Chapter 2
Education for Living Well in a World Worth Living in

Stephen Kemmis

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

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

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

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

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

Marx on the Dialectical Relationship Between the Individual and the Collective[1]

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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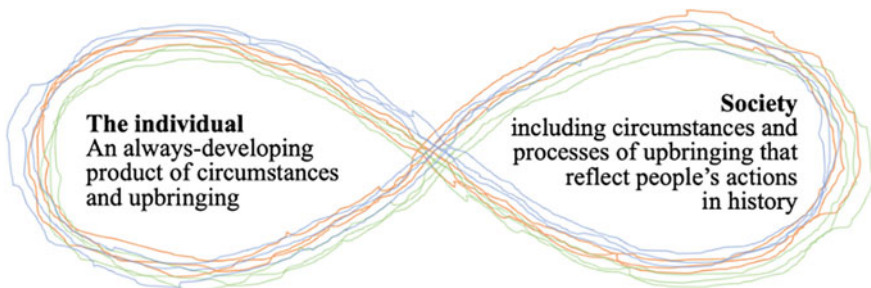

The individual
An always-developing
product of circumstances
and upbringing

Society
including circumstances and
processes of upbringing that
reflect people's actions
in history

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

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

Three Dimensions of Intersubjective Space

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[3] Schatzki (2010) describes this space in terms of 'the timespace of human activity'.

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

a. the sayings of my practices are shaped by the languages I use, even to describe myself, and by my prior experiences in conversations and communications in talk and text;
b. the doings of my practices are shaped by my prior activities and forms of work, that take place among more or less familiar arrays of physical objects in activity timespaces; and
c. the relatings of my practices are shaped by the kinds of prior roles and relationships I've experienced in my life and work, including

  i. my lifeworld relationships with other persons I encounter as unique individuals like myself, and
  ii. the functional and role relationships characteristic of the different administrative and economic systems in which I participate, for example, in organisations and institutions.[4]

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

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

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

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[4] Habermas (1987) draws a distinction between the *lifeworlds* in which people encounter one another as unique persons like themselves and the administrative and economic *systems* in which they encounter one another in system functions and roles. He proposes two theses about the tensions that have arisen between lifeworlds and systems in modernity: (1) the functioning of administrative and economic systems (e.g. business organisations and public institutions like universities or government departments) has become increasingly autonomous from their grounding in the lifeworlds of the people who work in them, and (2) the imperatives of administrative and economic systems have increasingly colonised the lived relationships of people's lifeworlds so people increasingly interpret their lifeworlds in system terms (e.g. thinking about the educational work of schools or universities not in terms of categories like the formation of persons or professions, but chiefly in terms of categories like *targets* for graduation rates; *key performance indicators* about progress towards targets, like progression and retention rates; and *outcomes*, like the number of students graduating).
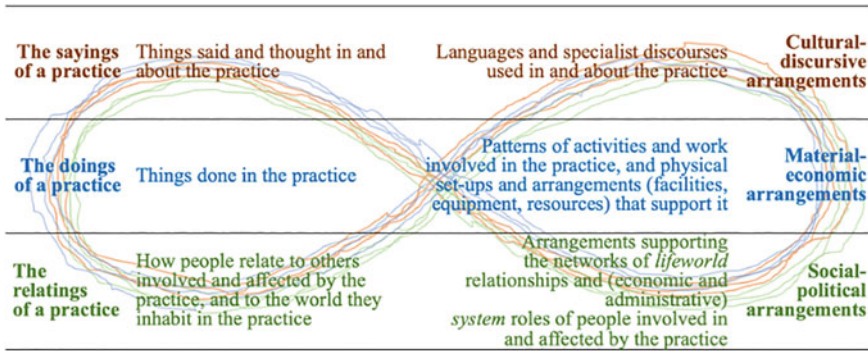
The sayings of a practice	Things said and thought in and about the practice	Languages and specialist discourses used in and about the practice	Cultural-discursive arrangements
The doings of a practice	Things done in the practice	Patterns of activities and work involved in the practice, and physical set-ups and arrangements (facilities, equipment, resources) that support it	Material-economic arrangements
The relatings of a practice	How people relate to others involved and affected by the practice, and to the world they inhabit in the practice	Arrangements supporting the networks of *lifeworld* relationships and (economic and administrative) *system* roles of people involved in and affected by the practice	Social-political arrangements

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

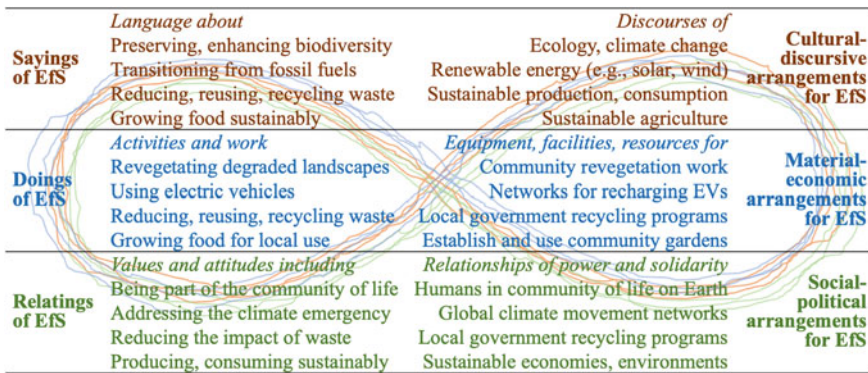| Sayings of EfS	*Language about* Preserving, enhancing biodiversity Transitioning from fossil fuels Reducing, reusing, recycling waste Growing food sustainably	*Discourses of* Ecology, climate change Renewable energy (e.g., solar, wind) Sustainable production, consumption Sustainable agriculture	Cultural-discursive arrangements for EfS
Doings of EfS	*Activities and work* Revegetating degraded landscapes Using electric vehicles Reducing, reusing, recycling waste Growing food for local use	*Equipment, facilities, resources for* Community revegetation work Networks for recharging EVs Local government recycling programs Establish and use community gardens	Material-economic arrangements for EfS
Relatings of EfS	*Values and attitudes including* Being part of the community of life Addressing the climate emergency Reducing the impact of waste Producing, consuming sustainably	*Relationships of power and solidarity* Humans in community of life on Earth Global climate movement networks Local government recycling programs Sustainable economies, environments	Social-political arrangements for EfS

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

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

The Theory of Practice Architectures

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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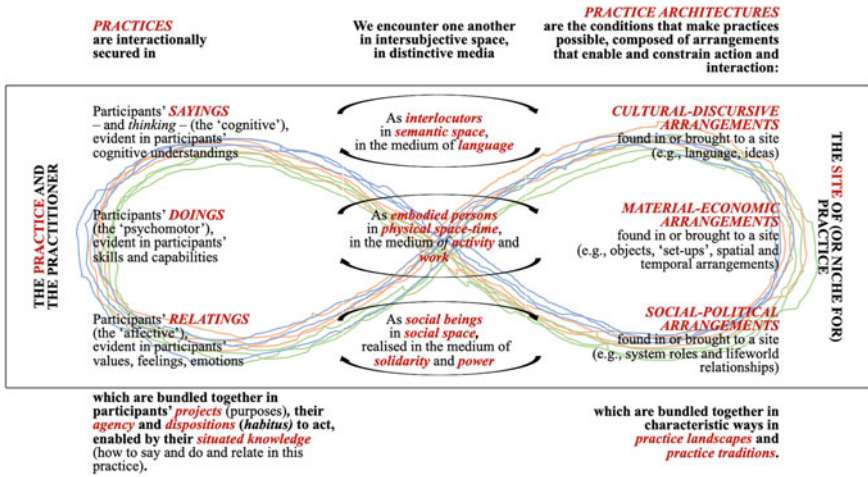
Fig. 2.4 The theory of practice architectures

A Theory of Education

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

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

and thus suggests that

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

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

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

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

On this view, then, education is not concerned only with the formation of individual people, nor only with the formation of societies; it is always concerned with both. Thus, every educator, and every tradition of educational practice, is (knowingly or unknowingly) informed *both* by a view of the good for each person *and* by a view of the good for humankind[6] (which, in these more ecologically aware times, we might replace with 'the community of life on planet Earth'). Education always has a role to play in the formation of individuals and in the formation of the cultural, material, and social conditions of our collective life.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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[8] By 'reason' here, we do not only mean a narrow rationalistic view of knowledge but also the reason of the heart. As Pascal (1623–1662) put it (*Pensées*, 1670/2013, Sect. *iv*, 277), "The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know". On this view, we should include reasonableness and reason giving as part of what is meant by 'a culture based on reason'.
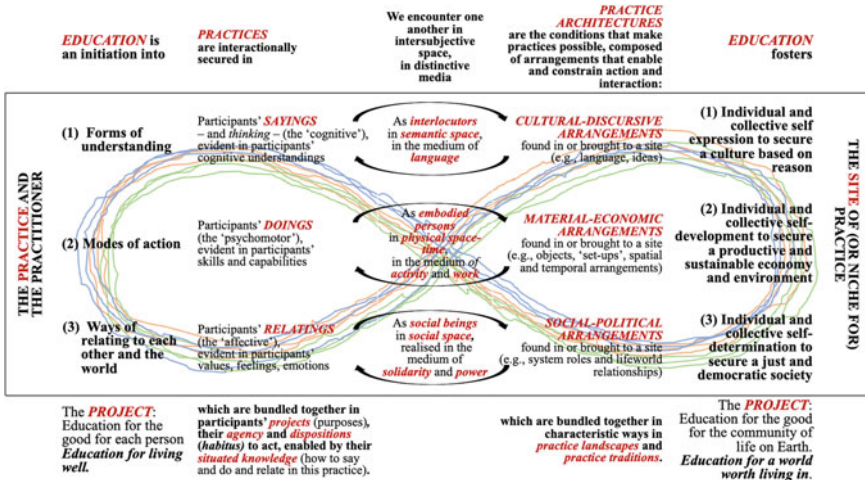
Fig. 2.5 A theory of education

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

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

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