Facing the world: pedagogical praxis through a post-pandemic prism[1]

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Abstract

Universities are not 'ivory towers'; they have always been engaged with the world around them. Their agile responses to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrate their robust capacities for self-transformation. As that crisis eases, universities have fresh opportunities to consider how their curricula, pedagogies, and assessments might further be transformed to respond to the range of other crises now confronting the world. In these ways, universities demonstrate that they are crucial contributors to the transformation of students, the disciplines, the professions, and the world.

Keywords: COVID-19; higher education; pandemic pedagogical praxis; transformative pedagogies

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Perhaps there are still people in the world who think that universities are 'ivory towers': introverted communities of scholars preoccupied solely with work in the disciplines and unconcerned about the so-called 'real world' outside their gates. If such people still exist, they are not well informed about how extensively contemporary universities are engaged with industries, enterprises, governments, and communities. Research and development partnership projects abound across the disciplines. University curricula are routinely reviewed by external professional bodies, employers, and graduates themselves. Universities have always faced the world, preparing graduates for the professions, responding through their teaching to all sorts of emerging crises and opportunities, and grappling with new research and development problems and possibilities.

As the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic eases, and many universities return to everyday life and work on-campus, university leaders and faculty are

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taking stock of what they have learned from the crisis, and exploring its implications for future university curricula, assessments, and pedagogies.

Universities were not so alarmed by the COVID-19 crisis that they retreated into their shells. Yes, day-to-day operations relocated to working from home for faculty and students while public health demands required it, but university leaders, faculty, and students did not withdraw from the world. They may have seen it with a new wariness, but their eyes remained trained on the world, not just on the universities' own internal operations.

As universities recover from the initial shock of COVID-19, this is a good moment to reflect on how they can refresh their engagement with and renew their responsiveness to the range of crises and transformations that beset the world. It is a moment that presents new opportunities for developing university curricula, assessments, and pedagogies to more fully realise *pedagogical praxis*.

SARS-Cov-2 and the disruption of university pedagogies

Before SARS-Cov-2 erupted into people's everyday lives in late 2019 and early 2020, higher education was characterised by diverse but relatively stable pedagogical practices for initiating learners into different disciplines and professions, including, for example, simulations initiating learners into clinical practice in the health professions, seminar discussions in which students interrogate literary texts, design and experimentation projects in engineering laboratories, and Socratic dialogues in philosophy classes. Since the pandemic and the blooming of teaching and learning online, pedagogical practices have become even more diverse.

SARS-Cov-2 drove most higher education teachers and learners out of the familiar encompassing places (Schatzki, 2021) for teaching and learning on campus. Sjølie et al. (2020) described some of the changes that happened when teachers and learners were catapulted into workspaces at home (e.g., home office, kitchen table, bedroom), using the resources and infrastructure available at home (e.g., more or less reliable internet access, workspace furniture, home computing resources), often while competing with partners or children for limited internet access and for time and space in the household for uninterrupted work. For some, the working day became more efficient, shorn of commuting time and time taken moving around campus, yielding more focussed time on task; for others, the working day was fragmented and stretched as the demands of others in the household impeded time on task. For some, the more efficient working day now allowed time for walks after lunch; for others, the working day was crammed with

supporting children in home schooling, competing with partners for uninterrupted times for Zoom meetings, and preparing for teaching or learning assignments late into the evenings. In some households, the new conditions amplified gender inequities; in others, partners took care to maintain adequate working conditions for everyone.

For many faculty and students, in many countries, early 2020 brought public health restrictions including 'lockdowns' which severely limited people's time outside the home. Their university teaching and learning changed substantially. Teachers and learners already deeply engaged in online education had an easier time of it, although some work practices changed (e.g., administrative meetings by Zoom or Microsoft Teams rather than face-to-face). According to researchers like Sjølie et al. (2020), many university teachers and learners experienced the first weeks of working online as a crisis. They struggled to cope with new ways of working online, unfamiliar software, loss of support from colleagues and technicians, and loss of the ability to 'read the room' through subtle non-verbal cues in crowded video meetings. There was also a crisis of preparation: courses designed to be taught on-campus now had to be re-imagined, redesigned, and revised to generate satisfactory online learning experiences for students suddenly isolated from face-to-face contact with teachers and peers.

After the initial months of online learning, however, teachers and students had begun to adapt. They began to exploit new affordances of learning management systems and software applications. For example, some began to replace lectures with more diverse resources available online; made better use of asynchronous connections with students; ran video meetings in ways that better recognised and respected the circumstances of all students, and better supported those most vulnerable. Some teachers began to think their way into the shoes of students whose sole form of online access was through their smartphones, students with limited resources at home, students in vulnerable circumstances, and students experiencing isolation and grief at the loss of social connections—especially commencing students who had not yet formed on-campus friendship bonds with peers.

By 2021, many faculty found that new teaching practices became established in their repertoires of pedagogical practice. Some reported developing far greater empathy for students and greater responsiveness to their diverse individual circumstances and needs. And some faculty felt that their identities as teachers had been subtly transformed.

The crisis of 2020 had demanded much urgent change as many teachers came to grips with online pedagogies. For many, research had to be abandoned for the time being; some projects required redesign for the changed conditions of life

under SARS-Cov-2. These changes also produced shifts in academics' practices and their identities.

In many places, universities also confronted enrolment crises: international students could no longer travel to study, and some students dropped out because they found online learning inaccessible or unrewarding. In various universities, crises of enrolment swiftly generated crises of funding. Reduced enrolments required less staff, with the consequence that nearly 20% of full-time, contract, and casual staff in public universities lost their positions[2]. Teaching workloads for remaining faculty increased when fewer teachers were obliged to teach more units serving fewer students, with some sacrificing research time to prepare for teaching and assessment in unfamiliar subjects. Many felt that the satisfactions of academic life were stretching to the breaking point, and that some of their most rewarding work was slipping from their grasp. In some departments, morale crumbled. As 2021 rolled into 2022, some academics began to feel that university life no longer preserved what Kemmis & Mahon (2017, p. 138) called 'the morality and civility necessary for the life of the mind and for the flourishing of communities based on reason'. If such a view were to become entrenched, the very idea of the university, especially the research university, could be threatened.

Nested crises

In 2022, many believed that COVID-19 was becoming endemic, and that the Omicron BA.2 variant, dominant in April 2022, might be less severe, perhaps more avoidable with improved vaccines, and more treatable with improved medications and therapies. Some thought that the world would revert to the 'old normal' or that a 'new normal' would not be much different from life before the pandemic. Others were more sanguine, on the view that the world was changing in some fundamental ways. For example, increased interactions between humans and other species have

[2] Writing for think tank The Australia Institute in September 2021, based on a variety of sources on higher education staffing, Littleton & Stanford (2021) estimated that by May 2021, about 35,000 positions had been lost in Australian public universities, from the May 2019 total of about 170,000. More conservatively, using Australian Bureau of Statistics Labour Force Survey data, Norton (2022) found 'a net loss of 9,050 permanent and fixed-term contract employees, a 6.9% decline', 'only the third decrease in university staff since 1989'; and that 'Casual staff fell by 4,258 full-time equivalents in 2020 compared to 2019, a 17.5% decrease. In data going back to 1991, all previous casual staff decreases have been by less than 1%'. Note that 4,258 full-time equivalents represent many more part-time casual university staff positions; Norton says that 'Australia's universities probably had nearly 100,000 casual employees before the pandemic'.

brought greater exposure to zoonotic diseases (Anderson, 2020)[3]. Health systems, public health measures, and health professionals have been under extreme stress; and health systems need reconstruction in the light of lessons learned through the pandemic. Many sectors of education have similarly been reconfigured, especially with the shifting balance between face-to-face and online and home education. And many other patterns and practices of everyday life have also been re-modelled, including, for example, workplace attendance, public transport, health, recreation, shopping, tourism, and domestic and international travel.

The crises associated with the pandemic did not come alone. Kaukko et al. (2021) regard it as one of a number of nested crises. As Anderson (2020) noted, the pandemic is a consequence of changes in land use, deforestation, and agriculture that have brought humans into closer interaction with wildlife. The multiplying consequences of anthropogenic climate change include unprecedented weather extremes (heat, drought, fires, floods), unprecedented losses of species and biodiversity, and threats to human habitation in vulnerable locations (e.g., coastal areas). These, in turn, are generating rapid economic-industrial changes like the flight from fossil fuel extraction, distribution, and use, and towards renewable energy resources (e.g., solar, wind, tidal, geothermal, hydroelectric) and new forms of transport (e.g., electric vehicles).

Other large-scale social transformations also underway as a consequence of the climate emergency include intra- and international migrations of people whose lives and livelihoods have been affected by climate change. These also spill into other global transformations: changing global political conditions like migrations resulting from war and oppression, and the exodus of people from repressive

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[3] Inger Andersen (2020, n. p.), United Nations Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme reported: 'COVID-19 is one of the worst zoonotic diseases, but it is not the first. Ebola, SARS, MERS, HIV, Lyme disease, Rift Valley fever and Lassa fever preceded it. In the last century we have seen at least six major outbreaks of novel coronaviruses. Sixty per cent of known infectious diseases and 75 per cent of emerging infectious diseases are zoonotic. Over the last two decades and before COVID-19, zoonotic diseases caused economic damage of USD 100 billion.

'Tragically, two million people in low- and middle-income countries die each year from neglected endemic zoonotic diseases – such as anthrax, bovine tuberculosis and rabies. These are often communities with complex development problems, high dependence on livestock and proximity to wildlife.

'Growth in humanity and its activity is largely to blame. Meat production has increased by 260 per cent in 50 years. We have intensified agriculture, expanded infrastructure and extracted resources at the expense of our wild spaces. Dams, irrigation and factory farms are linked to 25 per cent of infectious diseases in humans. Travel, transport and food supply chains have erased borders and distances. Climate change has contributed to the spread of pathogens.

'The end result is that people and animals, with the diseases they carry, are closer than ever.'

regimes. Alongside these are global social movements like #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo. And technological transformations multiply in the wake of digitisation, the internet, social media, and instant communications, sometimes accompanied by untoward social consequences like cyberbullying, trolling, and the diffusion of conspiracy theories, pseudoscience, and 'fake news'. Table 1 lists some of the crises now confronting humankind.

Table 1. Some contemporary crises.

SARS-Cov-2/COVID-19 and other zoonotic diseases
The climate emergency (e.g., global warming, sea level rise, increases in extreme weather)
Migration and displacement of people (caused by, e.g., climate change, war, repression)
Changing demographics of injustice in (e.g.) wealth, poverty, war, violence, domination, and oppression
Contemporary social movements (e.g., #BLM, #MeToo)
Political transformations (e.g., polarisation in liberal democracies, rise of autocracies and authoritarianism)
Global neoliberalist changes in law, regulation, administration, monitoring, and surveillance
Technological changes (e.g., digital technologies; changes in production, distribution, and use of energy)
Economic changes (e.g., in local and global production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services)

It is not just the COVID-19 pandemic that should prompt changes in twenty-first century university pedagogies, then, but also the wide range of upheavals brought about by the climate emergency and other contemporary cultural-discursive, material-economic, environmental, and social-political global challenges and transformations. In short, we need university pedagogies that recognise and respond to the wide range of these challenges: pedagogies that will be *culturally, materially, economically, environmentally, socially, and politically transformative*.

Re-imagining university pedagogies

In the face of the range of transformations currently smouldering around us, we need to find new forms and practices for university life. While the roots of the university stretch back to the twelfth century, universities have been ceaselessly remade ever since, through, for example, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, the

Industrial Revolution, and the wars, crises, and aspirations of the twentieth century. Moreover, in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, ideas about and institutions of higher education have diversified: alongside ‘traditional’ research universities, there are now universities specialised in education for the professions, universities specialised in the service of particular industries or enterprises, and others. There is not just one, single stock on which to graft some new idea of the university.

Almost all the participants in this conference work in higher education, in very diverse institutions, serving different students, communities, disciplines, professions, industries, and enterprises. Our universities have different histories; they respond to different social needs and political pressures; their internal structures and practices also differ; they have commonalities, but no two are the same.

It follows that if we, here, are to facilitate changes towards some kind of ‘post-pandemic’, *transformative* kind of higher education that will also respond to the range of crises that now beset us, then we will have to reconstruct our spaceships as we travel. Starting from the diverse institutions in which we now work, we must nevertheless respond to some common challenges.

Universities must change, each from its own current posture. The content of university curricula must change in the face of the crises we now confront; what university teachers and examiners assess and certify must change; and university pedagogies must change. Much of the responsibility for these changes will fall on university teachers, but they are not alone; the changes also have implications for many people, communities, agencies, and professions beyond the university, who are also involved in shaping emerging forms of university work and life. Crucially, *students* must be engaged in these processes of change. They are not passive recipients of higher education; they are the ones who come to inhabit the practices into which they are initiated through university study. As citizens of the university, they are agentic selves whose formation is (partly) shaped by university work and life; they are not merely clients to be ‘served’, nor customers to be ‘satisfied’, nor pliable ‘objects’ to be moulded by the disciplines (Foucault, 1979, Part 3) of university study. The discourse of ‘learning outcomes’ should be abandoned; what students learn are ways to participate, through practices, in history and the world.

Changing university pedagogies requires changing not just the teaching practices of teachers, it also requires changing the ways learners engage in the practices they are learning, and in the embodied knowing that arises from participating in practice, that represents and recalls practice, and anticipates and returns to its use in practice (Kemmis & Edwards-Groves, 2018, p. 120). The

practices of teachers and of learners must be changed in tandem, as complementary parts of distributed *pedagogical practices*.

Pedagogical practices are distributed practices

Pedagogical practices aim to orchestrate complementary teaching practices and practices of learners. Pedagogical practices involve both one or more teachers and one or more learners. They are a species of *distributed practices*, that is, practices in which two or more participants enact forms of connection with one another in order to collectively accomplish the ends of the practice: what Hopwood et al. (2021) call 'connective enactments' and 'collective accomplishments'. Neither teachers nor learners accomplish pedagogical practices alone. While teachers sometimes conduct *teaching practices* when learners are not immediately present, for example, when they pre-record a video lecture in the absence of students), ordinarily they teach learners who are in some sense present. Learners, however, frequently engage in learning in the absence of teachers, for example in private study, or by legitimate peripheral participation in workplaces (Lave & Wenger, 1991), or by 'stealing the secrets of the masters'[4]. Distributed *pedagogical practices*, by contrast, are *co-produced* by teachers and learners, in the way that medical consultations are distributed between doctors and patients, netball practices are distributed between players within and between teams; and practices of everyday conversation are distributed between interlocutors.

Pedagogical practices are co-produced when teachers and learners encounter one other in sites like classrooms or lecture theatres or learning management systems, that is, in sites specifically designed for teaching and learning encounters. Schatzki (2021, p. 4) called such sites *encompassing places* for practices; in this case, for teaching entwined with learning. Encompassing places for pedagogy are frequently dense with particular kinds of material objects (like Smart Boards, desks, lecterns, computers, and screens) specifically designed to support the activities that constitute both teachers' teaching and learners' learning.

[4] Lave (2019, pp. 75–8) quotes Kondo's (1990) study of Japanese apprentice confectioners who report that they must steal the secrets of their masters in order to learn the trade. Kondo (pp. 237–8) writes: '… artisans' training sometimes began with … tasks having no apparent relation to their chosen trade. Even when the artisans began to take a more active part in learning appropriate artisanal techniques, there might be little explicit verbal instruction from the master. Learning through observation (*minarai*, literally seeing and learning) was, and often still is, the primary mode of instruction. In more vivid terms, they were supposed to *nusunde oboeru*, learn through stealing, learn on the sly, for one could not necessarily count on formalised instruction'.

They are also dense with talk and texts (discourses) in and about teaching and learning (in semantic space), and (in social space) dense in pedagogical relationships among and between teachers and learners.

To change pedagogical practices, in these post-pandemic, multi-transformational times, then, will not just be to change the dances of teachers, and not just what teachers do to shape the steps that learners can take. It will be to change the 'contract' between them: to make changes to university curricula, assessments, and pedagogies in ways that will engage learners agentically in 'learning how to go on' in the practices of, for example, the disciplines and professions. Pedagogical practices appropriate to our times will assist learners to 'learn to practise differently' (Kemmis, 2021) by helping them to reproduce their existing, prior practices with variations that will extend the range and depth of their repertoires of practices. Sometimes theorists of learning advocate seeing students as *active* learners; that is part, but not all of what I mean. I believe we need to create pedagogical spaces in which students have opportunity and space to be *agentic* learners, agentically learning how to practice differently. I will return to the question of agency shortly, in relation to Stetsenko's (2019) 'transformative worldview'.

Praxis and pedagogical praxis

The new kinds of pedagogical practice that I have in mind are ones that engage learners agentically in learning, but not just for the sake of the learning itself. They engage learners in order that they can become agentic in changing the world through their professional practice, for example. This is to see learners' practices not solely from the narrow standpoint of the classroom or the institution, but with a broader historical and substantive perspective. This is the perspective of *praxis*.

For some years now, with colleagues in the *Pedagogy, Education, and Praxis* (PEP) international research network (Edwards-Groves & Kemmis, 2016), I have been exploring the nature of educational praxis. The following six quotes highlight some of the key landmarks on my journey towards understanding praxis.

(1) In the first of his *Theses on Feuerbach*, Karl Marx (1845, n. p.) noted that practice, or *praxis* is 'human sensuous activity'—what today we might call 'embodied human activity'. Marx emphasised that praxis is what people actually do in the world; it is not just the abstraction, 'action', that appears in the thoughts of 'philosophers in their armchairs'.

(2) In the third thesis, Marx continued:

> The materialist doctrine that [people] are products of circumstances and upbringing, and that, therefore, changed [people] are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is [people] who change circumstances and that the educator must [him- or herself] be educated. … The coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change … can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice [which he also describes as practical-critical activity].

This idea of 'the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human … self-change' is crucial in understanding praxis as a dialectical process of world-changing *and* (individual and collective) self-changing.

(3) A few years later, very memorably, Marx wrote (1852, n. p.) wrote:

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

People everywhere, always, exist under circumstances already given, and they are always immersed in traditions (ways of life, ways of doing things around here) that already carry them forward in the tide of history. To cease reproducing the world as it has been requires transforming it; in fact, transforming not only our circumstances but also ourselves. Such transformations in turn contribute to the *evolution* of traditions.

(4) Taking a rather neo-Aristotelian view of praxis (cf. MacIntyre, 1983), Kemmis and Smith (2008, p. 4) described praxis as

> action that is morally committed, and oriented and informed by the traditions of the field. … Praxis is what people do when they take into account all the circumstances and exigencies that confront them in the particular moment and then, taking the broadest view they can of what it is best to do, they act. (p. 4)

(5) That neo-Aristotelian view of praxis in PEP writings was soon complemented by a Marxian view of praxis. As Mahon et al. (2020, p. 27) wrote:

> in praxis, actors are aware of the historical situatedness of what they are doing. They are conscious of their actions in the present being shaped by history (e.g., past actions/events and consequences of past actions/events), and of how they are shaping unfolding action … that is, how their actions are 'making' history (Kemmis, 2008). This evokes the notion of educational praxis as "history-making educational action" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 22; see also Kemmis & Trede, 2010), which links to the … Marxian notion of praxis.

So here a view of *pedagogical praxis* begins to emerge more clearly, in the idea of 'history-making educational action'.

If we want to transform higher education pedagogies so they are forms of history-making action that more efficaciously educate learners, we need to begin with a view of education. People have different views and definitions of education. My own view is that education initiates learners, not just into knowledge, but into *practices* that embody

(a) forms of understanding that increase people's individual and collective powers of self-expression, to secure a culture based on reason,
(b) modes of action that increase people's individual and collective powers of self-development, to secure productive and sustainable economies and environments, and
(c) ways of relating to one another and the world that increase people's individual and collective powers of self-determination, to secure just and democratic societies.

These are very general aims for education. They must be interpreted and reinterpreted for every field[5], not just in relation to the relevant *knowledge* of the field but also, and more importantly, for the conduct of the *practices* appropriate to that field. Very different forms of understanding, modes of action, and appropriate ways of relating to others and the world are needed for the conduct of the practices of, for example, the health professions, public administration, automotive services, and software engineering.

On my view of education, it might also be noted that the developers of higher education curricula, pedagogies, and assessments need to interrogate not only existing forms of education in their fields, crystallised in their current curricula, but also the forms that contemporary and emerging *practice* takes in their

[5] By 'fields', I mean fields of practice, including in the disciplines and professions.

fields—and ways in which that practice should be transformed to meet changing circumstances and conditions of professional practice. In my view, universities cannot content themselves with preparing graduates with the knowledge appropriate to the professions, on the model of contemplative knowledge, or *theoría*, as Aristotle described it, a notion that perseveres in some fields where 'pure' forms (e.g., pure mathematics) distinguish themselves from 'applied' forms. Instead, I think universities and their faculty must be, as many already are, extremely sharp-eyed and sensitive observers of the conduct of everyday practice in their fields, disciplines, and professions. Medicine learns from clinical practice; civil engineering learns from practical problems emerging, for example, as a consequence of climate change; economists learn from the real-world conduct and consequences of markets, investments, and the distribution of wealth. The university curriculum must always be in dialogue with, and responsive to, changing conditions, and the new forms of practice needed for emerging as well as existing and enduring conditions. It might help university faculty to develop more powerful forms of, for example, both initial and continuing professional education if they were to think not just of curricula of *knowledges* but, rather, *curricula of practices*.

These are eternal questions for higher education and educators: questions of what to respond to, and how to respond, in the changing world vis-à-vis the content of curricula, pedagogies and assessments. For centuries, universities have been sensitive and responsive to the world around them; it is not something new. Sometimes they have done it well and sometimes badly; sometimes in ways that are more visionary than others. The usual state, for universities, as for life, is not stasis but perpetual transformation. Transformation does not happen only in response to sudden shocks, of which the world faces many; it is a familiar part of the living, breathing, everyday life and work of the university.

(6) This notion of transformation brings me to the last of the key features of critical pedagogical praxis: that it is built on the foundations of a transformative worldview described by post-Vygotskian human development theorist Anna Stetsenko (2019, p. 2) this way:

> In the transformative worldview, reality is reconceived as that which is being constantly transformed and realized (literally made real) by people themselves—and, importantly, by people not as isolated, autonomous entities but as agentive actors or active agents of social practices. At the same time, human development is posited to be not only fully immersed in collaborative practices but, more to the point, co-constituted by each individual's active contributions to these practices, whereby the dynamics of what exists is changed as a whole every time a person acts. The emphasis

> is thus on the nexus of people changing the world and being changed in this very process of them changing the world—as two poles of one and the same, bi-directional, and recursive co-constitution of people and the world in a process of a simultaneous self- and world-realization. This approach implies that people never merely react, nor respond, to what exists but agentively act in co-creating both the world and themselves beyond 'the givenness' of the present. Agency in this account is accorded with a central, formative (or constitutive) role in the processes of human development, the overall sociohistorical dynamics, and the very materiality of the world. In addition and quite critically, the development of agency is contingent on access to cultural tools and resources that afford it, an access that needs to be provided by society and also agentively taken up by each individual. Therefore, discussions of agency are immediately related to how societies afford or stifle agency and thus, to fundamental issues of social equality and justice.

On Stetsenko's view, then, 'reality' is not a passive 'given; it is always being constituted. It is dynamic; it is always coming into being. In my view, this accords with a view of the social world as constantly constituted and re-constituted through human practices – praxis in the Marxian sense of history-making. The social world is always being made and re-made by the way we live and work in it. So, as many others have observed, if we want to change the world, we have to make it differently, together changing both the world and ourselves, both our practices and the conditions that hold our practices in place (Kemmis, 2022).

Moreover, the transformative worldview is to be found not only among university faculty as they formulate and reformulate their curricula, pedagogies, and assessments; it is also part of the everyday experience of university students as they agentically form and transform their own practices in relation to the university curriculum and to the world around them, in transformative processes that realise both their emerging *selves* and their emerging *worlds*. In these transformative processes, students become more acutely aware of the past, more alert in the present, and more far-sighted in anticipating the future consequences of their actions.

This brief outline of features of praxis and pedagogical praxis suggests ways in which both university educators and university students might participate agentically in processes of self- and world-realisation through university curricula, assessments, and pedagogy.

(1) Marx described praxis as 'human sensuous activity': *embodied* action. Explicitly *practice-based* curricula for transformation will give students

embodied experiences of practice in their fields, disciplines, and professions. Curricula that observe the life of practice from the library or the armchair may be necessary, but they are not sufficient. It is a mistake to think that curricula culminate only in assessments; they culminate in transformations of students' practices, lives, and worlds.

(2) In the third thesis on Feuerbach, Marx emphasised that, while people are formed by circumstances and upbringing, they also *form* and *transform* circumstances and upbringing; they are not just made by the world; they also make the world. University curricula should not only give students opportunities to experience the life and work of their fields; they should give students the means and opportunities to engage and explore and experiment so they can develop a practical 'feel' for the work of their professions in the world.

(3) In *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Marx suggested that people are formed by always-already given conditions in which they find themselves as well as by traditions inherited from the past. University curricula should give students opportunities to transform the conditions in which they study and work, and to experience first-hand the evolution of inherited traditions in their fields.

(4) On the neo-Aristotelian view of praxis, university curricula should initiate students into praxis in their fields so they strive constantly, through their work, not only to 'do no harm', but also, through their practice, to realise the good for each person, the good for humankind, and the good for the community of life on the planet.

(5) On the Marxian view of praxis as history-making action, university curricula should initiate students into the profound sense that both their studies and their professional work are *always* consequential; as students and as professionals, their work *always* makes a difference. Curricula should help students to develop an acute awareness that the conduct and consequences of their practice can be for good, for ill, and often both. They should be alert to the possibility that the consequences of their practices can be untoward: unreasonable, unproductive, unsustainable, harmful, unjust, or undemocratic. University curricula must therefore initiate students into practices of *critical praxis* that ensure that they are equipped to reflect constructively on the conduct and consequences of their own practice to avoid, overcome, or ameliorate untoward consequences.

(6) Finally, on Stetsenko's transformative worldview, university curricula should initiate students into a profound understanding that individual and collective praxis always form and transform both the world and the one who acts. University curricula should enable students to experience and to interrogate

their own self-transformation as learners and selves, and to interrogate how their work transforms the world. Universities also need to be extremely thoughtful about *who* they grant, and who they deny, access to the cultural, material, and social tools and resources that their curricula provide.

Practice-based education and the ontological transformation of students

As noted earlier, Kemmis & Edwards-Groves (2018, p. 120) said that learning and knowing arise from practice, represent and recall practice, and anticipate and return to their use in practice. It should not escape our notice that *students themselves* also come from worlds of practice; they represent and recall those worlds; and they anticipate and return to those worlds in and through their practices. University educators should do their best to connect with the *practices* through which students engage with their current and future worlds because their new knowledge and practices always and only evolve from their prior practices.

Students come to the university from their own worlds, and they bring those worlds into the university with them. They also bring their everyday practices, and practices previously developed through education and experience. *Practice-based university education* (Kemmis, 2012) creates spaces and opportunities for students to reproduce their prior practices with variations so they can learn to practice differently (Kemmis, 2021), that is, so they can extend and diversify their repertoires of practices, not just their knowledge.

Just as Stetsenko's (2019) transformational worldview emphasised how people's practices bring about both world- and self-realisation, Lave and Packer (2008) described learning as a process of *ontological transformation*. In their view, learning is a process of transformation of the embodied being of the one who learns—the person a university teacher meets in a lecture or laboratory or classroom. A curriculum which aims to develop a student's repertoire of practices, as distinct from their 'store' of knowledge, must engage with that repertoire of practices, not just with the knowledge 'in their heads', since no knowledge exists only in people's heads. A curriculum that aims to extend students' repertoires of practice must therefore be ontologically transformative: it must engage the student and the student's embodied practices, not just their interest or their ideas. A university curriculum will be transformative for students when it extends their repertoires of practice in ways that make them more agentic in transforming the world. Practice-based pedagogies aim deliberately to realise and transform both selves and worlds; they aim for critical pedagogical praxis that encompasses and

encourages both critical praxis for university educators and critical praxis for students.

Conclusion

Universities have always faced the world, although they also face inwards to discover how best to conduct the life of the mind in communities based on reason, in every field, discipline, and profession. In the post-pandemic world, if that is what we are now entering, responses to the pandemic cannot be our sole preoccupation. A barrage of crises in the world demands attention in every field: the climate emergency, forced migration, technological change, and the eddies of intersecting social movements.

The easing of the pandemic crisis may be an ideal moment to renew our thinking about how university curricula, assessments, and pedagogies can better engage with the problems and challenges that now confront the world. Each field must respond through its own disciplinary lens, to pursue the good for each person, the good for humankind, and the good for the community of life on Earth.

This engagement can be achieved through *practice-based* education: curricula, assessments, and pedagogies that explicitly initiate learners into the practices that constitute the work of their disciplines and professions – not just the relevant knowledge. To develop practice-based education requires developing forms of *distributed critical pedagogical praxis* that create spaces and opportunities for agentic action by learners, through which they can be initiated into the practices of their fields.

If university educators want to help their students to make ontological transformations, the challenge is *how* to create spaces and opportunities for students to engage in the practices of their chosen fields in and through university curricula, assessments, and pedagogies, during their studies, not just when their studies are complete or nearly complete. And, in turn, this invites university educators to consider and explore how, within every course, students can engage, through their practices as they learn, with the multiple crises that now confront people and the planet—crises that include, but are by no means limited to, the COVID-19 pandemic. This is part of what it means for universities, faculty, and students to 'face the world'.

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