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Touching the Unknowable

Unlearning the universality of modern ways of knowing and learning, with the example of the EarthCARE approach.

Global learning can definitely help all learners make better sense of the challenges we face as a global community, especially the benefits and challenges of globalization including inter-related “wicked” systemic challenges related to migration, ecological vulnerability and reconfigurations of economic, political and cultural power. It can raise awareness of the intended and unintended consequences of global trends such as the effects of automation on the creation of surplus labour, the effects of hyper-consumerism on environmental depletion, the effects of global financial capital on national governance autonomy, the effects of subsidies, monopolies and debt on global trade, and the effects of colonialism on present international borders and relationships.

Global learning can help educators understand how societies are changing, how this change is happening at a faster pace, and how this impacts learning and education, both formal and informal, as younger generations face more complexity, diversity, uncertainty, instability, volatility, and inequality than their parents and teachers have faced in their lifetime. Global learning prompts important questions like: Is the role of education in society to adapt to change or to shape change? How can education prepare for a future where the generational promises of welfare, sustainability, security and prosperity for all *could* be unworkable?

Global learning does not offer a singular response to these questions. It is a field of study that, like any other, has many different conversation strands, pedagogical orientations and interpretations of what the words global, learning and transformation mean. Therefore, the answer to the question: how transformative can global learning be? is “it depends”. Global learning can be as transformative as the depth of analysis that is possible in each context, the scope of horizons for (co)existence opened by the pedagogical intervention, and the relevance, quality of relationships and impact experienced by learners in the pedagogical process. There are different ways we can talk about these dimensions. In this short article, we offer a tentative cartography of critiques and horizons with the intent to invite new conversations.

We could think about social critiques as having a focus on methodological, epistemological or ontological concerns. Critiques focusing on methodological concerns ask questions about what we do, how we do it and how this doing can be more effective. Critiques focusing on epistemological concerns ask questions about what we know, how we know it, and how this knowing can be expanded, for instance, to include silenced perspectives. Critiques focusing on ontological concerns ask questions about who we (think) we are, the conditions for us to be and to understand being that way, and how we could experience existence differently. Critiques with epistemological and ontological concerns tend to have a systemic orientation that highlights the connections between history, power relations, the politics of knowledge production, and the uneven distribution of wealth, labour, and the perceived value of life (human and not). Critiques

with methodological concerns tend to focus on models and strategies for improving the effectiveness of policies and practices towards pre-defined institutional goals (see table 1).

Table 1: Different layers of concern

methodologica I concerns doing	What is the problem? How can we fix it? What should we do? How should we do it? What happened? What is happening? What strategies are effective? What outcomes are expected? What challenges are faced? How does/will it work? How to improve effectiveness? What knowledge/expertise is missing? What public policy is needed or not being implemented correctly? How does this compare to what happens in other contexts? How can I help?
epistemological concerns knowing	Whose bodies/voices are represented in what is perceived to be normal or natural? Who decides where forward is? In whose name? For whose benefit? How come (i.e. historical/systemic forces)? How are dissenting voices included (or not)? Whose terms of dialogue/inclusion are in operation? What collective traumas are present? Whose vulnerabilities are visible/invisible? Why? Who has been historically and systemically negatively wounded? What side effects have emerged? What healing strategies have been employed? Who decides on the pace and remedy? What notions of authority, merit, credibility, normality and entitlement are at work? What is being opposed and proposed as replacement? How am I connected to this struggle? How am I complicit in harm? How am I reading and being read? How to be an ethical ally/"accomplice"?
ontological concerns being	What is the nature of reality, self, consciousness, time, change, life and death in this context? What cognitive / affective / relational/ educational / healing / sensorial practices are possible from this cosmology? How is the possibility of my understanding (knowing/sensing) limited by my positionality /lack of socialization? What is this (not knowing) experience teaching me about possibilities I could never have imagined before?

Similarly, pedagogical interventions driven by investments in linear and seamless teleological progress, which entails incremental continuity rather than a fundamental disruption of the present, will aim for a soft reform of modern institutions and relationships. These interventions will focus on improving policies and practices within what is already known and defined in terms of our expected experience within nation states, capitalist economies, liberal justice, and humanistic frameworks of knowing (same questions and same answers). Interventions that acknowledge the limitations of a modern horizon based on a single story of progress, development and human evolution (epistemological dominance) will encourage a radical reform of modernity. These interventions will focus on the inclusion of perspectives that have been excluded and encourage learners to make the unknown known in order to increase the range of options (same questions, different answers). Interventions that acknowledge the limitations of a modern structure of being grounded in anthropocentrism, and limited expectations of human experience in terms of self-worth, purpose and belonging, will focus on moving 'beyond reform' of modern institutions, towards different possibilities for cognition, affect and co-existence, shifting our relationship to both the known, the unknown and our perceptions of ourselves within the world (see Andreotti, Stein, Ahenakew and Hunt, 2015).

In other words, in both soft and radical reform interventions the pedagogical engagement with the unknown (how to engage with global challenges, how to imagine the future) is mostly understood as an expansion or an improvement of the already known (increased knowledge), while the beyond reform orientation approaches the unknown as something that is ontologically *different* and not grounded in the same kind of (universalizing, modern) structure of being that we have learned to inhabit. In that sense the beyond reform interventions tend to engage with the unknown as potentially permanently *unknowable*, opening us up to what we often consider impossible or unimaginable. Rather than conceptualizing the learning process as an accumulation or expansion of (normalized or critical) knowledge, the beyond reform orientation seeks to expand possibilities in terms of what we consider to be real, ideal, legible and relevant. We have tried to tentatively combine the different concerns presented so far in figure 1.

<p>Soft Reform</p> <p>to make the same world a little bit better through transformations of policies and practices</p> <p>horizon: single story of progress, development and evolution</p> <p>methodological critique; focus on effectiveness</p> <p>SAME QUESTIONS, SAME ANSWERS</p>	<p>Recognition of epistemological dominance</p>	<p>Radical Reform</p> <p>To make the same world a lot better by including more people, voices and perspectives in collective action.</p> <p>horizon: unification of stories in a single direction</p> <p>epistemological critique; focus on representation</p> <p>SAME QUESTIONS, DIFFERENT ANSWERS</p>	<p>Recognition of ontological dominance</p>	<p>Beyond Reform</p> <p>To disinvest in the current unsustainable world and to walk with others into the possibility of new worlds .</p> <p>horizon: learning from repeated mistakes in order to make different mistakes</p> <p>ontological critique; focus on representability</p> <p>DIFFERENT QUESTIONS, DIFFERENT ANSWERS</p>
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In designing this table, our aim is not to define what is the best type of global learning, but rather show that what is possible for us to do in global learning will depend on what is perceived as legible and viable in each educational context. On the other hand, developing a cartography of global learning also helps us to make what may be invisible (and impossible to talk about) in a specific setting notably absent (making the gap visible) with the intent to invite deeper and further (never ending) conversations. In our educational practice at the interfaces between soft/radical and radical/beyond reform, this and other cartographies have helped practitioners/learners in terms of:

- developing more complex, systemic, multi-layered and multi-voiced social analyses that take us beyond simplistic solutions
- identifying the origins and limits of dominant narratives, hierarchies, frames, and imaginaries

- supporting learners in recognizing how we are all implicated / complicit in the problems we are trying to address: how we are all both part of the problem and the solution (in different ways)
- understanding and learning from repeated historical patterns of mistakes, in order to open the possibilities for new mistakes to be made
- expanding our frames of reference, acknowledging the gifts, contradictions and limitations of different knowledge systems, moving beyond 'either ors' towards 'both and mores'
- opening the imagination to different forms of knowing and being, to different questions and to different futurities

We share an example of a global learning initiative we are involved with that emerged from epistemological and ontological concerns at the interface of the radical and beyond reform orientations. The EarthCARE Intergenerational Justice Educational Community is an international network of 20 community-based educational centres that are currently working together to create experiential global learning experiences that integrate ecological, cognitive, affective, relational, economic (EarthCARE) and intergenerational approaches to justice, based on an “alternative approach to alternatives” and the nurturing of “ecologies of knowledge” (Santos, 2007). The complete EarthCARE framework can be found at <http://blogs.ubc.ca/earthcare>, a summary of the orientation of each approach to justice is reproduced below:

- ecological justice: (re)framing “the environment” as a set of human and other-than-human relations and interdependencies, rather than a set of resources to be extracted/exploited by humans
- cognitive justice: identifying and interrupting the harmful effects of a monoculture of thought premised on a singular narrative of human progress, development and evolution
- affective justice: recognizing our collective need for healing from historical and inter-generational trauma, prioritizing collective well-being; learning to be comfortable with the difficulties and discomforts of working through complexities, paradoxes, complicities, uncertainties and disillusionments
- relational justice: dismantling divisions caused by inherited social, cultural, economic and epistemological hierarchies that hinder symmetrical relationships and working towards ethical, equitable power relations, reciprocity, and solidarity
- economic justice: analysing and acting upon the systemic reproduction of inequalities through unjust systems of trade, governance and value production, while identifying viable possibilities for economic dignity; and,

The EarthCARE community is committed to developing social innovations in education that alleviate the effects and transform the root causes of material and existential forms of poverty. The 20 centres involved in this initiative share a vision of transformational learning as doing

(together), trusting (each other), deepening (analyses) and dismantling walls/barriers (between peoples/knowledges/cultures). Each has a specific learning methodology rooted in the contexts, knowledges, and histories of local communities. All have experience in cultivating practices of sustainability that attempt to challenge, transform, and move communities beyond what is possible to imagine within socio-economic systems that neglect the bio-physical limits of the planet and the ecological and social costs of market-driven modern development.

Together, the centers have started to develop experiments in alternative pedagogies to nurture learners' yearning for change and connection, while enabling them to delve into the complexities of thinking and acting beyond dominant paradigms. They aim to equip learners to seek collaboration in the face of unprecedented global challenges, to integrate the strengths of different knowledge systems (including Indigenous knowledge systems), to work ethically and relationally with diverse populations, and to open up not-yet-imagined futures. These alternative pedagogies move beyond prevalent definitions of 'development', 'success', 'impact', 'sustainability', and 'productivity' in education (Jain, 2011). They may seem counter intuitive in the current educational context as they emphasize the importance of complex existential questions, self-reflexivity and onto-epistemic openness instead of the search for (often simplistic) self-affirming solutions, grounded on desires for certainty, predictability and control (see Andreotti, 2016a).

Through their epistemological orientation, these pedagogies invite us to challenge what we take for granted, to examine our sanctioned ignorances, and to rationally explore and sit at the limits of (logocentric/Cartesian) rationality without dismissing its gifts (Andreotti, 2016b; Suša, 2016). They also invite us to acknowledge to recognize that our perceived entitlements, securities and enjoyments have been subsidized by violence elsewhere. Through their ontological orientation, they invite us to interrupt the satisfaction we have with these subsidized comforts and to re-activate our capacity to relate to ourselves, others and the world in ways not mediated by knowledge, identity or understanding (seeing ourselves in each other). These orientations offer little in terms of personal and professional validation, but rather encourage people to become comfortable with the discomfort of on-going difficult learning (Pitt & Britzman, 2003; Taylor, 2013; Zembylas, 2014) that comes from disarming and decluttering the landscapes of our imagination, hopes and experience (Biesta, 2013; Todd, 2014). Both the successes and the failures of these educational experiments may deepen our knowledge of the capacity for global learning to help us to hospice a system in decline (with patience and care) and to take up the responsibility of assisting with the birth of something still undefined and potentially (but not necessarily) wiser.

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