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Editorial

Participatory Public Education: A cosmopolitan approach to social and environmental justice

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Introduction

This special edition includes papers from colleagues and graduate students on the area of shared concern spanning the rights of the voiceless and the marginalised and the responsibility of educators and public policy researchers to enhance the capability of decision makers to hear their voices and to work with them to co-create a better world.

My starting point is to think about the 'taken for granted'. As a social anthropologist and sociologist I have drawn inspiration from people with whom I have learned whilst undertaking fieldwork in a range of cultural contexts. As time passed and I was confronted by more and more social, economic and environmental issues I was increasingly inspired by West Churchman's Design of Inquiring Systems Approach 'to unfolding values' and 'sweeping in' social, economic and environmental considerations. The body of work inspired by this approach and aspects of social cybernetics (Bausch, Christakis, Flood, Haraway, Jackson, Romm, Stafford Beer, Van Gigch, Ulrich, and Midgley) are also helpful in formulating more systemic research on living systems and our place in the bundle of life. Most importantly the organic praxis and focus on living systems by Shiva, Deborah Bird Rose, Max Neef, Yiannis Laouris, Turok and Wadsworth is increasingly relevant to my current work on ecological footprints and social justice.

Critical systemic praxis (adapted from West Churchman 1971, 1979) helps to explore our thinking and our relationships spanning self, other and the environment. As a Meta form of inquiry it is based on questioning boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, it examines the so-called 'enemies within' (religion, mortality, politics and aesthetics) and it considers the consequences of our choices for living systems (Wadsworth 2010).

I have also been inspired by Albert Hirschman's (1970) three options for action, namely: 'loyalty, voice and exit', but these are no longer sufficient because the scope of current problems is not merely at the organisational or national level. They are at the planetary level. My praxis aims to:

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- **Build** the capacity of people to think about the consequences of their choices for self, other and the environment.
- **Co-create** policy based on testing the principle of subsidiarity and Ashby's Rule of Requisite Variety (1956) and explores the policy implications for complex decision making.
- **Extend** social theory through re-framing and re-considering boundaries (conceptual and spatial) in relation to social, economic and environmental justice.
- **Contribute** to systemic ethics by: a) expanding pragmatism through addressing 'what if' heuristics and 'if then scenarios' to enable individual self-reflection, group considerations and pilots of participatory democracy and governance. b) Considering i) identity and relationships, ii) boundaries and flows and iii) Policy decisions based on drawing the ethical line through questioning taken for granted ideas about the state, market and society together with those who are to be affected by the decisions that respect our relationships with others and the environment of which we are part. My praxis strives to reveal 'in the small new ways of seeing the whole' (Adelman, 2013, 9). This has implications for public policy education and ethics.

The acts that are covered by the Australian Human Rights Commission provide the lens through which I consider the following current issues in society: employment, provision of goods and services, education and administration of Commonwealth laws and programs. The values that shape our current social and economic choices are the root cause of a way of life *that benefits a minority at the expense of the majority* in this generation and the next.

Praxis: Believing in students and empowering them to become leaders through enabling them to apply critical systemic thinking and practice to diverse, complex trans-disciplinary issues

My role is one of facilitating engagement for social and environmental justice through enabling policy researchers and service users to voice their needs and preferences and to address the policy responsibilities of the various players so that they narrow the gap between perceived needs and policy or service responses. For example, in April this year I spent a few days at Universitas Nasional setting up a research consortium on: 'Representation, Accountability and Sustainability'. One of the key themes was the importance of implementing the Paris Agenda on Development by ensuring that participants who are recipients of Aid are able to shape the agenda. In line with the Paris Declaration, the research will be framed together with key stakeholders in public and private secular and non-secular secondary and tertiary institutions. The Paris Agenda of 1997 stresses the importance of involving all those party to research and development to be part of the design process and evaluation of the initiative. The approach will be to engage with students and staff over a three month period through on site observation, participation, focus groups and interviews.

The symposium and consortium meeting was held at the same time as the Anniversary of the Bandung Asia /Africa Conference in 1955. It was supposed to be attended by South African President Zuma. He cancelled his attendance and was represented instead by his deputy Ramaphosa, because of the xenophobic attacks on African migrant workers who are perceived to be 'stealing jobs for locals' or setting up successful shops /businesses that are seen to lessen opportunities for locals. The situation was worsened by comments that 'foreigners could/should go home'. Offers to send migrants home in the wake of the violence



in Durban (with the support of government) were interpreted as tacit support by some. This was hastily corrected in public assurances by government.

The work of Hannah Arendt has helped to shape my thinking about the question: how should we live? Her notion of the ‘banality of evil’ is particularly relevant as we need to consider the broad context and the structures that lead people to make unethical choices at a personal, interpersonal and planetary level. Democracy needs to be worked on each day to ensure that people engage in protecting their rights and asserting their responsibility. The need to demonstrate leadership for democracy is not just the role of the elected members. It is the responsibility of all global citizens. Today more and more people are on the move (Urry, 2005, 2007) as a result of natural, social disasters and personal choice. Public education is vital to support the rights of those who are currently unprotected by the social contract because they are non-citizens of nation states. A cosmopolitan support such as education for justice is important within formal educational organisations and through public education opportunities (including public arts) in open societies and through a range of media.

This editorial addresses ways in which my own program of research has been used to facilitate graduate researchers who are working on their own areas of concern. My role as A/Prof and higher degrees co-ordinator in the School of Social and Policy Studies at Flinders University and as adjunct professor in Indonesia and (recently in South Africa) is as a facilitator to:

“influence, motivate and inspire...which ‘requires a ‘different kind of and level of commitment’ and care ...keeping current in one’s field, teaching, advising students, overseeing dissertation research and intra institutional governance responsibilities ... can prevent the kinds of long term dedication to a community necessary to effect change. One option, of course is to involve one’s students... This has the immediate advantage of training a new generation of researchers ...’ (Lincoln, 2001, 130). This will be expanded upon in an article entitled: ‘Capacity building through facilitating action research for social and environmental justice’, in progress for a special edition edited by Norma Romm, 2015.

My teaching and supervision is designed to help students address complicated policy and management challenges in complicated environments. I facilitate leadership in teaching and learning through developing opportunities to learn what works, why and how and conversely what does not work, why and how in fostering the learning outcomes of international, local and non-traditional graduate students including those with disabilities or from disadvantaged backgrounds.

To sum up, my role is one of engaging students, believing in their capabilities and enabling them to build their skills step-by-step so that they achieve their goals. I draw on the Harmon Doctrine as an example of water policy that ensures that resources are shared across boundaries. Invitations from graduates and colleagues to collaborate are evidenced by workshops for University of Indonesia, University of Padadjaran, Institute of Technology in Bandung, Ministries of Religious Affairs, Finance and Social Affairs testify. These invited workshops and plenaries to promote critically reflective systemic capacity in graduate students but also provide resources to support capacity building for decision making and leadership capability in relation to complex issues around teaching and learning within universities. But I also do research with students and colleagues – through government and non-government organisations or providing workshops, for example to West Java Provincial Government, Bappenas and consultants for UNICEF or providing advice /mentoring to Living

Hope (linked to the University of Cape Town's Knowledge Management network). The theoretical perspective developed by Nussbaum (2006) in 'Frontiers of social justice' is applied to addressing complex challenges within and across boundaries, in order to address quality of life and capabilities for all.

My own critical reflection spans social, economic and environmental considerations. Climate change is a significant problem in Australia. There is little doubt that accelerated climate change will adversely affect wellbeing and sustainability in Australia (Flannery, 2005, 2010, 2015, Pretty, 2013, Stiglitz et al, 2010) — particularly if we continue to consume at current rates (Davies & World Institute, 2008) — resulting in significant devastation and a compromised quality of life. The impact of climate change has been underestimated (Lovelock, 2009, Rockström et al, 2009) and local solutions have been overlooked. Aboriginal cultures teach us about stewardship and relationships with the land, but these relationships have been lost in non-Aboriginal cultures. As Major Sumner, an Ngarrindjeri Aboriginal elder from the periodically drought-ravaged lower Murray River in South Australia and custodian of the river stresses, we are the land and the land is us. Re-establishing relationships with the land is at the heart of effective cultural ecosystem management (see <http://www.mdba.gov.au/what-we-do/working-with-others/aboriginal-communities/ringbalin>).

There is evidence that many desire more environmentally sustainable lives, but little is known about the influences on choices around the management of land, water, food and energy supplies that affect the environment.

According to the business as usual paradigm: "By 2020, Australia's population will increase by up to 14 million. Population growth is a vital ingredient of business and economic growth. Increasing the number of people in the working age population will reduce the burden on each tax payer cause by an ageing population's potential investment opportunities in infrastructure such as water, gas, electricity, roads, housing and related industries" Is bigger really better? Count, Summer 2014 Issue no 118:

Government responses to human wellbeing are often based on economic development, which inadvertently increases consumerism, resulting in greater environmental degradation and a heavier carbon footprint. The implementation of coal plants and the lack of local government support for green energy sources are a case in point for both Australia and South Africa. The recent declaration by the G7 to support a carbon free economy needs to be implemented and supported by reframing the economy and not 'mis-measuring' what is perceived to be valuable (Stern et al, 2010)

In Australia the social contract protects those within the boundaries of the state but not those who seek asylum from elsewhere. The issue of bounded governance and decision making that does not consider the consequences of social, economic and environmental choices for our neighbours has been raised by Joy Murray in the so-called 'Tuvalu test' that demonstrates how our social economic choices affect our neighbours through rising sea levels. For example in Tuvalu and Samoa, agriculture has been affected by rising sea levels and increased levels of salinity.

In workshops in South Africa and Indonesia I have explored specific questions that flowed from their engagement with our shared area of concern, namely the need to respond to urbanisation and ways to live sustainably. Often the challenges are seen in terms of



unemployment or food insecurity. Public education needs to ensure that policy makers join up the dots so that a balance between individual and collective needs can be achieved through enabling learners to achieve pathways to sustainable living. Many of the issues faced by South Africans, Indonesians and Australians are issues faced by those in other parts of Africa, Asia and Europe. The droughts in Tunisia, for example has led to protests and the flow of asylum seekers to Europe. Many also seek asylum in South Africa from other parts of Africa.

Thus the issue of employment and unemployment is one that needs to be placed within the context of the ‘environment of the problem’, namely a sustainable future in which learning supports social, economic and environmental wellbeing. After sharing my own concerns about the implications for climate change locally and regionally in workshops and showing the interconnectedness of social, economic and environmental considerations by means of a soft systems map, each participant is asked to raise their own areas of concern using critical systemic thinking tools ranging from the simple to the more complex (see McIntyre-Mills, 2006, chapter 4 and PER article by McIntyre-Mills et al, 2014).

The work of Stuart Hall (Hall, 1992) on cultural identity and representation discussed the diversity within the modern state and stressed the need to consider the way resources are distributed and consumed within nation-states by asking: What is the social, cultural, economic and environmental context? He has stressed in ‘our mongrel selves’ (1992) that we need to think critically about who, gets what when why and to what effect. Stuart Hall on critical heuristics stresses that human identity today is not tied to the nation state. As a British citizen who hailed from Jamaican, a child of parents with diverse ancestry who stressed the need to strive for social recognition he won a Rhodes scholarship. As a public academic he posted questions about cultural identity and stressed that these days people need to give a narrative response to the question: who are you?

The statue of Cecil John Rhodes has been removed from its position at the base of Jameson steps at the University of Cape Town where I studied Social Anthropology and Sociology. The statue has been described as a symbol of ‘colonial mindsets’ and the need to re-consider the direction of education. Despite the sense of loss expressed by some that the statue of Rhodes was defaced and de-centred – it is indicative of confidence in the new South Africa where people can speak out and re-frame what is valued, what constitutes knowledge and who should be shaping what is valued. It is also understandable as an expression of frustration and a way to vent anger at the many social, economic and environmental challenges that need to be faced in South Africa and the wider region. It is worth noting that in Bristol the statue of Colston (the slaver who traded in Africa) remains despite many protests.

Nevertheless history needs to be preserved so that future generations will learn about the past when the colonial mindset and colonial symbols are decentred. History tends to repeat itself. So statues may be de-centred, but should be kept as part of the historical record and as a mark of respect for the historical record and for the artists who made them.

Conclusion

Critical thinking needs to be fostered so that the errors of the past are not repeated in the future. This editorial paper stresses the need to be able to think about our thinking – need to be open to testing out ideas with others through a new form of public engagement that protects human rights and the rights of the planet. Education needs to serve through being conducted in a democracy that respects the open testing of ideas and that is guided by

systemic ethics and supported by governance structures that support a strong cosmopolitan approach.

The responsibility we hold as educators is to uphold a sacred trust, namely that we are caretakers for current and future generations of life. As public educators we are responsible for advocating for the rights of:

- First nations whose wisdom and insight are vital,
- Young people to whom we pass on the baton of stewardship and whose capabilities we need to foster,
- The dis-abled who need to experience both accessibility and social inclusion, often as an additional challenge to other bases of discrimination
- Prisoners, the destitute, asylum seekers and those who grieve the loss of land and culture.
- And to sum up, all sentient beings and the environment on which we depend.

Curriculum development and learning processes need to be based on testing out ideas in conversation and dialogue with others through creating rapport based on many ways of knowing and by learning from all aspects of nature. Reciprocity and empathy can be extended through encompassing more ways of knowing to achieve global enlightenment – that respects diversity to the extent that freedom and diversity does not undermine the rights of others.

Participatory Education Research has a central role to play in enabling the re-framing and testing out of new forms of stewardship to protect social and environmental justice. We can be free and diverse to the extent that we do not undermine the rights of others. Thus, educational co-learning to shape the content of curricula cannot be disconnected from society. Educators need to design responses in service to both human beings and the environment on which all life depends. Education and research is not about commodification for profit. Public education needs to advocate non-commodification of organisations of learning so as to foster the ethical values of treating living systems with the respect that they deserve in the interests of a sustainable future. We are shaped by our ability to show compassion for others irrespective of age, gender, socio-economic status or level of ability.

The quality of life of the vulnerable is a measure of our humanity.

The extent to which our societies remain ethical and democratic is a measure of our capability to achieve a balance between individual and collective needs.

The extent to which the environment on which we depend remains liveable is a measure of our stewardship.

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