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Teaching critical hope with creative pedagogies of possibilities

Anke Schwittay

Department of International Development, School of Global Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK

ABSTRACT

How can we teach critical hope, amidst contemporary challenges that seem intractable, within neoliberal educational institutions that work to foreclose transformative pedagogies and through academic critique that can result in cynicism and disillusionment among students? Here, I draw on the writings of Paolo Freire, J.K. Gibson-Graham and Sarah Amsler, as well as long-term research at the University of Sussex in the UK, to propose a critical-creative pedagogy that enables students to better understand global challenges and to imagine alternative responses to them. Consisting of whole-person learning, the use of arts and design methods and praxis, this pedagogy aims to nurture students' critical hope. In this article I sketch an outline of its elements, advance philosophical arguments for their importance and share brief examples from my own teaching in International Development to show how it can be enacted in classrooms. Critical-creative pedagogy necessitates generative theorising that allows pedagogies of possibilities to emerge and grow, critical engagement with the neoliberal education system to find spaces for action, and a radical understanding of pedagogical creativity. It results in practices of pedagogical prefiguration that enable students, and educators, to collectively imagine heterodox responses to contemporary social, economic and ecological challenges.

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In a 2014 article in this journal, Sarah Amsler called for pedagogies of possibilities to democratise Higher Education (HE). In my article, I take up her challenge and propose an outline of a critical-creative pedagogy that opens up such spaces of possibilities in HE and beyond. The aim of this pedagogy is to help students better understand contemporary social, economic and ecological challenges and to imagine alternative responses to them. Both critical understanding and creative reimagining are important for students to engage with the complexities and uncertainties of today's world, which calls for new ways of educating students with particular knowledges and orientations that a critical-creative pedagogy can provide.

This pedagogy articulates whole-person learning, design and arts methods, praxis and critical hope in an interlinked, expandable practice. It starts by affirming the fundamental need for students to develop critical thinking capacities in order to interrogate the world

CONTACT Anke Schwittay  a.schwittay@sussex.ac.uk  Department of International Development, School of Global Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, UK

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around them, understand its complexities and contradictions, recognise the limitations of mainstream solutionism and reflect on their own positions within systems of power and change projects. In some disciplines, including my own field of International Development, such critical teaching, especially when it is the sole focus of classroom engagement, can lead to students becoming disillusioned with and cynical about the possibilities of using their education to contribute to the transformative changes that often brought them to university in the first place. Over the years, rather than accepting such student sentiments, I started to ask myself What if I could help students move beyond the seeming impasse produced by relentless critique and offer openings where they can currently only see closure? What if I could redesign my own teaching to inspire students to deconstruct but also to re-imagine the world around them, in radically different ways? Critical-creative pedagogy is my answer to these questions.

This pedagogy is the result of a three-year research project at my academic home, the University of Sussex in the UK. It started while I was Head of the department of International Development (ID), which not only meant that I was able to substantively guide the teaching focus of the department but also that I had many meetings and informal conversations with staff and students about teaching. Formal research consisted of semi-structured interviews with five colleagues and 30 undergraduate students who had finished their degree course in ID, often combined with cognate disciplines such as Anthropology, Geography, International Relations or Economics, or a language. A systematic review of teaching materials was conducted as part of an administrative periodic curriculum review. I also observed some of my colleagues' classes, which I selected based on their teaching content and format. In addition, I used my own classrooms as experimental spaces. I teach a postgraduate module on Activism and Development and a third-year undergraduate module on Urban Futures, in both of these I was free to formulate my own teaching content and style as long as core content was covered. Ethics approval for all primary research was obtained from the university's Social Science Research Ethics Committee.¹

Undertaking this research at my home university has allowed me to draw on deep contextual knowledge, personal situatedness and long-term sustained engagement, but has also resulted in limitations because of this unique setting and small sample. These limitations are tempered by my twenty years of teaching experience in the fields of ID and Anthropology.² Before joining Sussex in 2014, I worked at the University of Auckland and prior to that I taught in the US, at a community college, UC Berkeley's Anthropology department and Information Systems school and a business school. I was also the co-founder of a consultancy bringing anthropology and design methods to technology organisations wanting to engage in international development, where I co-designed and ran interactive workshops with Paul Braund. My critical-creative pedagogy is informed by the diversity of these teaching experiences and contexts.

I do not have an academic education background, however, which means that writing about teaching did not come easy, 'perhaps reflecting a broader failure in the academy to subject our teaching to serious critical reflection and to consider it worthy of serious writing and publication' (Cameron, Quadir, and Tiessen 2013, 349). This failure is partly caused by the demands of academic (over)work that leave little time or space for writing about teaching. Ironically, it was my administrative role that gave me plenty of opportunities to think about and research teaching, and a post-HoD sabbatical provided me with

time to write. But I also needed courage to publicly reflect on my pedagogical practice. In doing so, I was inspired by Paolo Freire's observation that 'it is impossible to teach without the courage to try a thousand times before giving up' (cited in Darder Baltodano and Torres 2009, 575). The same holds true for writing about teaching. Moving forward with courage then, in the remainder of this article I will first lay out the philosophical and political underpinnings of critical-creative pedagogy, then situate each of its four strands within the relevant literature and present brief examples from my own teaching to illustrate my theoretical arguments empirically. I conclude by examining the possibilities of teaching critical hope.

Becoming an academic subject of possibility in neoliberal times

The conceptual and political conditions of possibility of critical-creative pedagogy are grounded in the work of feminist geographers J. K. Gibson-Graham, who argue for the potential of academic work to open up spaces of possibility where alternatives can grow. For this to happen, we need to reimagine how we use theory, consider the current HE regime and re-imagine pedagogical creativity.

Generative theorising

Generative theory is an essential part of critical-creative teaching, as I agree with Gibson-Graham that academic subjects can become 'world-makers [with] a constitutive role in the worlds that exist, and ... power to bring new worlds into being' (2008, 614). While these subjectivities can be enacted by committed researchers and educators, they do not come easy to academics:

we are trained to be discerning, detached and critical so that we can penetrate the veil of common understanding and explore the root causes and bottom lines that govern the phenomenal world. This academic stance means that most theorizing is tinged with scepticism and negativity, not a particularly nurturing environment for hopeful, inchoate experiments.(618)

Gibson-Graham (2006) find the sources of such negative, or in their words 'strong' theorising in certain (leftist) practices. These in turn have been analysed by Eve Sedgwick as paranoia that aims to be all-knowing to protect itself against surprises; they are found in Walter Benjamin's writings about melancholia that looks backwards longing for certainty, and in Saul Newman's arguments about left moralism that aspires to a purity of powerlessness. Taken together, these practices result in strong theory that dismisses experimental practices as always already tainted or co-opted by capitalism and neoliberalism. Instead of questioning these dominant political-economic structures, strong theorising reinforces them and as a result 'render[s] the world effectively incontestable' (6).

As an alternative to strong theory's scepticism and suspicion, Gibson-Graham employ Sedgwick's 'weak' theory to practice openness towards the emergent. Weak theory cultivates a mindset that refuses to know too much and nurtures rather than discredits alternatives. Weak theory has a purposely reduced reach, localised purview and attenuated explanations, so that it can hold open spaces in which possibilities can grow. Critical-

creative pedagogy transforms weak into generative theory, a term I use to make explicit its ability to actively create possibilities.

Generative theorising identifies the root causes, manifestations and impacts of contemporary challenges and then begins to formulate responses in partial, cautious and modest ways. Instead of aiming for absolute diagnosis and grand solutions, it searches for work-arounds, accommodations and fixes. In recognising the incompleteness, impurities and imperfections of its approach, generative theory assumes an experimental and open stance that pays attention to multiplicities and ambiguities. It seeks connections and collaborations, aims to consider rather than judge, embraces the unexpected and celebrates surprises. It is interested in building rather than (only) deconstructing, and when joined to critical-creative pedagogy, it ensures that its critical element does not overwhelm its creative sibling, putting both on an equal and mutually-supportive footing.

In HE, generative theorising involves 'rethinking the meaning of the higher educator [and] may require the unlearning of traditional approaches to theoretisation which privilege performativity over humble co-operation, abstraction over praxis, individual knowing over collective learning, and monological solution-given over dialogical inquiry' (Amsler 2014, 279). Such a re-imagining of what it means to be a university educator can include publicly reflecting on our pedagogical practice, as well as pursuing prefigurative pedagogical politics where we begin to enact in the here and now the transformative visions we have for the future. This is an affective process that is bound up with our identities as educators and challenges us to confront personal assumptions, aspirations and anxieties (Zembylas 2003). It leads to teaching without guarantees, grounded in unlearning educational practices, recognising our partial knowledges and positions and being humble and persistent.

It also involves pausing to ask whether HE programmes should pursue transformative education in general and a search for alternatives in particular. A number of important questions arise: what is the role of (higher) education – imparting knowledge, analysing the world that is or seeking to transform it? And if it is the latter, which transformative projects do we pursue and which ones do we eschew? And what about the students who don't come to university with emancipatory aspirations but to be taught necessary information and skills for post-university employment? I will return to these questions throughout this article and explore them in more detail in Schwittay (2021).

Whether to practice strong or generative theory is not only a pedagogical decision, but also a political and ethical one, shaped by a commitment to become an academic subject of possibility. Such a commitment does not suspend critique, but places it alongside generativity and care. It does not deny or ignore the existence of oppressive and exploitative structures but rather 'encourages us to deny these forces as fundamental, structural, or universal reality and to instead identify them as contingent outcomes of ethical decisions, political projects, and sedimented localised practices' (Gibson-Graham 2006, xxxi). And this means confronting the neoliberalisation of contemporary education.

Working in the belly of beast

After decades of 'economistic, utilitarian and technocratic discourses about schooling and higher education, combined with the gradual institutionalisation of managerialism and marketisation', educational institutions in the UK and other countries have become

commodified, privatised and corporatised (Amsler 2014, 275). This has had dire consequences for HE governance, working conditions and pedagogical practice. Increasingly, educators become service providers to students who think of themselves as customers demanding value for their money. As a result, knowledge is becoming commodified and pedagogy instrumentalised as outcomes-driven learning hemmed in by competency-based curricula. Repositioned as ‘technically competent dissemination of information’, intellectual knowledge is now often regarded as too difficult or irrelevant (Cowden and Singh 2013, 30). When discourses of public values, social responsibility and civic education become thus replaced by consumption and competition, education for democracy, equality and justice seems ever more remote.

Individuals’ responses to these changes vary from retreat, cynicism and accommodation to defiance and protest. While some educators might stick to analysing the world that is, critical pedagogy scholars in particular call for ‘pedagogies of transformation’ (Wrigley, Lingard, and Thomson 2012). While important conceptual and practical critiques of critical pedagogy have been advanced over the years (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2009), I continue to find value in its proposal for a pedagogy of resistance, which ‘displace[s] cynicism with hope, challenging the neoliberal notion that there are no alternatives with visions of a better society, and develop[s] a pedagogy of commitment that puts into place modes of critical literacy in which competency and interpretation provide the bases of actually intervening in the world’ (Giroux 2014, 46). For some, this can only happen outside of formal education, because working within the system helps to sustain it and compromises the radical potentialities of more emancipatory educational models (Bessant, Robinson, and Ormerod 2015). Where does that leave those of us who choose to struggle in the belly of the neoliberal beast?

Here, co-optation of our work is an ever-present danger: proposing more creative teaching and learning could easily become part of the market-driven HE regime, drafted into employability efforts to better equip students to compete in the knowledge economy and creative industries (Barnett 2020). It could also become an additional requirement for already stretched faculty and overwhelmed students. Similarly, discourses of social justice and equality are in danger of being mainstreamed and deradicalised (Tinning 2002). Acutely aware of these dangers, I nevertheless do not see them as inevitable outcomes and instead recognise the resultant need for constant self-scrutiny. Such critical reflection leads to the recognition that teaching is a deeply emotional, moral and political endeavour: we must take responsibility for the specific normative values and objectives of all our projects; remain vigilant about how power works through ostensibly liberatory practices ... and be critically aware of the possibility that such practices can easily be deployed for conservative and repressive ends (Amsler 2014, 281). This also means that we must be explicit about the values that guide our work, about our belief that good pedagogy is a social justice issue (Lingard and Keddie 2013).

Pedagogical creativity

Creativity has been recognised as a complex, contested and context-specific phenomenon with intellectual, emotional, practical and ethical dimensions. Building on this multidimensionality, certain features resonate across the literature on pedagogical creativity, including originality, curiosity, playfulness, divergent thinking, risk-taking, openness

to new experiences and an ability to tolerate ambiguity and accept uncertainty (Robinson 2011). While teaching and learning are inherently creative at all stages of education, they are not always recognised as such. For the pioneers of child-centred education, such as John Dewey, Rudolf Steiner and Maria Montessori, creativity meant that education should draw out the inborn abilities of each child. These abilities are often lost as children move through formal education, especially in those systems that focus on academicism and knowledge assimilation to be measured in outcomes-based assessments.

For universities, Ronald Barnett (2020) distinguishes five forms of creativity, ranging from intellectual creativity driven by research activities to environmental creativity that acknowledges universities as social institutions. Of particular importance for this article are pedagogical and learning creativity; these do not stand in an automatic relationship so that creative learning can take place in the absence of creative teaching and vice versa. Foundational to all of these forms is reflexive creativity, which 'calls for the university to be radically creative ... to imagine and bring into focus its own mode of going on in the world' in a collaborative, future-oriented way (15). What these futures might look like is contested (Facer 2018).

In the current neoliberal HE regime, calls for more creativity are often linked to the importance of preparing students for rapidly changing workplaces. This economic instrumentalisation of creativity by education policy makers and senior university managers is linked to a corporate-managerialist version of creativity, which emerged during the mid-20th century as a Euro-American response to profound social and technological changes, aiming to produce scientific discoveries, technological inventions, commercial competition and military superiority (Pope 2005). In the following decades, the rise of the knowledge economy led to a focus on creativity as a tool for corporate growth and national economic competitiveness, leading Rob Pope to characterise this corporatist creativity as 'one of the most prized commodities of capitalism' (23). It has renewed itself with the emergence of the creative industries as a key economic sector.

In HE, corporatist creativity has resulted in human-resources-driven and employability-oriented teaching, with a focus on developing students' competencies and workplace readiness. However, adequate responses to ecological, economic and political crises require radical modes of thinking and acting which people formed and socialized through formal education in the Global North – despite being able to identify the problem – are ill-prepared to imagine or engage in (Amsler and Facer 2017, 7). As a result, corporatist creativity needs to give way to a radical creativity that moves outside of mainstream capitalist growth agendas (Amsler 2014). How can pedagogical creativity accomplish this shift to help students imagine the heterodox alternatives that are needed to address global challenges?

Ken Robinson has defined pedagogical creativity as 'the ability to leap out of familiar habits into new idea spaces' (2011, 185). It entails considering things from different and multiple perspectives, in a form of 'domain bridging' that results from making unusual and novel connections across different areas or from putting unrelated things together (Staley 2019). Importantly, pedagogical creativity does not foreclose critique; instead it must be grounded in critique to have an informed understanding of the contexts and conditions of particular situations. Each creative action has an element of critique, as new ideas must be critically evaluated in order to become meaningful, while critical thinking itself is a creative process. Consequently, rather than being a binary, critique and creativity

are interlinked and situated along a continuum. Just as important for critical-creative teaching, the capacity for creativity is latent in all individuals. As everyday creativity, it is found across diverse activities of everyday lives, as individuals constantly adapt, innovate and try out new ideas (Richards 2007).

This everyday creativity means that every educator and student has creative capabilities that can be nurtured through broad pedagogies and practices of creativity that are accessible to students with different learning styles. Still, creative teaching might not fit all educators or students; it depends on teaching and learning modes and curriculum requirements but also on personal preferences. The latter are deeply connected to educators' identities, as affective social and political experiences shaped by the values, relations and power structures of personal and teaching environments (Zembylas 2003). If, on the other hand, students feel that they are not creative or transformational enough, such teaching can also become an exercise of disciplinary power (James and Brookfield 2014). Calls for creative teaching can therefore elicit contradictory responses. And yet, 'students remember imaginative classroom moments as some of the most powerful events in their learning trajectories' (xiv). For teaching to fulfil this potential, we must be explicit about the normative values of our pedagogical projects and aware of their implications and consequences.

Taken together, generative theorising and finding spaces in which to enact change inside neoliberal educational institutions through radical pedagogical creativity form the foundations of critical-creative pedagogy. In the next section, I describe each of its four strand in more detail, relate it to relevant literatures and provide short teaching examples to show how it can be enacted in HE classrooms.

Outline of a critical-creative pedagogy

Whole-person learning

The *first* strand consists of whole-person learning, which is attentive to students' selves consisting of intellects, emotions, bodies and senses, which are shaped by students' interactions with and experiences of the world around them. Whole-person learning has embodied and emotive elements that invite students to bring more of themselves into the classroom and therefore combines pragmatic, phenomenological and praxis elements of experiential learning (Roberts 2008).

John Dewey, addressing the New York Academy of Medicine in 1928, observed that 'I do not know of anything so disastrously affected by the habit of division [of mind and body] ... the evils which we suffer in education, in religion, in the materialism of business and the aloofness of "intellectuals" from life, in the whole separation of knowledge from practice' (cited in Bresler 2013, 8). In today's education, this dualism is replicated in classrooms that place a premium on academicism and analytical reasoning and neglect other forms of knowing (Robinson 2011). By contrast, Dewey's pragmatist followers argue that education must engage students' experiences, which translates into an active, reflective and relational concept of learning. It is active because 'learning takes place with the understanding that knowledge has moral consequences to invite (and often demand) social action' (Roberts 2008, 23). It is reflective because students' past and present experiences can become important sources of knowledge to inform their own

and their peers' learning through students' critical reflection on their own positionalities. And it is relational because of its emphasis on interactive learning and collective knowledge creation. In addition, whole-person learning draws on phenomenological ideas about sensory embodiment, but moves beyond its focus on individual experiences of the world towards intersubjective ones.

Critics have argued that Dewey's pragmatism ignores relations of power and marginalisation. In response, feminist scholars have developed a more critical approach that shows how certain knowledges become privileged over others and how consequently the experiences of groups in power become dominant, while marginalised groups are often excluded (Hooks 1994). Drawing on critical theory and pedagogy, they recognise experience as embedded in systems of power that can reproduce inequalities. At the same time, these scholars attempt to 'work with the racialised, gendered and class-based nature of experience to move towards a more liberatory pedagogy' (Roberts 2008, 28). In line with generative theorising, rather than creating foreclosing narratives of oppression and domination, critical experiential learning enables agency and action while always interrogating their conditions of possibility.

In my own teaching, I use whole-person learning when I ask students at the beginning of my Urban Futures module to keep a Brighton diary for a week, where they record in written, visual or auditory format their movements around the city, economic transactions, personal interactions, feelings about particular places and other experiences. By that time in their studies, most students will have lived in Brighton for at least a year and the diary activity asks them to reflect more consciously on their identities as residents of the town. On the basis of their diaries, students create and share an artefact that represents them as Brighton residents with the rest of the class and then collectively write a Brighton Manifesto to make the city more equitable and sustainable.³ By drawing on students' own experiences, emotions, critical reflections and conversations with fellow students, as well as theories on rights to the city and urban citizenship, I therefore invite students to re-imagine Brighton with their heads, hearts and, as I show next, their hands as well.

Art and design

The second strand of critical-creative pedagogy consists of the incorporation of creative methods from the arts, literature and design. Scholars such as Augusto Boal and Maxine Greene have strongly advocated for the integration of various arts practices into transformative education, which are particularly apt to engage students' imagination. In addition, design concepts and methods enable students to become comfortable with the complexities and uncertainties of global challenges and the ambiguities of responses to them.

For Greene, the arts and especially literature can serve as sources of personal reflection and inspiration and open up spaces of possibility by 'giving play to our imagination, enlarg[ing] the scope of lived experience and reach[ing] beyond from our own grounds' (2009, 84). Fiction, when studied as an art form filled with mystery and aesthetic pleasure, can nurture desires, hopes and expectations. Poetry's non-linearity, rich imagery and unusual connections can further expand students' imaginations. Similar to Dewey, for Greene it is through imagining a better future that individuals find the present in need of

change. Teaching through the arts also connects to whole-person learning. Theatre and dance, singing, painting and making enable embodied learning experiences, while creative writing can draw in students' emotions. Craig Hammond shows how students' autobiographical writing incorporates creativity, spontaneity and adventure, which in turn can challenge consumption-based education and nurture students 'active, militant and constructive hope' (2017, 107). Extending such arts-informed pedagogies, design affords additional concepts and methods for critical-creative teaching.

Design is an extensive and contested field, which can broadly be defined as 'an integrative discipline that connects knowledge from the arts and the sciences and applies it to the problems of the present, with a forward-looking orientation' (Buchanan 1992, 11). It has a multidimensional character that encompasses material, cultural, epistemic, political and ontological aspects. In contrast to commercial design, which often contributes to unsustainable production and consumption (Fry 2018), socially-engaged design recognises itself as a fundamentally ethical and political activity (Yelavich and Adams 2014). Another distinction has to be made between specialist professional design practice and everyday design, as 'the human ability to prefigure what we create before the act of creation, [which] defines one of the fundamental characteristics that makes us human' (Fry 2018, 2). Design shapes our engagement with the material world and with other beings, things and systems. This means that every act of design incorporates intellectual and material practice, raising the potential to narrow the mind-body gap so criticised by Dewey and others (Gatt and Ingold 2013). It is this socially-engaged, everyday design that can offer useful concepts and tools for critical-creative pedagogy.

One of these concepts is wicked problems, which are 'social system problems which are ill-formulated, where the information is confusing, where there are many clients and decision-makers with conflicting values, and where the ramifications in the whole system are thoroughly confusing' (Rittel quoted in Buchanan 1992, 15). In contrast to problems that follow more linear processes to precise solutions, wicked problems are indeterminate because they have no clearly defined limits and more than one possible explanation. Conceptualising contemporary challenges as wicked problems can help students better understand their super-complex, indeterminate and multi-faceted nature (McCune et al. 2021). This is necessary because 'we live in a "systemic world" characterised by multiple causation, interactions, complex feedback loops and the inevitable uncertainty and unpredictability. Old ... forms of teaching and learning seem inadequate in addressing the present global sustainability challenge' (Wals and Fadeeva 2010, 90). Wicked problems and associated interdisciplinary pedagogies of uncertainty thereby offer one way to move beyond limited pedagogical approaches (Kirby and Webb 2021).

It is design's open-ended and iterative approach to learning that can help students embrace situations of uncertainty and ambiguity, which often provoke discomfort and anxiety. This entails developing the ability to hold open spaces for reflection, discussion and action, becoming comfortable with the absence of (easy) answers and with multiple possible ways forward, all of which are important orientations for students facing a complex world. These orientations support processes of unlearning, whereby students let go of certainties and confidences, echoing Freire's definition of education as problem-posing. He himself connected this form of education to creativity and contrasted it with banking education that fills passive students with information to memorise and regurgitate (Darder, Baltodano, and Torres 2009). Challenging students with 'what-if questions'

that disrupt taken-for-granted understandings requires the exercise of their imagination and can avoid ideological thinking where the answers are known before the questions are even asked (Staley 2019). Such open-ended attitudes can also be fostered by encouraging students to assume an experimental approach to learning where failures are reframed as learning opportunities that invite reworking rather than resignation. Together, these orientations emphasise the emergent qualities of processes and things.

This emphasis on things is not accidental, because design brings to the fore the material dimensions of teaching that are often overlooked in theory-focused classrooms. Introducing visual and tactile materials to support students' learning can convey multiple ideas and layers of meaning simultaneously and better express thoughts that do not fit the linear structure of words (Robinson 2011). A shift away from written materials also 'de-centre[s] written texts as the only source of legitimate knowledge within the academy' (Laing 2021, 12). Here, information is confined to what is suitable for the page, reinforcing expert authority through the logic of sequential and sustained written arguments, while information acquisition from paper or screens is reduced to the movements of eyes and fingers (Boys 2010). By contrast, students working with physical materials can develop a form of 'hand knowledge [that] prompts physical, intellectual and emotional responses' (Blakey and McFadyen 2015, 134). This speaks to the performativity of material objects that can play an active role in teaching and make unexpected and surprising contributions to learning through their open-ended nature (Mäkelä and Löytönen 2017).

In my Urban Futures module, after students have co-written their Brighton Manifestos, they build scenarios of Brighton 2050. Through creating with wooden and Lego blocks, Play-doh, pipe cleaners, found and random objects, students give material shape to their visions of Brighton as a self-sustaining, hospitable and generous city. This activity builds on Anne-Marie Willis' (2014) exercise of designing back from the future and invites discussions about whose futures are desirable and possible, who will participate in creating them and who might be excluded from them. While incorporating such critical reflections on future making, scenario building also reveals design as the art of the possible. Together with arts-based teaching that nurtures students' imagination, design lends itself to critical-creative teaching because it 'transcends the limits of deconstructive and discursive analysis by venturing into the positive project of how the world can be – and be understood – otherwise' (Escobar 2018, 96). This alternative venturing forth connects design to praxis.

Praxis

The *third* strand of critical-creative pedagogy is praxis – as action informed by theory – which emphasises its future-oriented character. Grounded in a critical understanding of the past and present, the praxis element considers possible heterodox responses to global challenges and how students could work towards creating these individually and collectively in a form of learning-by-doing-together.

The concept of praxis is most strongly connected to the work of Freire, for whom education is 'the practice of freedom, the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world' (2000, 34). Praxis becomes a way of developing learners' radical knowledge, grounded in their lived experiences of oppression and marginalisation as the basis from

which to bring about personal and social transformations. In line with whole-person learning, more attention needs to be paid to the role of affect in praxis and in the fostering of a critical consciousness that enables students to recognise, for example, ‘hunger as more than just not eating, as the manifestation of a political, economic and social reality of deep injustice’ (Lake and Kress 2017, 65). This reframing of personal want as political problem is enabled by praxis, materialising in a cycle of reflection, dialogue and action that brings together learners’ knowledge, emotions and experiences and dialogical interaction with teachers and fellow students.

While students’ personal experiences are therefore the starting point for praxis, further recognition of their embeddedness in relations of power is necessary. Only through such recognition can students, especially those in privileged positions, become allies in struggles against inequalities. According to Freire, ‘oppression is domesticating. To no longer be prey to its force, one must emerge from it and turn upon it . . . [through] praxis’ (cited in Straubhaar 2015, 393). Praxis therefore necessitates politicising students’ locations within racialised, gendered and class-based structures inside and outside classrooms, through continual ‘hyper-self-reflexivity’ that asks them to interrogate their assumptions and prejudices, to unlearn dominant systems of knowledge and to decentre themselves as experts (Kapoor 2004, 641). This is difficult mental and emotional work that also demands careful attention to the complex politics of difference in classrooms, in order to avoid simplistic binary conceptions of oppressor/oppressed (Lingard and Keddie 2013).

Incorporating a critical perspective on practice is particularly pertinent for in teaching ID, where it is closely related to discussions of saviourism, in reference to individuals who want to alleviate the poverty and plight of far-away others. Saviourism motivates those students who enter university with an ‘under-scrutinised moral compulsion to help’ (Cameron, Quadir, and Tiessen 2013, 356), often caused by the representations students encounter in charity fundraising appeals, social media campaigns or voluntourism adverts (Baillie Smith 2013).⁴ Disrupting the saviour narrative starts with particular curricular content through a critical deconstruction of mainstream ID institutions, their histories, power hierarchies and knowledge politics, but also includes using critical pedagogies to discuss multiple forms of privilege and the diverse ways in which they are experienced. These discussions need to be linked to engagement in the world, in order to avoid privilege’s ‘double comfort: the comfort of demonstrating that one is critically aware, and the comfort of not needing to act to undo privilege’ (Heron 2005, 344). Students need to recognise their privilege and work to unsettle it through praxis.

I incorporate praxis into my own teaching through challenging students to apply their theoretical learning to situations beyond the classroom, by asking themselves: What situations in the world around me do I find unacceptable and why? How am I implicated in them? If I wanted to change these, how would I start going about collaborating with others, from my own situated location and drawing on my own partial knowledge? A good example of such learning-by-doing-together are the campaigns students design for my Activism module, which is taken every year by postgraduate students from diverse geographical, professional and academic backgrounds, with a high percentage coming from Global South countries. Over the course of six weeks students work together to design an activism campaign focused on an issue of their choice. Their work is guided by a series of weekly workshops that introduce various tools of organising, from theories of change to stakeholder analysis, communication strategies and

budgeting. Students write an assessed group campaign report and an individual reflection on the pedagogical, methodological and interpersonal aspects of the campaign work.⁵

An in-depth analysis of the campaigns can be found in Schwittay (2021); here I briefly want to reflect on this learning activity as an example of praxis-focused critical-creative teaching. The campaign work is preceded by five weeks of seminars during which students learn about different concepts and theories of activism – positioned ‘as a process of challenges and moral dilemmas more than as an experience that brings clear answers and solutions to social problems’ (Huish 2013, 10) – which they have to incorporate into their campaign designs. They also discuss examples of historical and contemporary activism campaigns, drawing on their own knowledge and sometimes involvement, which challenges them to reflect on the various forms of agency they have to engage with structures of power. The campaign work then allows them to experiment with how they might enact this agency. The theoretical and practical halves of the course are brought together by a class where students discuss Gibson-Graham’s writing as well as prefigurative and pluriversal politics, which directly invite them to consider their own roles as (potential academic) activists. The ensuing campaign design involves intense group work for several hours each week, and learning how to negotiate multiple understandings of what political engagement means and different styles of working is often cited by students as particularly challenging and rewarding.

The campaign design therefore asks students to apply their theoretical knowledge, unlearn some of their established ways and reorient themselves towards the futures they want to create. In their personal reflections past students have expressed a renewed sense of hope about transforming the world around them, which brings me to the final section of this article.

Towards teaching critical hope

The fourth strand of critical-creative pedagogy is critical hope. Such hope does not lead to unrealistic optimism, facile escapism or naïve solutionism but instead is aware of its own conditions of possibility. It is akin to Freire’s notion of radical hope as ‘the active refiguring of epistemological, ontological and axiological conditions necessary for renewing society and alleviating human suffering’ (Lake and Kress 2017, 69). This is hope that is reparative in addressing past injustices, active in materially engaging with contemporary challenges and future-oriented in seeking transformative action. Such hope is not easy to come by in contemporary classrooms, but we can begin to address the obstacles that stand in its way through forms of pedagogical prefiguration.

Whither hope

There are many reasons why critical hope is difficult to find in today’s schools and universities, from the pressures faced by students and educators, the material conditions of learning and teaching and the structural constraints imposed by instrumentalist education policies. One reason that remains underexplored but is a common experience of educators in ID, and critical social sciences more generally, is *relentlessly* critical teaching. I write this with some trepidation, because I know that developing students’ critical questioning skills is

fundamental to a transformative education. In ID it is absolutely necessary because of the above-mentioned saviourism. Once they commence their studies, students quickly realise how important it is for them to understand that social change is complex and contradictory and that the current development industry continues 'extractions of resources, restructuring of nation-states and economies, consolidation of power in the hands of a few global elites, and the practices of surveillance, conformities and alienations' (Sultana 2019, 32). ID is thereby recognised as the continuation of colonial hegemonic discourses about under-development, progress and expert saviourism.

However, teaching that *only* focuses on critique often leaves students feeling that there is no space left for change or hope. I often heard students talking about 'hitting a wall', 'feeling defeated' or 'becoming cynical', first in my office hours and then during the interviews I conducted for this research. This led me to ask 'if we are *only* teaching students to find failure, to take apart, to deconstruct, to constantly question, without giving them a sense that it is possible to also re-imagine, re-create, re-construct in radically different ways, what are the implications for their identities and sense of agency, especially when they come to study ID precisely because they want to bring about positive change?' Pessimism, disillusionment and cynicism was the outcome of my (and my colleagues') teaching for some of our students, and ID is not the only field to experience this. Ruth Barcan, who teaches cultural studies in Australia, observed that there is often little engagement by educators with such student sentiments: 'rather, I have seen an ignorance of the potentially life-changing impact of such teaching, a simplistic celebration of it, or a tendency to see it as some form of necessary initiation' (2002, 345). None of these reactions seemed satisfactory to me.

More structurally, the retreat of hope is also caused by the foreclosure of possibilities that accompanies the neoliberalisation of education. In UK education policy the disciplining effects of an 'anticipatory regime' aim to control educational outcomes and reinforce managerial and bureaucratic power (Amsler and Facer 2017). By marginalising and censoring critical pedagogy that could work against this power, this regime 'systematically diminishes opportunities for creative emergence and spaces of political possibilities in order to reproduce itself' (9). Amsler and Facer see this as part and parcel of a wider political construction of hopelessness, where discourses of inevitability, the dismantling of democratic structures and the diminishing of political agency contract or altogether foreclose spaces of possibility.

Some critics equate having hope or optimism with intellectual inferiority, personal naivety or political betrayal, arguing that 'if you are optimistic or joyful about the world, it's because you are not bright enough to realise how corrupt it is or not politically committed enough to jolt yourself out of your bourgeois comforts' (Barcan 2002, 345). Hope has also been privatised and marketised, deployed in the service of false narratives of personal advancement and material accumulation. Such 'hokey hope' manifests in discourses of individual self-realisation through DIY-bootstrap capitalism that ignores structural inequalities and feeds a 'mythical hope' that is ahistorical and depoliticising (Duncan-Andrade 2009). A related process is the commodification of hope into slogans displayed on T-shirts, tote bags or social media memes. In the face of these appropriations, 'hopelessness is what the contemporary ethos demands as we attend to the serious business of trying to adapt to circumstances that are increasingly alienating and oppressive' (Lake and Kress 2017, 72). If hope has thus become neutralised as a form of action, how can we reanimate it as a force for transformative teaching?

Hopeful education

Like many scholars interested in this question, I once again turn to Freire (2021/1992) who wrote that 'hope is necessary, but it is not enough. Alone, it does not win. But without it, my struggle will be weak and wobbly'. For Freire, education can recuperate hope as a moral and political act of daring to envision different futures. In my own discipline, this has been linked to repositioning ID from expert interventions towards a project of global social justice (Sultana 2019). In ID classrooms, students engage in dialogue and collaboration with each other and with teachers, from the position of partial and situated knowledge and the recognition of social locations and intersectional identities. The forms such teaching and learning take are non-prescriptive and context-specific, but always guided by values of mutuality, solidarity and justice. They also include thinking about contradictions and failures, but not in ways that result in hopelessness or paralysis.

A broader proposal for critically hopeful education posits three mutually constitutive elements of material, Socratic/indignant and audacious hope (Duncan-Andrade 2009). Material hope searches for 'cracks in the concrete' that are the social, economic and political conditions that shape especially marginalised students' experiences in the classroom. Locating teaching in these cracks can provide knowledge, orientations and spaces for them to be hopeful when these connect with their own lives. Nevertheless, this can be a painful process that asks students to critically examine their own lives, which Duncan-Andrade calls Socratic, or, following Freire, indignant hope, as it demands courage and perseverance. When these classroom reflections and discussions lead to collective struggles, where educators stand in solidarity with students and defy dominant ideologies from positions of justice and care, the result is audacious hope.

Such hopeful teaching is not only intellectual, but becomes an embodied orientation and an ontological necessity (Freire 2021/1992). It is also critical, because a critical perspective on the shortcomings of the present can lead to a search for alternative futures. Here hope is recognised as an 'existential must that needs to be cultivated, by showing that another way of being is possible, by encouraging trustful relationships and by giving young people the opportunity to concretely work together for change' (Ojala 2017, 9). Critical-creative pedagogy provides one way to achieve such critically hopeful teaching, this time starting in the cracks of the educational system by planting seeds that can germinate and grow when nurtured by generative theorising and materialising in pedagogical prefiguration.

Pedagogical prefiguration

Prefiguration, defined as 'the creation of alternatives in the here and now [that] enacts an interplay between theory and practice' (Maeckelbergh 2011, 3) can guide our thinking about how students' critical hope can be encouraged within today's HE system. Rather than (only) bringing about change through analysis, planning or demanding reforms, for prefigurative practitioners 'the struggle and the goal, the real and the ideal, become one in the present' (4). For educators, this materialises in finding ways in our own practice, within the spaces – however small – we do have, to transform teaching and learning into an 'ontological project' with the power to bring alternatives into existence (Gibson-Graham 2008, 626). Providing students with opportunities to apply their theoretical

knowledge and critical thinking to un acceptable situations can involve elements of curricular co-creation, for example by meaningfully engaging with the widespread students demands to decolonise curricula (Laing 2021).

In my own Activism module, one group of students designed a campaign called *Newversity*, drawing on generative theorising and prefiguration to redefine the role of universities in UK society. Departing from a critique of the neoliberal university model, the campaign proposed bringing together academics, students, local communities and policy makers in horizontal and open-ended workshops in five locations across the UK to co-write a manifesto presenting alternative ways of teaching and researching. The workshops aimed to prefigure alternative pedagogies, which included unlearning existing teaching strategies and operating without predetermined goals and guarantees. The students thereby directly applied theoretical knowledge from the first half of the course in the practical design of their campaign. Another example from Sussex is a course called Forest Food Garden, where students design, plant and maintain a garden on campus, which they hand off to a new cohort of students each year (Kirby, Parry, and Lambert 2021). Students engage with uncertainty, climate change and food security and experiment with experiential and creative ways of learning. Building on these, climate justice activism is one way in which many students take their learning outside the classroom and actively campaign for change (Schwittay 2021).

Pedagogical prefiguration also takes place outside formal education. From Free Universities to cooperative educational institutions, alternative models do exist, including in the Global South where radical and utopian experiments with autonomous, often anti-colonial and Indigenous education incorporate socially and ecologically-relational and holistic modes of learning (Amsler and Facer 2017). Some of these take the form of 'committed, polyphonic pluri-versities' that engage in struggles for social, economic and ecological justice through pluralistic pedagogies (de Sousa Santos 2017, 377). Based on her research with popular educators, social movements and cultural activists in the UK, Amsler (2015) shows that such non-formal educational practices centre around creative, aesthetic and relational learning and are open-ended, slow and not easily controlled or bureaucratised. All of these practices of pedagogical prefiguration make critical hope more present and credible in classrooms.

Conclusion

I began my article with Amsler's call for pedagogies of possibilities and in response have proposed an outline of a critical-creative pedagogy that combines whole-person learning, creative methods, praxis and critical hope. I have shown how this pedagogy can help students better understand global challenges and imagine alternative responses to them. Amsler also argues, however, that knowing that there are alternatives "out there" and in principle is not enough to make concrete and critical hope in social change possible ... The construction of paths and bridges, of spaces and infrastructures for learning, of signposts for way-making, and of way-stations to nourish us on the journey, is essential work (2015, 17). This crucial work can be supported by a critical-creative pedagogy, and this article is an invitation for educators to experiment with its philosophical elements and practical components.

Such experimentation calls for generative theorising that creates spaces from within neoliberal educational institutions, to teach students to understand the legacies of the past and learn from the shortcomings of the present, but also to imagine possible alternative ways forward, to foster their radical creativity and imagination and to inspire them to work towards more just and equitable futures in heterodox and activist ways. Such teaching calls on us, as critical-creative educators, to be courageous and persistent, to build networks of support and mutual care, and to find the cracks in the system where pedagogical prefiguration can take root and flourish.

Notes

1. To gather student feedback on these activities, I used formal module evaluations, weekly anonymous surveys, follow-up interviews with interested students and written reflective accounts. Following Sussex University ethics protocol, I obtained informed consent to use these materials from all students and conducted all interviews with them once marks had been finalised.
2. Because of my disciplinary grounding, the focus of my pedagogical work is on the social sciences. How it might apply to other fields such as STEM will hopefully be the work of future scholars.
3. Examples of what this looks like can be found here <https://www.creativeuniversities.com/post/teaching-urban-futures-again>.
4. While it is most frequently referred to as 'white saviourism', my use of expert saviourism highlights the importance of race but also gender and regional belonging.
5. The reports detail how students would carry out their campaign. Because they move into a summer of intense dissertation work right after the course finishes, they are not able to implement the campaigns.

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