier book, and it could have been useful to compare and contrast the two books systematically. Antonia Darder could counter-argue that if she had followed my wish, she would have well gone beyond the scope of her book, which after all was to be a *A student guide to Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed*. Moreover, Darder has authored another book which offers a more holistic approach on Freire: *Reinventing Paulo Freire. A pedagogy of love* (2017).

It is precisely this thought of reinvention that Freire also endorsed:

> "Freire often reminded those who praised and adopted his ideas to not try to imitate his pedagogy, which was grounded in a particular historical and geographical context, but rather that we should seek ways to reinvent his ideas, so that our labor might truly be in sync with the actual conditions teachers are facing within their particular historical and geographic contexts" (pp. 18-19).

This means that if we discover flaws in a work such as Freire's, or things that are not applicable to a particular historical and geographical context, we should feel free to reinvent them. Freire's humility here is redeeming and makes him part of my ever-growing 'toolbox' when thinking about, and practicing, learning and teaching. Despite the above-mentioned critical comments, I nonetheless recommend Darder's book highly to all interested in Freire and his educational thought. Although Freire's own prose packs a punch, it is not easy to read. Consequently, many readers may like to get some support in appreciating his approach, and Darder provides much valuable scaffolding in interpreting Freire.

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Presentation and Discussion

Bras Basah Open: School of Theory & Philosophy

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Stevphen Shukaitis: For this conference rather than a keynote from a single academic we decided to have one from an alternative educational project. Sticking with the divergence from traditional academic norms, rather than give a formal introduction of them I'd like to tell a little story.

I've been coming to Singapore fairly regularly since 2011. I don't want to rehash a whole list of cultural stereotypes about Singapore but it's not the kind of place you think you'd go to for finding experimental art, music and literature. But what I discovered is that after spending more time in Singapore is that in fact there's a lot of interesting things happening in those areas. And that ranges from things happening in terms of art at spaces like the Substation, or music being released by Ujikaji Records. And one of the most interesting projects I've been lucky enough to meet people from is the Bras Basah Open.

I remember going to one of their events. It was a Tuesday night. There were like 80 or 90 people coming out on a Tuesday night to talk about critical theory. That impressed me because people who were there had already done their readings and were really engaged with the topic. It struck me that here's another example of a group of people who are engaged in very interesting art, media, political work or activity outside of a formal institutional environment. When we came to organizing this conference it seemed really logical to invite them along to talk about their project and experiences.

Nazry Bahrawi: Thank you, Stevphen. I will start the presentation and there'll be two other speakers. So let me just go through it. We would first like to express thanks to Essex and also Kaplan, for inviting us to speak at what I think is a very timely conference, especially given the current conditions with Covid-19. Today Bras Basah Open School of Theory and Philosophy, or BBO for short, will be represented by three of five members. By way of a brief introduction, we are a collective of like-minded individuals from different disciplines and interests who want to help create an informal space for the public to discuss critical ideas and its application to society at large.

These are basically the contents for our presentation today. I've included here a brief that describes what we actually do. And this brief was taken from the Singapore Writers Festival booklet that we participated in last year, not the booklet but the event itself because it succinctly captures what we do.

You will also see the five core members here and I want to introduce them to you briefly in turn. On the far right of your screen is Shayus Shahida Sharif, who is an academic coach and learning facilitator. She'll be speaking later about pedagogy and the interfaces we use as a collective. To her right is Farhan Idris, researcher and educator trained in comparative philosophy. And to his right is Shawn Chua, researcher, dramaturge and artist in the field of the performing arts. Shawn will be speaking later on various entry points and anchors across the context we reference as well as one specific program that we run that we call TheoryFILM. Next to Sean is Nurul Huda, who is a researcher, writer and visual artist, who is infatuated with the idea or the venture of archiving knowledges and events. My name is Nazry Bahrawi and I'm an academic translator and literary critic, interested in decolonial thoughts and text across the Indian Ocean.

Sadly, Farhan and Nurul couldn't join us today because of other commitments. So the three of us will try to carry the presentation for them. As an informal collective, our ethos is not to represent ourselves as an organization. Instead, we each bring to BBO varying ideas and influences. In our discussion just prior to this presentation, Shawn puts it best when he described BBO as being refracted through each of our personal investments. And to give you a sense of how wide-ranging and diverse we are, we have created a mind map of the kinds of topics we tackle.

In terms of the coverage of the issues that we do, you will definitely notice some breadth, but I want to reassure you too that we do our best to try to delve deep into the topics we tackle. So, in the spirit of personal reflection, I would also like to introduce BBO in terms of how it came into being as a response to certain prevailing ideas in Singapore, when we first started back in 2018. We've just been about two years in operation. I say this by tapping into my experience as a

humanities lecturer at an engineering university.

Figure 1: selected events organised by BBO.

On the screen, you will see some of the events that we've organised. Specifically, you will see three posters and two events. Stevphen earlier talked about the number of people that have attended our events and it's very encouraging, at least from the two pictures here. As the pictures indicate, most of the time we get quite a packed room of people, which is very encouraging to us in terms of what it represents. On the next slide you will see some of the ideas that we're responding to and I'm going to talk about them very briefly.

The first is the widespread idea of academia as an ivory tower. This basically means that knowledge produced by academics is only accessible to other academics, which creates a kind of elitism. This closed sphere of the academia is enabled by features such as the tenure track system, as well as restricted access to research materials and academic jargons. Another idea that I think we're responding to is the fear of abstraction, and by this I'm referring to the idea that theory has little contribution to the real world. This is an issue that resonates in many parts of the world – it's certainly not something that is unique to Singapore. But the fear of abstraction is even more pronounced in uber-pragmatic Singapore where ventures are often judged by what gains one can derive from them. Simply put, theory is held as airy fairy. And the third idea that I think we're spent responding to is the keen pursuit of democratization of knowledge.

This is also interrelated to the first two points. The warm response from the kinds and number of people joining us on Tuesday night just to have a heavy discussion, which sometimes lasts till beyond 10pm, suggests that there is indeed a keen interest from folks in Singapore to participate in a process of knowledge creation that isn't dictated purely by the academia and that doesn't shy away from theoretical engagement.

In the next slide, I'll talk about how we kind of responded to all three of these. In response to this, I would like to outline the three frameworks that have been bandied about amongst ourselves, in our own discussions. These are informal academia, critical humanities and decoloniality.

Informal academia challenges the highly-bureaucratized university which in Singapore (and I think so too elsewhere) has turned the university into an institution that produces graduates to serve the economy. As a collective that is not limited by ideas of tenure or closed access to materials, we can operate slightly more freely. Critical Humanities meanwhile is a concept that can also be taken synonymously with public humanities. This basically means that we want to make available knowledges, theoretical concepts and frameworks to a wider audience outside of the university circle. This means building communities and seeing ourselves not as teachers, but as facilitators and enablers. We oftentimes in our events invite our audience members to suggest events and work with us and some of these have come to fruition. Especially so in Singapore, we have not quite taken to the humanities in the same way that the UK has taken to the humanities. In Singapore, we have established the Social Science Research Council, but we have not quite established an Arts and Humanities Research Council, nor do we have something equivalent to the Royal Society of Literature as an independent arts institution that supports and can give funding to promoting humanities research. We're missing the infrastructure for the flourishing of humanities in the public sphere. Bras Basah Open is one instance of how maybe some of us are responding to that. I use the term Critical Humanities, and the term 'critical' here means that while we engage theory, we also want to make the extra effort to try to contextualise the frameworks and concept to try to make sense of it in Singapore. I've already mentioned that a related idea here might be the notion of applied humanities. Our appeal to contextualisation and application is not so much a utilitarian idea. Rather we consider it a kind of decolonial move, and that is to say, we want to pursue the co-creation of knowledge by considering knowledges that make better sense to our lived experience and not to blindly import knowledges from elsewhere.

We've signalled this objective quite early on through our first book discussion with Professor Farid Alatas by reading chapters from his co-edited volume, *Sociological Theory Beyond The Canon*.

Shawn Chua: Thank you so much, Nazry, for kind of developing a framework for this and covering the ethos of Bras Basah Open. My background was in Cultural Anthropology and I did my Masters in Performance Studies and I've been working within the Performing Arts and as a researcher, educator and an artist. That's kind of the entry points that I have into this. During my section, I'll try to paint a little bit about the ecology in which our activities take place and I also take you through, more specifically, the TheoryFILM series.

This gorgeous map that was done by Nurul as a way to begin to draft the kind of themes that we keep coming back to. I think Nazry mentioned earlier, decoloniality is something that is a very important orientation for us and we do make a concerted effort to make sure whether it's in the programming of the films or speakers or the kind of readings as well that we are also casting the spotlight on academia and scholarship that is usually left out of the canon. And more importantly, to put them in conversation with the discourses that are happening.

Figure 2: BBO's themes.

For the TheoryFILM series, this started in 2018. Our very first TheoryFILM was actually helmed by Nazry as well, and the idea behind TheoryFILM was that we wanted to play with the idea of pairings. This Theory Film as a series was actually a kind of collaboration between Bras Basah Open and soft/WALL/studs, which is an independent art space in Singapore.

We were interested in thinking about what pairings can do. What happens when we pair theory and film. When we did this it was very clear that it wasn't about film theory necessarily, it wasn't exclusively about film theory. It's not about trying to apply the films to the theory, but we also want you to see how the film becomes a kind of theoretical intervention as much as the theory becomes a kind of filmic intervention.

How do these two different kinds of modalities begin to interact and juxtapose with each other? Usually the format of this series, how it works, is that we will assign a specific scholar. For the first one it was Svetiana Boym on nostalgia, paired with Elia Suleiman's film. Participants would get a reading, that is assigned by Svetlana Boym, they would come there watch the film together and then we begin to have a conversation.

Usually we should start with talking about the text a little bit before watching the film, and then we'll begin to see why the kind of resonances are happening and how each medium begins to offer a different kind of rereading of each of them.

The second session was Sara Ahmed. I believe it was *Orientations*... paired with the *Funeral Parade of Roses*. Then we had Nurul leading Nadine Labaki's *Where Do We Go Now* paired with Judith Butler. I did a session pairing *Tiger of Malaya* with Tanabe Hajime.

It was about metanoetics [a way of doing philosophy that understands the limits of reason and the power of radical evil]. And I just wanted to stay with the *Tiger of Malaya* episode a little bit more, to give a bit of context as well. And I was the dramaturge for Singapore's Teater Ekamatra production of *Tiger of Malaya*. Tiger of Malaya was a World War II Japanese propaganda film. We did a theatrical production that begins to unpack what it means to offer reparative accounts of history and begin to negotiate with these points of our history.

At Bras Basah Open, we decided to screen the original film as well and I think this is important because it's about situating how I actually see these kinds of TheoryFILM sessions and not necessarily as things operating out of silos or in isolation. We wanted to see how they can begin to extend the kind of discursive dimension to the kind of art world events that were happening, whether they were performances or exhibitions, and we'll see a bit more of that in some of our other programs as we go on.

Another wonderful one was with Lizzie Borden's film, it is a mockumentary. This particular iteration of TheoryFILM series was at that time at soft/WALL/studs. Divaagar, who is an artist, did this series called The Soul Lounge where he turned the space into a bar, it was a queer and brown solidarity bar. During the course of the installation, there were five interventions, one of those interventions was a TheoryFILM session which was Lizzie Borden's film.

I wanted to bring that out so that you begin to get a sense of how these TheoryFILM sessions – I think we did about 15 – are actually quite different in nature, how they're participating or being related to different kinds of events. That's part of the beauty of these pairings as well because I think what we wanted to play with is the kind of synergy of these pairings, to see what becomes undone and what new possibilities and conversations emerge when we take these conversations in a promiscuous way that is then engaged with all these different kinds of spaces and events. soft/WALL/studs is housed in an industrial building in Geylang. Hence this aesthetic.

In our latest TheoryFILM session, this happened just a few months ago in April 2020 and it was on sickness and social choreographies. With this session, we're pairing Kelina Gotman's *Choreomania: dance and disorder* with a film. This particular iteration was special for a number of reasons. Firstly because, for those of you who are in Singapore, you would be familiar with the time, we were in the middle of the circuit breaker [lockdown], and actually in the months just trying to plan this event, it was so nerve-wracking. Every other day, there were new developments that were happening. There were so many questions about what is the context in which we're going to be organising this event and actually to organise an event at all just feels completely speculative and radical at that time, what is the future, what is one week later.

In the end this session became an online Zoom event and we kind of constrained it to about 20 participants. That was very interesting for a number of reasons because not only did all of us have to manage that transition of going on to these online spaces and adapting our programme to that, but I think one thing that changed for the films. Initially we had considered another film. It was by a Burmese filmmaker and I think it is called *The Patient*. We realized that firstly, the experience of watching a film on your laptops is a very different experience than watching it in a space. Secondly, we also realised that given the tenor of how we were all in very bleak, anxious times, we didn't necessarily want to screen the film that was to further cement those effects.

Instead we decided to see what was native to these digital spaces. We became very curious about the viral videos that were going around, of dances around the virus. The one that you see here is, I believe, a police force in India that was doing a dance. I thought that was so fabulous on so many levels: On the realm of disciplining, but also in the kind of co-opting, and thinking about choreography across these different kinds of modalities. That was an interesting moment to then think about how then theory films in an age where we're all kind of live-streaming each other, we are all basically operating within a TheoryFILM. That was the kind of orientation that was happening there.

We were thinking a lot about how, rather than trying to adapt the theory from sessions into an online space it was more generative to then think about starting the online space, think about its affordances, what it can do and what it cannot do, as a kind of radically different possibility altogether and using that as a starting point and we framed this session as a kind of support group actually. At the start of the session we did a gesture exercise where we wanted people to think about involuntary gestures, involuntary movements that they see themselves doing. Whether out of anxiety or otherwise, during the pandemic period. Towards the end, which is the closing of the session itself, we started to get people to think about gestures of care with an object. This was a kind of way for us to begin to reach out to each other beyond this isolation that we were all experiencing and to kind of begin forging a different type of imagination of what a community can begin to look like.

Shayu Sharif: Stevphen had an event with us one time, whereby we discussed *Combination Acts*, the aesthetics of collective practice. This was sometime in April last year [2019], how time passes by. Stevphen put out a book [Gilman-Opalsky & Shukaitis, 2019] and we actually had an event centred around that. If it's not obvious to everyone, the general flow of our sessions, if we are basing it on like a book, a title or a couple of chapters of a book, we would usually then pre-empt anyone who signs up for our sessions with a list of questions and certain issues that they can start thinking about as well as kind of like the prescribed chapters that they can read. I would say that that's the most prescriptive part about our events but for the most part, we are not really too hyper-vigilant about whether or not they do the readings, because we don't really want to recreate these uniform and kind of hierarchical formalized learning structures in our events.

Just to give you an idea about the event with Stevphen that we had, Farhan would usually start by situating a body of work against the backdrop of ideas in the case of Stevphen's book. Farhan would then sort of raise the issues, for example, why the social organization of artistic production should not be considered to be extraneous to the forms in art and cultural production. Who are the interlocutors in the field of art theory, sociology of art or organizational theory that the book is responding to, as well as the whole concept of the undercommons that was kind of a common thread that weaves throughout the book which is integral for us to understand artistic and cultural production. If the book is quite heavy going and if it demands a little bit of scaffolding on our end, we will usually do so before we get into the meat and potatoes of really discussing the book chapter or the book itself.

What usually proceeds is either a dialogue with the team member of Bras Basah with the author. If it's going to be an online kind of correspondence, we usually get the author to come online, usually via Skype, and then we will engage the author with some questions to just scaffold our general understanding of the key concepts and the main arguments of the book. Followed by that we usually have a break and then we would invite our participants to just go for it, like ask and engage the author in any questions that they might have pertaining to the book or pertaining to the issues that we did talk about. In that sense there is no predetermined scope of things that we need to discuss. The conversations will usually go in a way that the participants will want them to go to.

Another topic that we did talk about that I think was really interesting would be a work by James Chamberlain [2018], whereby we talked about the social function of work. His book was a critique of that. We also talked about universal basic income and other things like labour and citizenship and things like that. It was quite an interesting segue to talk about minimum wage issues in Singapore, as well as the other parts of the world. We do have sessions, whereby we collaborate with other like-minded organizations and informal groups.

We've had a session with the reading group which is quite a prominent group here in Singapore who mainly focus on Islamic issues and that session we had with them was to discuss a title by Souleymane Bachir Diagne called *Open to reason: Pluralism in Islamic philosophical traditions*. We invited some members from the reading group to scaffold the big issues about philosophical traditions within the Islamic tradition. And then we talked about geographies of reason and how Islamic philosophy should be extended to include philosophy in sub-Saharan Africa, of which the author of the book that we were reading argues for.

If you come to our sessions frequently enough, you do see a trend in how we run our sessions, usually the topics that we like to go for address things like philosophy from the margins, decoloniality and anything that really pushes our understanding of society, of justice and things like that. We do have quite a number of really hotly attended sessions and those usually tend to be the ones that do include some kind of a fundraiser. We've had two fundraisers so far. We had a session, whereby we raised funds for the T project and we paired it with a title.

The sex workers was one of it but we had another one. We were reading Jessica Hinchy's article "Transgender and queer lives in the colonial archive" and it was quite a fitting match because the T project as an advocacy group does push quite heavily for trans-rights in Singapore. We do marry other titles with other fundraisers. As you can see here, we read *Revolting prostitutes: The fight for sex workers' rights* and we collaborated with Project X, not to be confused with the T project. These events are really well supported by not only regulars to BBO, but other people who are interested in advocacy as such. But it's not all really serious advocacy and

activism, we do have things that are really quite out there and quite interesting as well. I think having something like this would be totally out of the question in this time and place, but late last year we had this very interesting event called Critical Karaoke. We can make anything critical in Bras Basah Open. The concept of Critical Karaoke was that we conceptualised karaoke to be a way in which we can confront neoliberal aesthetics and the concept of resilience. This event was the brainchild of our founder Farhan and basically the setup, if you're not familiar with Asia Bagus, it's quite campy but it's basically inviting contestants to showcase their vocal abilities and whatnot.

The twist here was that participants who did want to sing in front of an audience and be judged on that would have to give some short presentation about how the songs they have selected goes against the neoliberal aesthetic. I remember being on the panel with Shawn, we privileged songs that were not sung in a mainstream kind of language like English and so the minority languages were actually given some form of recognition in that sense. It was not all fun and laughter though, even though it was largely a very funny kind of event. Preceding the talk, Farhan gave a talk about karaoke, neoliberal aesthetics, and resilience and our good friend Bani Haykal, who is an artist here in Singapore, also gave a short talk sometime towards the end of the event about karaoke reverberations and coincidentally that event was also a fundraising activity for The Observatory. It's quite difficult for us to give you an idea of how we are like, but the sort of events that we do have is quite multifaceted, the range of topics and books that we do read together is really quite wide-ranging and we don't really impose some kind of membership criteria to be part of Bras Basah Open because we've had participants who had been attending quite a number of our sessions to actually give some kind of presentation on their own as well. So in that sense it's really a collaborative learning experience for all of us. And who knows, this whole visual mind map of the things that we dabble in might very well expand in the next years.

Shawn Chua: I wanted to bring up one point as well, because this is a symposium about alternative education and it's interesting because in terms of what our relationship with school is because we dropped 'school' at some point because it was an important signal or gesture. Just to reorient a different possibility of pedagogy that might not be, at least within the context of Singapore, the framework of the school as a very disciplinarian kind of apparatus and a hierarchical one.

What's also very interesting is the people who come to our events, especially reading groups. That's the moment where we realised there was a deep hunger for people who are not in academic spaces to have access to these spaces, or people who might have pursued academia to some degree at some point in their lives who then decided to go to other spaces, who wish to be nourished by the conversation again, we find them in these conversations or so. And depending on the topic, the kind of communication of the demographic in each of this event is actually very different.

We had this conversation with Farhan when we had one of our first events, was a Deleuze reading group, for example, and we were very clear that we kind of didn't want the space to be dominated by like Deleuze philosophy bros, for example, who are just flexing, like it's not about that. This is not about patronising or making education more accessible or easier, but rather it's about trying to harness the perspectives of people who might be coming from outside of philosophy, a kind of conventional philosophy training who might then be able to bring a very different kind of understanding or application. How do you begin to make sense? I think that's the part that is the richest for us and we want to facilitate that conversation in which we begin to make sense of ideas in a more diverse way as well.

Discussion

Stevphen Shukaitis: Thanks for that. That was wonderful. One thing I wanted to ask about is it seems that across your events you've stayed mainly within the humanities, which I can understand. But in terms of thinking about decolonising knowledge that perhaps it is through technical and apparently 'neutral' subjects, from business to architecture, that many forms of control continue to operate through. I wanted to ask if you're thinking through if opening and decolonising knowledge could operate through those areas as well.

Shawn Chua: I'll just give a quick response first and then I'll pass the time to the others. We also go beyond the humanities in the sense that we work quite a bit with science and technology studies as well, especially recently. For example, Nurul did a reading group of *Algorithms of oppression* by Safiya Noble. These questions of decolonisation of course extend to AI algorithms, surveillance technologies etc as well. Nurul and I have also been talking more about developing this further, and in terms of querying, for example, media theory or decolonising artificial intelligence. And I think I remember, Nazry, you were also involved in the conversation, about what does that mean for the digital humanities.

Nazry Bahrawi: One of the possibilities of the reading group that we were thinking about was to look at science fiction as a way into understanding the workings of science, and also to try to then expand the existing idea of science fiction. We haven't really got into this properly yet, but we were just talking about it, of reading science fiction from a non-Western context. And what that says about the production of knowledge in terms of the production of STS [Science, Technology & Society] knowledge. As you can see from our background, none of us are really quite trained very technically. I come only from a university that is engineering-centric, very STEM-oriented, so I get a first-hand account of the kind of scepticism towards the humanities that exists, and Singapore is going the way of big data. Big data was something that we touched on.

Ada Sharif: We did have a series of reading group sessions in collaboration with Tanah. Through those sessions, we unpack together things like agrarian transformations in Southeast Asia, urbanisation and agro-ecology and a host of other associated topics with regard to ecology and whatnot.

Jürgen Rudolph: I wanted to attend your Critical Karaoke session and after your presentation, I feel even worse for not having made it, unfortunately. How do you advertise your events? Do you have an email list or something like that because I would love to be on it and participate in future sessions?

Ada Sharif: We bootstrap a lot of our endeavours really. All the information that you need, you can just connect with us on Facebook. I guess that's the simple answer.

Nazry Bahrawi: We realise that this also means that people who do not use Facebook may not get to know of our events, then it actually closes off a certain group of people who may want to attend, but don't know how to or don't want to join Facebook. We are in the conversation about possibly extending our reach beyond Facebook. This is one of our challenges, I think. You've mentioned that we could maybe talk a bit about challenges. For me, it made me think about how to move on in the future in terms of outreach, but also in terms of an informal group and what our plans might be.

Whether we should somehow formalise a little bit more, or not at all. And this is something that we're still discussing and we don't have an answer to yet. But certainly I think that limiting ourselves to Facebook is an issue if we just limit our space to it.

Jürgen Rudolph: All the social media outlets come with their own problems, obviously.

Shawn Chua: We've had conversations about techno animism, for example, I think indigenous knowledge is definitely something that it's in the ether. There were a few programs that at least touched on notions of indigeneity.

Ada Sharif: All that is coming up to my mind is that one session we had with Tiantai Buddhism? We also had another session about Dalit Theology.

Shawn Chua: Information and data is not just flat, value neutral. Right. Some of this knowledge and data belongs to particular communities and it means certain kinds of things that then become radically and quite violently decontextualised and be regarded as transacted through a different panel.

Ada Sharif: If I may just add, we do have participants who do come regularly for sessions, who are part of another kind of informal reading group called the Decolonial Reading Group, here in Singapore. They really do go pretty in depth with decolonising knowledge and decoloniality. We do have Zoom sessions now and again as well. The whole community is just an overlapping and intersecting collective of people who are interested in many different things. Sometimes you might see each other in certain events but sometimes not in others. I think that's the beauty of it being open.

Shawn Chua: That's such a great point because it's important to understand that Bras Basah Open is not one entity. It's more than an entity. It's a mesh. It flourishes because of its promiscuity. Earlier I was talking about the dynamics of pairing. But this kind of extends that even further, whether it's through the kinds of collaborations with NGOs or different meeting groups or different communities. Much of our work is supported by the disenchantment of academics, who are more than happy to give their time and talk to us for free, for example. They're usually very happy to do that because they can then begin to take the work that they're doing and circulate that outside the academic spaces as well. But something that we've received quite a bit of feedback on, from the speakers, is to be transparent. We can't afford to pay people and speakers, unfortunately. And I think this becomes especially an issue when we're trying to engage with fellow peers and artists who may not necessarily have the stability of a full time job to come and share their knowledge. Actually sometimes we do ask for donations for events, we usually have a kind of recommended donation but it's pay-as-you-wish. Sometimes we try to give some of that money to speakers.

Nazry Bahrawi: Sometimes we also work with official bodies such as the Singapore Writers Festival, where we actually curate events. Then we can gain access to funds to pay people who work with us. We've done that with the Singapore Writers Festival. But, we've also done that with the Canadian High Commission recently when Nurul Huda hosted a talk with Kamal Al-Solaylee.

Stevphen Shukaitis: There's just something quite interesting about the way you talked about the dynamics of care in what you do. This strikes me that that's shared across people working in, let's say, independent literature or music or many things because there's lots of activities that, if just viewed on strictly a cost benefit analysis are just never going to survive. And it's something you do because you care about it, It's a continued existence, rather than an outcome or benefit.

Shawn Chua: Which is why I think sustainability and burnout become a big question. What is that maintenance labour, if you're talking about costs, who can afford to do this? Also, how can we continue to support people? I'm not sure if this is a question that we have fully resolved. It's not like we have a five-year plan, for example. But because of that we can also respond very tactically to things as they are arising very quickly. Farhan responds so quickly when a crisis emerges, he's actually the one who pitched the idea of developing a fundraiser for that. Or immediately trying to see opportunities to foster those kinds of collaborations. Coming back to the question of care and cost benefit analysis. Maybe it's not about thinking through a kind of scarcity of what is the cost of care or how much care you can give. And I guess it's important to take a step back and to think about how we think about the wider ecology as a kind of network of support that is happening, even outside the five of us and how these institutions try to support us also. Whether it's through financial support that comes through something like Singapore Writers Festival or some paid events. I think people who try to link us to different kinds of networks. I see those kinds of modalities to support kind of circulating.

Stevphen Shukaitis: It was just interesting thinking about the way, for instance, my university will divide people into academic staff and non-academic support staff, as if the

work done by non-academic support staff isn't completely integral and necessary for ongoing knowledge and learning to even occur in the first place. That kind of separation between what is really academic work and what is everything else is kind of superfluous. Or at least a lot more blurred than it seems.

Nazry Bahrawi: We have been at the forefront of content production, but we've also just carried chairs and set up stuff. That line between what is academic and what isn't doesn't really fly with us.

Shawn Chua: Or rather we were beginning to find that these kinds of strict boundaries of what is academic or not is precisely what is suffocating the production of these kinds of knowledges as well. I think part of our work then is to repartition those kinds of sensibilities, to open up a different possibility so that people who are coming in can see that 'hey, actually, you know what, thinking about film as a kind of critical theoretical object'; not just as an object of study, but to think about how a film is producing theory. I think that that becomes a kind of invitation that we want to open up. How can we be a bit more playful also, and these are the kind of possibilities that a space like Bras Basah Open can do. Maybe people who are operating strictly within academia might be a little bit more constrained in what is legible as 'proper academia.'

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