



Curriculum for living structural crises towards socially just futures: bringing diverse funds of knowledge into participatory-democratic action around lifeworld problems that matter

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Abstract

As crises unsettle lives across the globe, growing numbers of people, in diverse situations, encounter social and planetary futures in peril. Harder to grasp is how historical structures of unequal power underpin those perils. Building capacities to comprehend the lived effects of structural injustices, and proact to transform them, are ethical challenges for schooling, which this paper takes up. I initially focus not on *school* curriculum but ‘*populist curriculum*’: ideological messages that issue from power-forces and spread across societies. I draw conceptually on Antonio Gramsci to diagnose how, in current times, populist messages verge Extreme-Right as a *hegemonically powerful minority* wages culture wars that target marginalised groups to blame for ‘good-citizen’ sufferings. Such unjustly divisive efforts to hold power manifest a *crisis of governance in chaos*, I argue, symptomizing how structural underpinnings are at historic tipping points towards dangerous times ahead. Against the *mis-educational* tide of populist curriculum, I consider how school curriculum can build young people’s knowledge and agency to live present-day crises towards sustainable and socially-just futures. Taking conceptual tools from Paolo Freire, Lauren Berlant, and the *Funds of Knowledge* (FoK) approach pioneered by Luis Moll and colleagues, I draw on a school FoK project I was part of, that suggested possibilities for participatory-democratic curriculum activity, but limited by system constraints. I then conceptualise ways to expand beyond the constraints through what I call a *Problems That Matter* approach, featuring collaboration among students, community people, teachers and academics in student-led action-research on lived problems in their communities.

Keywords Funds of knowledge · Problems that matter · Participatory-democracy curriculum · Gramsci

Introduction: structural crisis times ahead, calling for curricular response

Gramsci ... [in 1920s Italy] came face to face with the revolutionary character of history itself. When a conjuncture unrolls, there is no ‘going back’. History shifts gears. The terrain changes. You are in a new moment. You have to attend, ... with all the ‘pessimism of the intellect’ at your command, to the ‘discipline of the conjuncture’. (Hall, 1988, p. 162)

As national contexts gear-shifted towards WW2 in Europe, holds on governance were fraught by civil-social and political unrest, especially in Germany, Spain and Italy where fascist and socialist momentums clashed. Amidst this historic unrolling of tensely-stitched societal cohesions – what Gramsci called *conjunctures* – Gramsci was active in worker movements, against capitalist exploitation, for better labour conditions and purposes. Elected to Italy’s national parliament in 1925, Gramsci was arrested by the Mussolini regime’s fascist police in 1926. In prison until death in 1937, he penned historical-structural analyses of Euro-fascist ascent in his time, and conjunctural power-formations in other times and geographies (see *Selections from the prison notebooks*, 1971).

Hall (cited above) applied Gramsci’s concepts to diagnose his 1980s time and UK place of ‘Thatcherism and the project of the New Right’ (p. 163) that seized opportunity, as the ‘Keynesian welfare state’ unrolled

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through political-economic and social-cultural unrests, to ‘reverse the ... political settlement – the historic compromise between labour and capital – which had been in place from 1945’ (p. 163). In this paper, I apply Gramscian and other conceptual tools to diagnose current historic shift into a *dis-junctural* dark age of crises trending in dire directions. All of us, and especially young people from marginalised social positions, face perilous futures on many fronts.

In the next three sections, I draw on Gramsci’s conception of *hegemonic* conjunctures: that is, across diversities within a societal formation, a *powerful population minority* – a power-core – dominates political, economic, media and civic-social systems, including schools. I stress that conjunctures are *fraught and temporary* ‘settlements’, their unrolling due not simply to crises that storm into people’s lives, but because those storms are underpinned by deeply-sedimented inequalities of social-structural power which evolve, spread and fester over centuries. Yet as people live the storms (in ways and degrees that vary depending on social-structural positions), structural dynamics that underpin lived crises remain elusive to conscious grasp. Lack of deep-structural awareness, I argue, is fuelled by power-invested populist mediations – what I call ‘*populist curriculum*’ – that focus blame for crises on structurally marginalised groups. In a paper that speaks to educators, I see it as vital, before moving to *school curriculum*, to explain connections between simplistic but forceful populist mediations, and deep-structural complexities that fester beneath lived crises that populism pretends to explain. Indeed, as I will diagnose, power-driven populists take advantage of structural turmoils even as they divert attention away from structural grasp.

Then, across all continuing sections, I focus on ways for schooling to build deeper understanding of how lived crises are underpinned by structural dynamics. I outline curriculum activity that engages and develops young people’s knowledge capacities for proactive agency to live the crises they face towards sustainable and socially-just futures. This entails curricular activity that practices principles for an *ethical democracy* which cannot flourish in – and therefore must act to change – social relations unjustly structured by power inequalities. I propose what Boomer (1999) calls ‘pragmatic-radical’ strategies for curricular practice wherein students, community people, teachers and academics share and create knowledge through collaborative action-research on *problems that matter* (Zipin, 2020; Zipin & Brennan, 2024) in students’ diverse community lifeworlds. Central to such collaboration is engaging *funds of knowledge* (Moll, 2014) that build around community-based needs for viable futures.

Hegemonic power-structuring of societal conjunctures

In this and ensuing sections, I draw on Gramscian concepts in *Selections from the prison notebooks* (Gramsci 1971), which I render in my own metaphoric ways. When first invoked, key Gramscian concepts are both italicised and in bold font.

Towards rendering Gramsci’s concept of a societal *conjuncture*, I start with a more familiar metaphor, ‘social fabric’, which needs Gramscian unpacking. I found its gist aptly defined by a textile artist (Sherrer, 2017, np): “‘Social Fabric’ is the relationships and connections we make with one another; making us all a part of the common thread of society as a whole’. I do not read ‘common’ here to suggest an *homogeneous* ‘whole’ wherein all become the same. Artistic tapestries inter-weave colourful diversities, not flat-whiteness. Likewise, a societal ‘fabric’ quilts social-cultural diversities into a patchwork ‘whole’. Yet I do read suggestion that social groups *equally* thread their diversities into *harmonious* relational connection. This could signify a *socially-just heterogeneity*, IF – a BIG IF – diverse groups enact inclusive, co-participatory agency in the quilting of societal fabrics.

I dare assume most educators reading this article would not see the institutions they work in passing this BIG-IF test. In Gramsci’s vision of *conjunctural* formations, societal ‘wholes’, at nation-state scale, comprise *power-unequal* relations across diverse groups. Quilting processes are not justly inclusive, due to forceful exertions from a *hegemonic core*: a *powerful minority* at the centre of the fabric. This core comprises diversities, but of economically privileged variety, more male and mono-coloured (in ‘Western’ nations, White) than not. Tensions arise across differences within the core, yet interests tend to converge around sustaining hegemonic control. Circling the core, diversely populated rings radiate outward, with relatively privileged groups nearer the core, relatively disadvantaged groups farther out, and oppressions intensifying towards the margins. Depending on how much global wealth accumulates at the national core, and how far policies distribute wealth outward to meet diverse needs, outer rings in total comprise either a *power-marginalised majority or significant plurality* of the population mass.

Across the rings, tensions inevitably fester as people in marginalised loci struggle to meet life-sustaining needs. To hold conjunctural hegemony, yet stem disruptive fraying along seams that stitch unequally diverse groups into a ‘whole’, the power-core wages what Gramsci calls ‘wars’ across the societal tapestry, of two historic kinds: *wars of manoeuvre* (WoMs); and *wars of position* (WoPs). Before explaining, I need to clarify that most people in relatively privileged positions do not consciously act to secure their

powers. Rather, key ‘leaders’, and careerist subsets in their service – I call them a ‘power-bloc’ – form around doing the ‘dirty work’.

WoMs involve blunt-force violence, dictated by fascist/authoritarian heads of state, allied with military/police strongmen and their legions, who force marginal groups to ‘know their place’. Some minority groups are targeted for extreme abuse, blamed as causing everyone else’s struggles: a strategy to forge an ‘everyone else’ that, despite diversities, identifies as ‘in the common majority’, hence safe from state abuse. WoMs thus viciously conjure what Appadurai (2006) calls ‘fear of small numbers’. In an authoritarian societal form, civic-social system leaders, including in education systems, are tied to ruling dictates, and ‘elections’ function to legitimate governance supposedly (but *not*) ‘chosen by the people’. There are manifold WoM examples, historical *and present*: as Blakely (2023, np) notes, ‘around 72 percent of the world’s population lives under some form of authoritarian rule’. Those born-and-bred in advanced-capitalist nations may think WoMs happen only in Global South and Asian ‘third worlds’; yet they can erupt in ‘first worlds’, as 1920s/30 s Europe showed. Indeed, Mussolini, a military-supported WW1 veteran, gained election to Italy’s Parliament in 1921. Then, in 1922, many thousands of fascist supporters marched on Rome, yelling for his enthronement as Il Duce. 2021’s MAGA-marchers to ‘stop the steal’ of Trump’s re-election suggests current WoM risk in the U.S., where a significant *plurality* favours Trump’s re-enthronement. (They are *not a voter majority*; but many who do not want Trump back in office are alienated from voting; and, as Trump’s 2016 ‘victory’ showed, even a voting majority may not translate to a majority in the U.S. electoral college count.)

I return to U.S. WoM risk in “[Present-day tipping points at deep-structural levels: fomenting chaotic governance](#)” section, after next considering two historic conjunctural formations that, from post-WW2 into the 2000s, were forged by ‘wars of *position*’ (WoPs).

Post-WW2 WoP conjunctures: enabled and unrolled by historical-structural shifts

This section addresses two post-WW2 conjunctures: first, from 1945, what Hall called the ‘political settlement ... [of] historic compromise between labour and capital’; then its 1970s/80 s displacement by the Thatcher/Reagan ‘project of the New Right’. They each apply mostly to ‘advanced-capitalist’ (henceforth AC) nations, and entailed WoP tactics for centring hegemonic power. I focus on the U.S., where, born in 1946, I lived this sequence of conjunctures (I moved to Australia in 1996). I dissect how WoP tactics forge conjunctures differently than WoMs; and I emphasise how all

conjunctures (WoM or WoP) are underpinned by shifting historical-structural dynamics that both enable and unroll them.

Industrial capital’s robber-baron history of cruelly exploiting working-class and migrant labours, and then financial capital’s precipitation of 1929 stock market crash that ruined many livelihoods, called for and enabled government support to tame capitalist greed. This political momentum was furthered by economic boom during and after WW2. During Democrat Franklin Roosevelt’s ‘New Deal’ presidency, livelihoods were rescued by war-related industrial jobs, and by civic-social projects: e.g. building river dams and other infrastructures. The boom was of course beneficial to capitalists; but unions gained mass and strength to press for better distribution of wealth in higher wages. Numbers of White working-class families mobilised upward to middle-class status. Black, Hispanic and other minority groups gained less traction, given ongoing deep-structural racism; and likewise many women (especially if not married to male ‘bread winners’), given deep-structural patriarchy. Still, Keynesian Welfare State distributions, funded by higher federal and state corporate taxes, supported life-sustaining needs of the structurally disadvantaged. (See Lipset & Marks, 2000, for why/how, although New Deal policies somewhat tamed capitalist greed, they also *protected* capitalism and were not avid to eliminate classed, gendered and racialized structural inequalities on which profiteering depends.)

This brings me to a key WoP difference from WoM conjunctural forgings: not by blunt force but by ideological messaging: what I call *populist curriculum*. After Euro-fascist horrors of WW2, governing forces in AC nations stressed elections to legitimate ‘democratic cohesion’ across group diversities. Thus, within power-cores, different political leanings – ‘leftward’, ‘rightward’, and ‘centrist’ – had to compete, but not too-fractiously, for voter majorities through populist messaging. Historical contexts favoured relatively progressive Democrat messaging of wage/welfare, civil-rights and other policy orientations to win votes of White blue-collar men, various women, and diverse minority population groups. This mass of voter shoes on *leftward* feet induced *rightward* campaigners to make *centrist* adjustments in hopes to gain electoral running-ground.

What then, in the 1970s, moved voter shoes to New-Right feet? A primary explanation, I argue, is historic shift in capitalist dynamics. A capitalist structural imperative is to keep accumulating profit, even as corporate competition lowers consumer prices. This requires ever-increased milking of labour productivity for the same wage-hours paid, not counting all hours of actual labour, and/or lowering wages (Marx, 1976/1867; see p. 342). Any long run of New Deal support for higher wages and corporate taxes threatened this imperative. Corporations launched ‘globalisation’ strategies

to fight back. Much industrial production was moved from AC national centres of capitalism to more colonially exploitable lands and workforces in peripheral regions (Wallerstein, 1998). And corporations threatened to move their centres to nations that taxed less. AC governments were thus induced to lower corporate taxes, losing Welfare State funds to support groups doing it hard. All this is part-and-parcel of what Harvey (2003) calls ‘accumulation by dispossession’ of fairer benefits previously won. Industrial workers in AC nations faced lower wages, job losses, and downward mobility in both earnings and ‘middle-majority’ status.

Did politicians try to educate people on structural underpinnings of these suffered effects? Resoundingly not: neither Democrat nor Republican. Yet the effects led a New Right power-core fraction to battle for hegemonic advantage. This brings me to another key WoP difference: power-bloc doers of the ‘dirty work’ were not minions of fascist dictators and militias but populist message-spreaders in corporate media, government policy offices, key institutional systems (including education), religious and other civic-social organisations, and more. Political campaign think-tanks were significant. Indeed, notes Halimi (2002), Reagan’s strategists said to each other that ‘ideological labour’ must ‘create demand for new political agendas’ (p. 12), and ‘even quoted the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci, who argued that “cultural hegemony must [continually] be conquered”’ (p. 13).

Central to such ideological labour is populist spread of what Gramsci called *dominant common sense* across an *un*-commonly diverse-and-unequal social patchwork. New Right messages touted norms that ‘good citizens’ uphold ‘in common’, against moral failures of minoritized others. New Right strategists battled to win White blue-collar workers – who had been voting Democrat – into Republican sway by targeting non-White marginals for blame. The Reagan campaign blamed ‘dead beat dads’ and ‘welfare queen moms’ in ‘inner cities’ – no need to say ‘Black’; it was tacitly understood – who breed children out of wedlock, destroy family values, and live off of ‘good citizen’ tax dollars that Democrats bestow on them (Cammet, 2014). Such mediations combine neoliberal/economic and neoconservative/moralistic ideologies (Apple, 2001), interweaving racialised, gendered and classed structural inequalities in appeals to White blue-collar sufferings: e.g. husbands out of work as wives go off to low-pay casual jobs, and associated rise in alcoholism, domestic violence, divorce rates and more. Democrat politicians, trying to hold such voters in their camp, avoided addressing life struggles and oppressions of marginalised groups, alienating them from voting. While, in 1992, Bill Clinton won enough voters back against a weakened Bush-the-elder, he did so by buying into many centre-right ideologies, especially neo-liberal, that still capture Democrat Party populist messages and policy leanings.

Rightward populist mediations of ‘common’ sense thus act to prevent better sense-making that can grasp *structural* dynamics, even as they exploit *effects* of those dynamics in power-divisive ways. Rather than blunt-force violence, they exert symbolic violence to stir *fear of becoming small-numbered* among those with felt-need to sustain ‘majority’ identity: i.e. ‘you don’t want to sink to the level of those immoral others’. Educative effort is needed to help fathom how deep-structural power relations: (a) underpin troubling effects; and (b) are not static, but fester dynamically, eventually unrolling any conjunctural ‘cohesion’.

I turn now to how current crisis times unroll into *dis*-conjunctural chaos, as deep-structural underpinnings fester up historic tipping points that harbinge perilously uncertain futures.

Present-day tipping points at deep-structural levels: fomenting chaotic governance

Time is not a line but a dimension ... like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another. You don’t look back along time but down through it, like water. Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing. Nothing goes away. (Atwood, 1988, p. 3)

Elaine, the central character in Atwood’s novel, *Cats Eye*, is a middle-aged artist, visiting Toronto, her childhood city, for an exhibit of her paintings. After many years away, return stirs memories of early-life traumas. In the *psychological* metaphor voiced above, she realises she must look *downward*, not backward, through layered ‘waters’ of her biographic history, to fathom how these deeply-sedimented and unresolved traumas dynamically structure her subconscious, underpinning and ongoingly affecting her life.

Translating *sociologically*: historically deep-sedimented structures underpin present-day storms of social and planetary crisis. Marx (1869/1991) pinpoints the need to fathom structural depths when he says: ‘Men [*sic*; i.e. humans] make their own history [yet not] ... under circumstances chosen by themselves, but ... transmitted from the past’ (p. 15). That is, deep-structures, as past-made legacies of human-social agency, limit but do not eliminate present-day agency to re-work them. Crises may spur creative re-workings, but also fear of future uncertainty. In Marx’s analysis of how the French Revolution historically unrolled into Napoleon’s tragic emperors, and then nephew Louis Napoleon’s farcically ruthless reign, he warns, in words relevant to our times:

The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language. (*ibid*, p. 15)

I read Marx to say that, when crises of *catastrophic proportion* surface in waves of lived-experience, the surface-level waves manifest effects of *crises at deep-structural level*. At such historic junctures, to pursue more sustainable and socially-just futures requires raising collective consciousness to structural dynamics that need revolutionising through pro-action to create what has not yet been but needs to become. However, lived anxieties more readily focus on the waves, not structures beneath. To grasp how surface and depth connect is an education challenge that power-bloc mediators work against, seeking hegemonic conquest through populist battle cries that lure attention *sideways, not downwards*.

Many global–local crises now explode across lived surfaces around the world. It would take books to explore them all and in connection with depth dynamics. My dot-points below scratch down through some crisis surfaces, towards structural underpinnings:

- Causes of what Marx (1976/1867) called ‘metabolic rift’ – fossil fuel expansion, soil debilitation, species extinctions and other ecological destructions – all profit-driven, have us near tipping-points of unfixable climate disasters. (Malm, 2020; Saito, 2023)
- Given capitalism’s structural imperative to accumulate great wealth in few hands, distribution of liveable wages for labours could never accrue to more than roughly 20% of the global population. This generated a ‘world-system’ of wealth concentration in AC ‘metropolises’ that colonise ‘third-world’ peripheries to expropriate resources and cheap or slave labours. However, a limit-point in geographic space for colonial expansion has been reached. (Harvey, 2003; Wallerstein, 1998)
- Sedimented legacies of colonial-capitalist conquest thus persist in structural dynamics of ongoing racist and patriarchal oppressions across: (a) a ‘third world’ vast majority of the global population, mostly non-White and especially women; (b) African, Hispanic, Asian and other peoples with histories of slave importation to ‘first world’ and colonised regions; and (c) unpaid domestic labours of women all around the world. These dynamics now aggravate ‘cold’ and ‘hot’ wars for regional dominion;

ethno-nationalist forcings of colonised peoples off their lands and/or into apartheid ghettos; and egoic masculinism. Fight-backs are inevitable. (Fanon, 1961; Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018)

- As poor and victimised ‘third world’ refugees, desperate for better lives, converge at borders of unwelcoming AC nations, downward mobility spreads in those AC nations as workers’ labours are milked to greater exhaustion while: (a) real wages decline; wealth accumulates in ever-fewer hands; and corporate tax reductions cause collapse of life-sustaining infrastructures. (Picketty, 2014)
- All this spells a *historic limit-point for capitalist-colonial future viability*, initiating a ‘dark age’ of perilously uncertain social-planetary futures. (Harvey, 2011; Wallerstein, 2013)
- When AC governments can no longer make or keep promises of decent life-standards that enable at least a reasonable plurality securely to identify as ‘middle-majority’, they increasingly rely on identity-politics to induce fears of sinking to where small-number minorities ‘indecently’ abide. (Appadurai, 2006)

The last dot-point gets at a surface crisis central to this special issue: governance that, *in AC nations*, trends dangerously towards anti-democratic, ethno-centric fascism. I again focus on the U.S. as a key locus of this governance wave, with ripple effects across the world. ‘New Right’, I argue, no longer carries U.S. political momentum. While the hegemonic tactics of Regan’s rise entailed symbolically violent populism that aggravated ‘majority’ vs. ‘minority’ tensions across the societal patchwork, it nonetheless quilted a *WoP* fabric that, for a few decades, held at the stitches. In contrast, I now see an *Extreme Right* ripping from *con*-juncture to *dis*-juncture, symptomized by fierce warfare among the power-core elements, aggravating divisive *culture-war* splits across the societal tapestry.

Extreme-Right battle cries stir what Zembylas (2020) analyses as ‘aggression against “enemies”’, ‘plummeting to new heights’ in a ‘Trump Pedagogy’ wherein ‘populist leaders and their supporters invest affectively ... [in] ideological visions of nationalism, racism, sexism and xenophobia’ (np). Trump campaigns on ‘Make America Great Again’ (MAGA) promises of ‘beautiful walls’ to keep out ‘vermin’ – non-White immigrants and refugees from ‘shithole countries’ – who ‘poison the blood of our country’. As well as migrants and refugees, elected Republican ‘leaders’, allied media manipulators, and other power-bloc Rightists target citizen minority groups: e.g. LGBTQ+ and even Soros-type (‘leftist’) Jews. Social media and street violence stir in the wake, plummeting to new heights in the January 6, 2001 assault on Congress to ‘stop the [Biden] steal’. Republican-governed ‘Red States’ and Democrat-governed ‘Blue States’, now clash on abortion rights, immigrant safety, taking climate change seriously, and

more. At this juncture it is uncertain to say, but plausible to imagine, that new forms of ‘civil war’ may evolve towards a WoM-policed authoritarian-fascism, or may devolve into prolonged power-war *chaos*. And U.S. ripple effects both stir and join Extreme-Right global trends in other nations, especially through social media.

As refugees fleeing perils in other nations accrete at U.S. borders, while downward mobility accelerates in the U.S., Rightist culture warriors take opportunity to stoke fear of *large* numbers. Indeed, as U.S. demographics trend toward a *diversely non-White citizen majority* (as Obama’s election signified), Extreme Right *populist* curriculum plays on ‘White-majority’ identity fears, especially in Red States where the rising tide now floods into *school* curriculum. Thus, Florida White-washes meaningful cultural-historical knowledge about diversities from school syllabi, with Governor DeSantis *trumpets* the state as ‘where woke goes to die’. Literature Nobel Prize recipient Tony Morrison’s novels are banned as causing White students to feel blamed for plantation-era slave legacies they did not historically make. Yet those painful legacies, which matter in Black lives, are both negated and inflamed by an *education policy mandate* to teach that ‘slaves developed skills which, in some instances, could be applied for their personal benefit’. (Note: In this and the above paragraph, quotes associated with Trump and DeSantis are so plentifully Google-accessible and internet-durable that I see it pointless to cite sources.)

While the MAGA tide constitutes a dangerous *plurality*, it is *not a majority*: more voters do not want Trump (or Biden) as President. Still, the U.S. electoral process now tips towards blatantly *anti-democratic* tactics: e.g. gerrymandered Red State districts to weaken non-White voter impact; fewer ballot-casting sites in districts still largely populated by marginal groups; state efforts to outlaw early voting and mail voting, etc. At structural level, to quote Gramsci (1971), ‘The crisis consists precisely in the fact that the old is dying and the new cannot be born’, and so, at surface-level, ‘in this interregnum a great variety of morbid symptoms appear’ (p. 276). Much is up in the air as to how long and far morbid symptoms may spread into futures. In my reading of now, I see: (a) governance so chaotically fraught that it is hard to imagine anything like cohesive ‘majority’ identities taking form; and (b) Extreme-Right culture warriors acting to conjure a plurality that looks *anywhere but down*, thereby blaming marginalised ‘others’, not deep structures, as causing lived crises.

Is there any basis for hope that, in the current interregnum, educative momentum can build for young people to grasp, and proact to change, structural causes of crisis tides?

Young people facing futures: education for agentic hope?

Gramsci (1948/1971) made famous the mantra: ‘Pessimism of the intellect; optimism of the will’ (p. 175). Current crisis symptoms surely warrant intellectual pessimism. Yet a Gramscian ground for optimism is that consciousness both takes in *and makes* sense. Across diversities, people embody what Gramsci called *organic intellectual* capacities. Power-mediations of ‘common sense’ may influence, but do not determine, *making* sense of complexly lived struggles that populist curriculum simplifies, evading deeper understanding. Crisis-waves indeed can incite downward glimpses into structural dynamics beneath; and education, I argue, must: (a) work such glimpses into consciously informed pessimism; and (b) infuse sensible pessimism with ethical-emotive fuel for pro-active agency to warrant optimism.

In ensuing sections, I address systemic obstacles to social-educational justice efforts. Here I consider a psycho-emotive obstacle to agentic optimism: what Berlant (2011) calls ‘cruel optimism’ – i.e. cruelled by how acute crisis-times bring ‘compromised conditions of possibility’ (p. 24). For example, migrant families who gain AC-nation entry often invest hope in their children’s school success as a path to better futures. Such upward-mobility is a hard climb in power-unequal societal structures, including in ‘good times’; yet there was real possibility in the post-WW2 boom-period. Now, as downward-mobility accelerates, school curriculum sorts and selects more competitively, and aspirations for better life-chances are increasingly cruelled. Yet many tend ‘not to fight’, notes Berlant, but to cling to ‘aspirations that had gotten attached to the normative good life’ (p. 249): ‘an affectively stunning double bind’ (p51) in which it feels ‘threatening to detach from what is already not working’ (p263).

Berlant grounds such attachment in affective need for ‘continuity of the subject’s sense of what it means to keep on living on and to look forward to being in the world’ (p. 24). I read this to imply *inborn human need to feel hopeful* in pursuing futures. It is vital, then, for educators to engage school-age young people – less immersed than elders in no-longer-working norms – as sense-makers of ‘emergent structures of feeling’ (Williams, 1977) for imagining future possibilities in new-generational ways (Zipin et al., 2015). They are thus more open to proactive fight to change unjust social and planetary crises.

Can educators take on the ethical challenge to smarten-up agentic capacities through what Freire calls ‘pedagogy of hope’ (1994). Says Freire: ‘Hope, as an ontological need, demands an anchoring in practice’ (p. 2). I read ‘ontological’ to indicate need for hope as *basic to human-social being*,

like Berlant's felt-need 'to look forward to being in the world', and Gramsci's felt-need for 'optimism of the will'.

How, then, to anchor hope in school curricular practice?

Anchoring curriculum praxis around lifeworld 'glitches': engaging funds of knowledge

To anchor hope in school *practice*, curriculum cannot feature knowledge content to be absorbed, but knowledge-*in-action*: what Gramsci, Freire and others call *praxis*. I take inspiration from Berlant (2016), who, having analysed the cruelty of attachment to no-longer-working aspirations, suggests that lived crises can incite alternative aspirations towards meeting life needs. '[I]n the situation tragedy of the present', says Berlant, 'we live on the precipice of infrastructure collapse economically, politically, and in the built and natural worlds' (p. 409). She amplifies:

[C]risis times like this ... [are] defined by a collectively held sense that a glitch has appeared in the reproduction of life.... A glitch is the revelation of an infrastructural failure.... Infrastructure is not identical to system or structure ... It is the living mediation of what organizes life: the *lifeworld* of structure. Roads, bridges, schools, food chains ... all the systems that link ongoing proximity to being in a world-sustaining relation. (p. 393; my emphasis)

I read Berlant to say that most people experience crises as 'glitches' in life-sustenance: e.g. rising shortages and costs of food essentials during Covid and since. I suggest that school curricular praxis can raise consciousness to how surface-level glitches connect to system-level *infra*-structures, e.g. food supply-chain collapse; and how such collapses connect to *deep*-structure dynamics, e.g. inadequate tax revenues to fix infrastructures, and lack of government action to stop supermarket price-gouging profits. Towards knowledgeable agency that warrants hope, then, curricular praxis would anchor first-and-foremost around proactive address to glitches in student's lifeworlds, and over time build insight into *infra*- and *deep*-structural underpinnings. (Ensuing sections develop this curricular possibility.)

Berlant's evocation of 'the *lifeworld* of structure' brings me to the *funds of knowledge* (FoK) curriculum approach that emerged in Mexican–American high-poverty areas of the U.S. southwest. Luis Moll and academic colleagues went with teachers into students' home and local-community spaces to research for FoK that people inherit, evolve, and share in social networks as useful for life survival and thriving. The teachers and academics then designed classroom curricular units that linked FoK into school subject areas.

Resonant with Berlant's lifeworld 'glitch' concept, Moll et al. (1992) say:

We use the term 'funds of knowledge' to refer to those historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for ... functioning and well-being ... [that evolve in] dealing with changing, and often difficult, social and economic circumstances ... [across] multiple spheres of activity within which the child is enmeshed. (pp. 133–134)

Connecting lifeworld knowledge into curriculum activity, as learning *assets* ('*funds*'), takes up Vygotsky's ethical challenge to educators (1997/1926):

Ultimately only life educates, and the deeper that life ... burrows into the school, the more dynamic and ... robust will be the educational process. That the school has been locked away and walled in ... from life itself has been its greatest failing. Education is just as meaningless outside the [life]world as is a fire without oxygen ... [E]ducational work ... must be inevitably connected with ... social and life work. (p. 345; quoted in Moll, 2014, p. 121)

Educators might here ponder how constraints, instituted into school walls, inhibit robust burrowing of FoK into curricular activity. Moll (2014) addresses such constraints: 'Schools are encapsulated ... [by] fixed systems for learning, with their primary artifacts, texts and tests prescribed for them' (p. 137). Walled into schools are messaging systems – curricular knowledge content, pedagogic delivery and learning assessment – that narrow what counts as 'achievement'. They encode selection for what Bourdieu (1986) calls *embodied cultural capital*: ways of knowing that children born into structurally-privileged *positions* internalise as subconscious *dispositions* – or, habit-patterns: what Bourdieu calls *habitus* – in family and other early-life habitats. School message systems thus elicit those dispositions, deem their bearers to embody 'natural learning assets', and sort them along 'high-achiever' paths. In relational contrast, ways of knowing embodied in marginalised lifeworlds are deemed 'deficits', sorting their bearers along 'low-' or 'non-achiever' paths. Moll (2014) thus notes that 'social dynamics in all societies ... are mediated by relations of power', infused into school walls, 'that determine whose language and cultural experiences count and whose do not, which students are at the center and which must therefore be peripheral' (pp. 148–149).

Curricular sorting-and-selecting based on power relations thus reflects, and reproduces, the pattern of nearness-to and farness-from the hegemonic core of a societal tapestry. Against this, Moll (2014) asserts the FoK approach's ethical challenge:

The funds of knowledge approach, then, represents a challenge to the stifling prescriptivism of the status quo, not only in valuing the knowledge of the students most marginalized by the education system but also in assuming that teachers can conceptualize a rigorous curriculum that honors students and families as co-participants in the practice of education. (p. 137)

Moll articulates social-justice principles for curriculum, featuring students, educators and family/community people, across their diversities, as co-designers of knowledge activity. Such participatory-democratic collaboration expands curricular praxis to include, as learning *assets*, FoK of proven use-value in power-marginalised lifeworlds.

Colleagues and I, in projects at Australian high schools where students are mostly from marginalised lifeworlds,¹ sought to anchor FoK ethics into praxis. Along with ‘small victories’ were hard lessons on how prescribed curriculum constrains such praxis. I say more about constraints, followed by hard thinking on how to work beyond them, after outlining an elective class – part of an FoK project – that suggests starting-points.

An FoK-based elective class

The class took place in a high school with students from a multi-suburb area near the city-centre of a state capital. I call the area Fringe City (FC), and the school Fringe City College (FCC). FC had long been culturally diverse; but some suburbs were gentrifying, pushing marginalised groups to poorer suburbs. FCC took in some White and Asian students whom I call *new-gentry*: parents were first-in-family to graduate university, during the progressive 1970s/early-1980s. More FCC students were from disadvantaged families: Black African and other recently arrived refugee/migrant groups; and ‘underclass’ Whites whose blue-collar parents lost decent jobs in the 1980s global-capitalist shift to overseas industrial production.²

In 2013 I sat in on Year 9 classes and held focus-groups with students, plus interviews with some students at home to include parents, asking about aspirations and concerns for futures. Towards the end of 2013, school leadership granted a request from me and an FCC teacher to

¹ The projects, funded by the Australian Research Council, are: (1) Reinvigorating middle years pedagogy in ‘rustbelt’ secondary schools (LP0454869), 2004–2007; (2) Pursuing equity in high poverty rural schools: improving learning through rich accountabilities (LP100200841), 2010–2014; and (3) Capacitating student aspirations in classrooms and communities of a high poverty region (DP120101492), 2012–2017.

² This section and the next two have, with co-authored modifications, been contributed to a non-refereed e-magazine that circulates in schools.

co-facilitate a Year-10 elective class in Semester 1, 2014. Our FoK approach involved an innovation that academic colleagues and I had developed in an earlier project, which caught Moll’s attention (2014):

[A]lthough conceptually aligned with the original funds-of-knowledge work, Zipin [and colleagues] applied a different methodology ... for teachers to negotiate curriculum units with students that [quoting Zipin, 2009] “connected meaningfully to lifeworld locales: in effect, putting students to work as ‘researchers’ of their own lifeworlds.” (p. 143)

Students in the class formed five affinity groups to research issues each group nominated as mattering for futures in FC-area communities.

- Four students – two male, a Sudanese refugee and a Māori immigrant from New Zealand; and two White female from underclass families, all from poor suburbs – researched changing race relations as some FC suburbs gentrified relative to others.
- Four Ethiopian refugee students – three female; one male – researched how rising rents in FC central-commerce zones pushed African family small businesses (barber shops, bakeries, restaurants, etc.) to poorer suburbs, adding to life-sustaining struggles.
- Four underclass White students – two male; two female – from a suburb with growing influx of non-White migrants from overseas, and poor Whites and non-Whites moving from gentrifying suburbs, researched drug-sale and other rising street safety concerns.
- Four Asian male students – three Vietnamese; one Indian – researched whether their generation would be able to afford housing in now-gentrifying suburbs where migrant ancestors bought homes back when houses were more affordable.
- Five White new-gentry students – three male; two female – researched how ‘yuppifying’ some suburbs diminishes ethnic and working-class presence and identities.

Before groups formed, the teacher and I explained that research topics should address matters of concern for futures in FC locales, but that the students, not the educators, would identify matters for research. Significant, then, is that: (a) they all identified what Berlant calls ‘glitches’ that mattered in their lifeworlds; *and* (b) the glitch-matters converged in what Freire (1993/1970) calls a ‘generative theme’ – in this case, gentrification effects and associated power-relational inequalities across diverse lifeworld locales. Says Freire:

To investigate the generative theme is to investigate people’s thinking about reality and people’s action upon reality, which is their praxis.... [T]he methodol-

ogy proposed requires that the investigators and the people (who would normally be considered objects of that investigation) should act as co-investigators. The more active ... in regard to the exploration of their thematics, the more they deepen their critical awareness of reality and, in spelling out those thematics, take possession of that reality. (p. 106)

Freire here explains how to anchor hope in praxis. Building thought-in-action around lived-thematic crises deepens critical grasp of systemic and structural underpinnings. It moves people beyond *reactive* clinging to aspirations that do not work, into knowledgeable *pro*-action, energised by felt-need and sense of *agentic capacity to act with others* towards socially-just and sustainable futures.

FCC class scheduling limited student time for research in lifeworld spaces during school hours; but students also researched in after-school hours. The teacher, I and some pre-service student-teachers from the nearby university sometimes went with groups. Back in the classroom, lifeworld FoK gained articulate expression in group dialogues, from which I learned much. For example, the Sudanese refugee boy voiced his experiential knowledge of how racism in the suburb where he lived – in an apartment tower full of Black African refugees/immigrants – differed from racism in the gentrifying suburb closer to FCC where he sometimes shopped (for rich testimonial data, see Zipin et al., 2021a). I reckoned that, if more FCC teachers heard-and-learned from such students, their FoK could connect richly into a multi-disciplinary range of school-subject areas.

I note that, three years prior to the class, a job I gained at the nearby university moved me to a gentrifying FC suburb. Walking around various FC-area neighbourhoods and commerce zones, I registered ethnic diversities in language, dress, restaurant aromas, and more. I fancied myself a spatial-geographer of the raced/classed/gendered patterns of core-peripheral power-relation in the area. I saw the same patterns in FCC, and in the power-relations of its curricular sorting-and-selecting. Yet in the elective class, as student *insider*-geographers of their lifeworld spaces taught me their FoK, I realised how far my street-walk perceptions were *outside* their rich lifeworld textures. This underscores the importance, for strong curricular and pedagogic engagement, of teachers learning from students about their lifeworlds. And – a hard lesson – I experienced how most FCC teachers' ears were not ready to hear students voice their FoK. As Moll and colleagues observe (1992):

[C]lassrooms seem encapsulated ... from the social worlds and resources of the community.... [T]eachers rarely draw on the ... “funds of knowledge” of the child’s world outside the context of the classroom. (p. 134)

Indeed, our class doings were encapsulated away from wider school attention. Hoping to share our doings more widely with FCC staff, and so encourage expansion of FoK praxis beyond a one-semester class, I emailed the FCC principal, asking for a meeting to discuss possibilities. I had in mind a workshop with fuller FCC staff. The principal replied ‘yes’ to a meeting, but no appointment was made, nor did my two follow-up emails get replies.

I see systemic pressures behind such avoidance, calling for analysis.

Schools in a double bind: attached to narrow curriculum that does not work

I here recall Moll’s observation that, in societies structured by power relations, ‘elite’ social positions culturally command the curricular core, and marginalised cultures ‘must therefore be peripheral’. Core-periphery patterns have particular histories in given AC nations. Lacking space for ample account of Australian particulars, I only offer a skim history, beginning with simple assertion that, from the late-1770s, British colonising of Indigenous lands cemented racialised inequalities as the deepest structural underpinning of societal and curricular patterns, evolvingly persistent into the present. (For plentiful history, see Reynolds, 2021. For history of school-marginalisation effects, see Campbell & Proctor, 2014).

With particularities, histories of race-colonial, gender and economic class inequalities underpin all AC-nation tapestries. However, Australia’s trajectory of *class*-structural history is somewhat atypical. At first, it matched Britain’s steep stratification when, on colonised lands, penal colonies were founded to export UK prisoners – mostly White underclass, for crimes often poverty-driven – and exploit their labours. But as the penal era faded from the mid-1800s, White ‘free citizens’ contested economic inequality that landed UK ancestors in prison. From the early 1900s, working men won a family wage, 8-hour day, old-age pensions and other policies of fairer economic distribution. Of course this did not apply to non-White groups, given a ‘White Australia’ immigration policy (1901 to 1973) and marginalisation of Indigenous peoples. Nor has socio-economic opportunity ever been as unstratified as ‘fair go’ romanticism implies. Still, until nearing the 1990s, class-stratification was not as steep as in the UK and US (Pusey, 1991); nor was school success as much a competitive passport system for jobs and living standards.

However, a late-1980s turning point came as jobs ‘de-industrialised’ across AC nations, Australia’s

class-structure stratified and steepened, the ‘middle’ thinned, and many young people faced downward-mobile futures, with room for few to rise (Pusey, 2003). Schools became a competitive passport system, as state and federal education policies, infested by ‘economic rationalism’, reflected the structural stretch in neoliberal ideo-logics of students earning life-chances through merit of hard work in school. In turn, curriculum went selectively narrower, encoding White upper-class cultural capital as *the* test of ‘merit’.

Education policies are a governance locus where depths and breadths of lived complexity narrow into simplifying ideo-logics that funnel into schools. I note that, while Australia has seen periods of neoconservative rise, neoliberal logics more strongly prevail. Extreme Right culture-warfare has not gained sway, *as yet* (symptoms are brewing). Yet neoliberal logics do the ‘dirty work’ of legitimating an increasingly stratified class structure. By 2011, policies imposed a *narrow* national curriculum; *narrowly* standardised testing; and *narrow* measures of whole-school performance, posted on a *MySchool* national website for families to choose where to send their kids. Schools are thus pushed to look better than other schools on competitive measures that *select narrowly for cultural capital*.

In Australia, elite private schools draw most students who inherit cultural capital in power-elite families. In contrast, what I call ‘poor cousin’ public schools, such as FCC, need students from marginalised families to fill seats, yet are pressed to ‘improve performance’ in line with narrow measures. By the time of the experimental class, FCC and nearby poor-cousin schools all had adopted a curricular strategy reflecting competitive pressures. Based on performance statistics from late primary-school years, they selected small sub-cohorts, judged to show ‘high-achiever’ qualities (i.e. cultural capital), for an ‘accelerated’ middle-years program (in FCC, Years 7–9). As I see it, school leaders were encapsulated by market-competitive need to advertise a program leading to ‘advanced’ Senior Years (11–12) study and on to university and ‘good life-chances’. FC-area schools thus competed to draw new-gentry students with cultural capital, reducing need for marginal students to fill seats.

In this, I see an *institution-level parallel to Berlant’s family-level ‘stunning double bind’*. As social-planetary crises expand, an ethical school response would *expand* curricular praxis to build knowledgeable capacities to understand current crises and proact towards sustainable and just futures. Yet, pressed by policy-drivers, schools stay attached to narrow curriculum, foregrounding ‘meritocratic’ aspirations in *narrow* ‘economic life-chance’ terms, that for structural

reasons cannot support more than few to rise (Brown et al., 2011).

In the process, marginalised students – who embody cultural knowledge *funds*, but not cultural *capital* – are sorted along ‘lower’ academic or vocational paths. When ‘poor cousin’ schools centre a ‘high-achieving’ few, a peripheralized majority absorb tacit and spoken messages that FoK as asset-value in their lifeworlds are considered ‘deficits’ for learning in school, alienating them from curricular engagement. In our FCC research, students thus marginalised in usual classrooms expressed their alienations to us, including those who participated in the elective class. (See Zipin et al., 2021a, b, for data in which students voice awareness and analysis of narrowly selective curriculum and the divisive pains caused). However, our class engaged rather than alienated them via curricular praxis that valued their FoK as *assets*. (Note: most students in the class were among the most peripheral at FCC. Only those in the White ‘yuppification’ and Asian housing-affordance groups had been in the accelerated program.)

While FCC leadership allowed a one-semester experiment in doing curriculum otherwise, policy ideo-logics for narrowly selective curriculum stymied our chance to encourage further and broader take-up of FoK praxis. I dare not blame school staff for encapsulation in system constraints. But I will now dare imagine a better design of our experimental class approach, anchoring FoK participatory-democratic ethics more robustly into curricular praxis. This re-design features student-led action-research into *problems that matter* in their lifeworlds, with substantive collaboration of educators and local-community people.

A Problems That Matter approach: putting diverse knowledges to work in student-educator-community collaborations

Across this paper, I have argued that *populist* curriculum, issuing from hegemonic power-core loci, carries purposeful intent to ‘dumb-down’ large portions of national populations. In counter, I have urged the need for *school* curriculum to act purposefully to smarten-up organic intelligence capacities among younger generations. In this section I dare to imagine an approach for undertaking this difficult educative challenge. I have argued that such an approach must build conscious grasp of how lived-surface crises connect to structural underpinnings. This section clarifies my view that this should not be done mainly through lecture-like focus on complex structural underpinnings and how populist curriculum

simplistically casts unjust fear and blame upon marginalised groups. Such direct teaching can and should occur in appropriate pedagogic moments. But, harking back to Berlant, I argue for main focus on problematic ‘glitches’ that matter in diverse lifeworlds of students and their communities, involving student-led action-research, with substantive collaboration from educators and community people, around which, pedagogically, to scaffold grasp of how lived ‘glitches’ connect to infra- and deep-structural underpinnings.

Extending from the FCC experimental class, I outline what I call a Problems That Matter (PTM) approach in a sequence of numbered design principles, each followed by dot-pointed pragmatic-radical strategies.³ Borrowing Boomer’s (1999) concept of ‘pragmatic-radical teaching’, I take ‘pragmatic’ to mean *doing what works* within constraints of current school contexts; ‘radical’ to mean *prioritising ethical root-purposes* for education; and the hyphenation to signify *doing what works to expand possibility to pursue what is worth working towards*. I begin with an overarching ethical root-purpose: *to re-purpose curriculum as collaborative praxis, inclusive of diversities, that builds knowledge capacities for agency to live the present towards socially just and sustainable futures*.

1. Prior to forming a class, identify a PTM of generative-thematic significance across students’ diverse lifeworlds.
 - In Semester2 of an FCC school year, teacher-education academics from the local university conduct focus-group dialogues in which a range of Year 9 students identify mattering glitches in their diverse lifeworlds. The academics gain trust by showing they are there to listen and learn. (Let’s assume the glitch-matters, and affinity groups that form around them, are those that emerged in the FCC elective class.)
 - Towards semester’s end, the students bring the academics into their homes and other lifeworld spaces. The academics enlist some FCC teachers, and some pre-service students at the local university, to join these visits, where they engage in dialogue with the students and local-community adults about lifeworld glitch-matters that the students raised. Across the diverse lifeworlds, educators listen for a convergently-generative PTM theme and relevant FoK.
 - The Year 9 students involved in this lifeworld research are invited into a Year 10 class, negotiated with school leadership to span two-semesters: classroom-situated in Semester1, expanding to lifeworld-situated action-research in Semester2. Two education
2. In the Semester1 class, promote inclusive student-led dialogue that shares FoK from across their diverse lifeworlds.
 - At the outset, encouraging dialogue, the educators:
 - (a) recap glitch-matters the students had raised, and state the generative PTM: in this case, gentrification effects across FC-area suburbs (which over time will be explored as a core-periphery pattern of structurally unequal power relations).
 - (b) explain the ‘FoK’ concept and assure they will listen and learn from students about lifeworld FoK in relation to the generative PTM theme and its affinity-group sub-themes;
 - (c) clarify that, whatever power inequalities exist across students’ diverse lifeworlds, and however much or little voice they had in prior classrooms, in this class all will have participatory-democratic voice, learning-and-teaching *with* (not competing against) each other.
 - Time for both small-group and full-class dialogues are planned. For the latter, the different affinity groups lead dialogue in rotation, tabling their glitch-matters and associated FoK for other students and the educators to hear and learn. As educators gain trust, they take the role of pinpointing thematic nuances that emerge in dialogues.
 - As students gain comfort in dialogues, they invite family/community residents into the classroom as FoK-sharers. The educators invite timely visits from other FCC teachers, pre-service university students, and community activists and academics with relevant knowledges for linking lifeworld glitch-matters to infrastructural and deep-structural underpinnings. Thematically-relevant readings – which all who participate can contribute – are assigned and talked about.
3. In Semester2, extend knowledge-sharing from classroom into lifeworld spaces through student-led action-research in which educators and community people collaborate.
 - In Semester1, students and community people brought lifeworld knowledges into the classroom. This continues in Semester2; but curricular praxis now also reaches into lifeworld spaces through student-led action research on half days that the educators timetable with school leaders. Having partici-

³ For another pragmatic-radical re-imagining, drawing on a different FoK project in a rural area where a PTM was chronic floods, see Zipin, 2020; Zipin & Brennan, 2024.

pated in Year 9 preliminary research, the students now return to their lifeworlds more broadly and deeply informed by diverse PTM-relevant knowledges gained in Semester1 dialogues in which students, community people and educators learned-and-taught together.

- Since students inhabit both their lifeworlds *and* the school-world, they are central in bringing lifeworld and school-world knowledges into *reciprocally useful* (not capital-selective) interaction in relation to the PTM. To do so, they bring FCC teachers, pre-service teachers, academics and community activists with them into their lifeworlds, such that educators learn first-hand from community people about glitch-matters affecting their lives, and FoK that builds around those mattering problems.
 - Back in the classroom, co-participants share research learnings from across the diverse lifeworlds. Focus develops on ways for students, community people and educators to collaborate pro-actively towards redressing the PTM of unequal gentrification effects, as differently lived, in the process gaining grasp on infra/deep-structural underpinnings.
4. Build educator professional community around PTM curricular ethics-in-praxis.
- From midway in Semester1, continuing in Semester2, student affinity groups rotate in attending FCC whole-staff meetings to report on their activities and learnings.
 - Through the combination of students reporting at staff meetings, some teachers visiting the PTM class, and some joining students in lifeworld research, momentum builds for FCC teacher professional development around PTM curricular praxis and its participatory-democratic ethics.
 - The academics organise a university program for in-service teachers, pre-service teachers, and teacher-educators to engage together in professional development and expand professional community. Current and future teachers are thus prepared to work with students, across their diversities and possibly across schools, in pro-active curricular address to current and emergent PTMs.
5. Expand school-community and school-school connections.
- As class activities gather momentum, FCC leadership alerts appropriate media about how the collaborations engage and contribute to local-community needs for sustainable and socially-just futures.
 - A volunteer FCC committee forms, including students, community people and educators. It has

timely meetings, and timely interactions with the PTM class, to consider: further PTMs for curricular address; expanding the number of Year 10 classes to involve more students; extending curricular action-research into Years 11 and 12; sharing professional development with other nearby schools; and more.

- Towards the end of the year, FCC hosts a public event, open to all students and teachers at FCC and nearby schools. Student, local-community and educator co-participants in the class and the action-research present on how their collaborations built pro-active agency to address PTMs, inviting commentary and ideas from those attending, especially local-community people. Media and government-policy actors are invited, with understanding that they are there *to listen and learn* before chiming in.

Of course, no matter how pragmatic the curricular strategies I outline, their *radically democratic ethics* will face powerful systemic-institutional obstacles that policies channel into school walls, the more so in crisis times. Yet crisis times are when ‘revolutionizing ourselves and things’ (recalling Marx) is vitally needed. Towards revolutionising curriculum, ‘we’ (educators) must anchor into praxis *both* knowledgeable grasp of the times we are in, warranting pessimism; *and* creative work with-*and-on* knowledge, warranting hope.

Conclusion: apprenticing ethically creative intelligence to crisis problems

The *ethics* that pervade pragmatic-*radical* strategies for PTM curricular praxis echo strongly in Pignarre and Stengers’ call (2011) for *apprenticing* to problems which manifest what Stengers, a philosopher of pragmatism, calls ‘catastrophic times’ (2015). They explain: ‘We are talking of a problem “that gathers together”, not of a problem to *be resolved*’ (p. 112; original emphasis). I read ‘gather together’ to indicate generative-thematic problems that draw together people, and their knowledges, who diversely live, and want to understand and proact upon, critical matters for present-into-future times. I read ‘not to be resolved’ to say that surface-waves of critical emergency are dynamically emergent, not static – as are their deep-structural underpinnings. Hence, knowledges for grappling with crises must also be emergent, not static. As Pignarre and Stengers underscore:

Apprenticeship is not a pedagogy, it is a production of knowledge, the production of a new type of expertise... creating new means of grasping a situation, leading to the production of new ways of acting, of connecting, of being efficacious. (pp. 76-77)

Such *creative knowledge-making* – informed by, but not limited to, knowledges of past making – calls for collaborations among co-participants with diversely relevant FoK as well as academic expertise. Hence, add Pignarre and Stengers, ‘the knowledges and techniques of professional researchers would not be excluded but they wouldn’t be in command’ (p. 86).

Apprenticeship to the problem thus anchors into praxis an ethics of inclusive, co-participatory democracy wherein all whom the problem gathers build agency together. In PTM school-curricular activity, young people across diversities – especially from power-marginalised lifeworlds – warrant centrality in such knowledge-making collaboration. While we all face lived crises for futures, young people face them most emergently. They need and deserve education that furthers their capacities to grasp and proact on crises of the times; and we all need their ‘new blood’. In reading the world from new-generation standpoints, they – with collaborative support of educators and community people – are best positioned to re-work inherited knowledges ‘into self-conception and self-expression’ whereby ‘they re-create particular funds of knowledge’ (Esteban-Guitart, 2016, p. 48).

What’s needed is ethically courageous education that smartens-up younger generations to see through false surfaces of neoliberal narrowing as well as culture-war ‘dumbing-down’ that steers focus away from seeing *structurally* downward by coaxing attention sideways for ‘causes’ of crisis effects that feed on, and fuel, structural power inequalities. We must anchor hope in curricular praxis that, in Marxian and Gramscian terms, creates something that has never yet existed: a societal conjuncture that is not hegemonic but *socially just*.

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