

Weaving Pedagogies of Possibility

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Our education systems are at a cross roads. On the one hand they are being relentlessly driven towards greater intensification of mechanisms of control and surveillance while on the other hand they are reaching out to the multiple possibilities offered by emergent global networks, the intercultural synergies these offer and the information technology revolution that underpins this process. The forces driving educational systems towards control and surveillance draw their energy from the anxiety that an uncertain future generates. Those exploring the possibilities for education offered by a networked infosphere are energised by the possibilities for networked open ended learning communities beyond a single educational context.

Educational sites in the grip of edu-anxiety (Bussey in press-b) have tended to quarantine education for sustainable development (ESD) within narrow disciplinary matrices that limit its transformative potential. The disciplinary approach to learning tends to create silos within institutions that constrain the creative possibilities inherent to inter-disciplinary engagement. Certainly in the case of ESD such a context offers only limited possibilities for the renewal of the practice of education in which all aspects of our collective cultures need to be rethought/re-enacted so that we can develop resilience at both the personal and collective level. With this in mind we have taken the following observation from Arjen Wals one step further:

‘Instead of putting our academic minds towards minimizing uncertainty and maximizing predictability, it might be more fruitful to put our energy towards living with uncertainty: seeing it as given, something that cannot be conquered.’ (Wals 2010 p. 387)

Living with uncertainty is something we must do whether we like it or not. In fact, culture can be seen as offering a schizophrenic response to this issue by both seeking to manage uncertainty through habit and structure while simultaneously exploring its possibilities for renewal through adaptive learning and creativity (Bussey in press-a). We see in the possibilities of uncertainty

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endless learning opportunities. Indeed, we celebrate this fact as it is undoubtedly a healthier way to understand the pedagogical nature of existence in which life is the curriculum and all encounters offer up possibilities for individual and collective growth.

Theorising Pedagogies of Possibility

This chapter will describe our attempt to proactively engage with our uncertain world. The context has been the course entitled Intercultural Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Development which is to be offered across different modalities in Sweden at: the formal learning site University West, Trollhättan; the in-formal adult study organisation Vuxenskolan and AkHUt; the non-formal group the Academy for Sustainable Development. To ground this work in the lives of students and other collaborators we needed to rethink the boundaries of learning. So we established five principles to direct and safeguard our process. These we called The Five Agreements. They are listed in Box 1.

- The Five Agreements

 - Clarity on how we communicate – mutual and co-evolving modalities
 - Knowing the facts – global/local assessment
 - My Spot – personal story
 - Entrepreneurial Experiment – engaging with context
 - Meta-Reflection – participatory action learning cycles

Box 1

Through this process it became clear that border crossing was at the core of our pedagogy. We were actively engaging formal institutions, informal networks and non-formal community learning contexts. Some of our colleagues thought we were mad. But to paraphrase Shakespeare: We are but mad north-north-west. When the wind is southerly we know a hawk from a handsaw! (Hamlet, Act 2; Scene 2). In short, we can tell the difference between ESD as a cultural process (the hawk) and ESD as an institutional label (the handsaw).

Our attempts to theorise our madness lead us to the work of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) who suggest rhizomes as a metaphor for understanding the process and networked nature of reality

(Bussey et al 2011). Rhizomes, we discovered, move across and between structures and allow us to understand the process orientation of learning as an ‘always-becoming-other’ than what one currently is (Semetsky 2006). This can apply to both individual and collective states. Hence, when thinking about ESD in the context of educational institutions we take as axiomatic that the world is *always-becoming-other* than what it appears to be and that our pedagogies emerge from what Kang calls our ‘rhizoactivity’ (2007). This is clearly a contested space in which the future lies in the play of environment, context, structure, culture and identity.

It is also important to note that our focus on formal, informal and non-formal contexts works across and between structures: in short it has a trans-structural quality that allows us to draw on both structure and post-structure as meaningful sites of human learning. Trans-structuralism is comfortable with the tension between domains, allows for multiple gestalts to play out (de Haan 2006; Wals 2010), finds patterns of meaning in this work and allows for the sparks of emergence and new hybrid forms. This led us to understand the productivity of uncertainty as a vehicle for social renewal and as a core tool in sustainability learning, thinking and practice.

To harness this productivity we turned to the possibilities afforded through intercultural dialogue (Giri 2011) in which outcomes are always unexpected and through which multiple cultures allow for alternative temporalities, spatialities and disciplinarity to emerge (Bussey 2009). We established yearly encounters beginning in 2006 that have fostered a range of relationships which we have extended and developed through rhizoactive discourse via various virtual means. The virtual realm is rhizomic in nature and built around hubs and nodes. Yet we also understand that there are limits to this vehicle. The internet allows us to construct hubs and nodes but is not a replacement for human contact. It also fails to account for the multiple we outlined above where ‘speed’ is no replacement for process and space-time functions so differently around the planet.

Writing this chapter has demonstrated this point admirably. We needed to establish an inclusive dialogical framework for our rhizoactivity that allowed the writing to evolve collectively. So we created a blog, began conversations, posted comments, skyped one another, discussed the form and function of the chapter and generally allowed our writing collective to dream, co-create, play and explore. Time of course got away from us and we were challenged by varying levels of internet access and the paradox of dreaming to a deadline!

Uncertainty also has been with us all along. This was well illustrated when suddenly we heard that the course we had been working on had been shelved by University West. Given our rhizomic structure this did not mean the end. The university still offers a platform for a range of ESD innovations that feed into our group processes and provide research opportunities in work integrated learning contexts that emphasise intercultural networks. Networks are resilient and the node and hub model of organising our learning rhizome immediately refocused our intercultural entrepreneurial activities around this chapter as a vehicle for voice and sustainability activism. We understand that institutions go through seasons; timing our pedagogies of possibility is important. As one door closes others open. So it has been and so it will be again in this process.

Learning Narratives

The architecture of our working process is polycentric and is not to be owned by any single institution or site. As noted this design principle has already proven its resilience.

Methodologically and aspirationally it is linked via the Five Agreements to a commitment to social diffusion that engages participatory action research in which all participants generate meaning and learning and share this virally. In this context research, pedagogy and actions for sustainability are linked in the overall learning experience.

This section draws on learning narratives taken from our Intercultural Blog that are emerging as we feel our way into our pedagogies of possibility. It was Åse Eliason Bjurström who set the blog up and has run the front line initiative to establish the course at University West. Here she is reflecting her aspirations for the course and its' potential.

‘Things have happened according to plan and not according to plan – all is fine. We have worked in open network structure linking the different institutions with each other and with local and global networks. Our possible plots, characters, sceneries for our joint plays called our futures have thereby expanded.’

What is important for Åse is that ‘Someone now looks upon someone with new eyes. Someone recognises valuable competencies in Manila or behind the very next door. Someone is inspired by the energetic people in the village of Budondo [Uganda]; by the way it is possible to transform educational institutions in Bolivia, recognising the way things seem to be connected that moves way beyond institutional belongings.’

This recognition suggests possibilities inherent to learning as becoming more than what one already is. Learning expands our human potential alerting us to possibilities in our environment to which we have previously been blind. Thus Åse notes that ‘We have tried rhizomatic networking principles; trust and commitment -in action, and found critical lessons to be learnt also in this power structure. We got past the exotic frames of The Other to the field of shared interest for the global situation. All bringing a broader picture of the possibilities and threats we face on global – as well as local level.’

This global-local continuum is central to our thinking and understood as being organically rooted to place. Place brings meaning and relevance to our actions and also defines them according to local histories. Maria Victoria (Mavic) Pineda tells us how she discovered this on her return to the Philippines:

‘Coming back from Sweden, when I first mentioned to my supervisor the term intercultural entrepreneurship, he told me we implement the concept in the Phils already. It is called ‘cooperatives’. And cooperatives for us, are entities intended to create economic means for community members to achieve and sustain small business or enterprising ideas.’

Mavic notes that such local understandings may sometimes limit how a concept is enacted or understood:

‘In the Philippine context, entrepreneurship is translating creative ideas to economic benefits. And rhizome exchange of practices and knowledge may not be a high priority. The rhizome engagement is commonly perceived as creation of business networks and

partners. It always boils down to economic motives given our situation that we are a developing nation, striving to be self-sufficient and self-reliant starting at the community level.’

Despite this Mavic is hopeful that learning will continue to bubble up, stimulated by activities such as our intercultural entrepreneurship process:

‘The community learning engagement is imagined organically as a hub initially having two types of engagement nodes or bubbles, the formal and informal approaches. The nodes are capable of creating other bubbles. The bubbles of engagement may pop or burst. Such organic nature allows space for more dynamic community building possibilities.’

Like Mavic, our two colleagues on the ground in Uganda, Mukisa Bernard and Muwanguzi Denis, are actively exploring new pathways of local relevance. For Mukisa, who has an MA in Theatre, this work is in the early stages:

‘The 13 (community workers) are training in community mobilisation to learn about sanitation/hygiene, immunisation, nutrition & family planning. ICT workshops are held in Budondo, Palisa and Iganga town. Recently formed Twogere girls’ club (TGC) with 16 girls of 14-16 years, discuss in Interculture and Entrepreneurship, will begin lessons in computer use too ... We are still using instructors and facilitators on a voluntary basis.’

For Mukisa a central obstacle to his work is corruption. He uses theatre as a tool to raise consciousness on this problem:

‘It is now 16 years since I came back [from Ukraine where he completed his MA] and during this time, I have been gathering different faces of corruption in our society. I have observed it has [challenged] and appealed to people in responsible positions to be transparent and have also seen how corruption has entrenched to society and everyday life; I see the responsibility of the government inspector on my shoulders. I am gathering the suitable names known in my society that when dressed in their characters will tickle one’s ribs to cause laughter. My mission will be dialogue on identifying faces of corruption and encourage debate.’

Denis offers a big picture view of how he sees our intercultural venture unfolding. For him there are lessons and opportunities.

‘The Budondo Intercultural Centre works to create an environment to [foster] positive change of attitudes, behaviors, laws, policies and institutions to better reflect the values of inclusion, fairness, diversity and opportunity. The outcome hopefully is change in the way nature is handled, social institutions, behaviors or relations and entrepreneurship for the better. Money alone brings about no change; nor do individuals. But when people band together and form organisations to focus their collective power, social change can happen.’

For Denis it is people and organisations working together that will make the difference:

‘When a large number of organisations or institutions work together toward a common goal, that’s a movement and this is what makes change. This requires flow from careful organising, massive public education, sustained agitation, and, at times, inspired collaboration across the divides of race, gender and class. These movements are driven by human energy, intelligence, courage as well as money; I’m so glad that this is part of the focus of our Intercultural learning and Entrepreneurship course we are taking for a better tomorrow.’

Having followed the intercultural blog as the conversation unfolded around the course and this chapter Denis could clearly see the link between social practice on the ground and large scale ventures across time and space

‘I can now realise how important the power of having a common cause can be. It just came to my mind how great the article will unify all the different units of the course from different parts of the world with similar goals but in different dimensions. There is still a lot I’m yet to learn colleagues as I try to associate with the work we do in Uganda – discovering the strengths of uniting the differing characteristics of social structure for a noble cause, with all the processes this article has taken.’

In the Ukraine Gennady Pervyi has been observing social, political and economic upheaval for the past 25 years. He recognises that at least one dimension of intercultural entrepreneurship is the forging of a broad social base.

‘Very Special Arts of the reformers is to find that delicate balance between innovations and the historical tradition of political and social culture which will create the broadest possible social base of support for reform.’

As a political scientist and historian Gennady links intercultural entrepreneurship with the renewal of civil society in post-soviet countries. This is an issue he argues that must come from local populations as they take ownership of their own contexts. Thus he notes:

‘The development of civil society, the presence in it of a proactive and dynamic middle class depends on how quickly, adequately and effectively the ... post-Soviet countries will succeed in the modernisation, overcome the existing political risks and take the path of sustainable development.’

Ananta Kumar Giri is a social theorist based in Chennai, India, who like Gennady has an interest in institutions and their possibilities for social transformation. For him education is limited when confined to structure. In consequence his work looks between structures to the soul dimension in which civilisational dialogue and a sense of, and a striving for, wholeness is to be brought into our encounters. For him the challenge is for ‘us to realise that ... education is an activity and process of learning and co-learning.’ Thus he observes:

‘Our educational systems are in a crisis now. This is evident in all levels of education--from the primary to the higher. A major part of the problem lies in our education lacking a soul-dimension. Strivings for realisation of wholeness as pedagogical method [often] lacks a

relation of love, mutuality, care among the partners and fellow travelers, [while] educational objectives lack the goal of integral development of individuals and societies. Our conventional educational systems reflect the fragmentation of modern subjectivity and society [with learning] mainly confined to rudimentary aspects of skill-training and mental education [which] ... does not touch all the dimensions of life and society.'

In Sweden Miriam Sannum describes the emergence of the kind of consciousness Denis and Gennady are discussing as a Renaissance.

'One way of starting this renaissance process has been for the non-formal adult learning organisation Studieförbundet Vuxenskolan to work closely together with University West and the informal network *The Academy for Sustainable Development* and with partners around the world in seminars as well as the emergence of the course Intercultural Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Development.'

For Miriam any renaissance will occur as the result of flows across and between consciousnesses or gestalts. She sees these representing ecosystems of possibility and she moves to metaphor as a way to enrich our thinking about this process of emergence. She offers us the following description:

'We have been using the term rhizomic to describe our work. One reflection (as I am an ecologist) is if the metaphor of mycorrhizal fungi could be an even more descriptive picture for this course and actions. When speaking about mycorrhizal fungi, the underground mycelium can be seen as the horizontal networking; whilst the existing structures like universities and non-formal educational organisations are represented as trees. The entrepreneurial projects can be seen as fusions (cross fertilisation) of different hyphae which leads to mushrooms – embodied and visible activities that can spread new spores; seeds for new hyphae!'

In India the philosopher Asha Mukherjee is also sensitive to ecosystems. She moves beyond metaphor to consider the interplay of nature and culture in the learning process. For her, intercultural dialogue must transcend the facile culture promoted by the global media. As she describes it here, the answer lies in identifying universal features of culture and leveraging these in intercultural communication:

'Due to internet and T.V. no culture can live in isolation. Children from their birth see others behaving in different way, the food, music, festivals etc. every aspect of life style gets effected by other's cultures. Still, we want the diversity of cultures; we want to preserve 'tribal culture'. So, intercultural education has to face this dilemma as to how much specificity and how much universality ... In my opinion, 'Intercultural' could not mean having no culture at all. At the same time it is neither Indian, nor Chinese, nor American, nor Swiss nor Swedish etc. Thus, we will have to look for some universal features of culture which are common to all.'

Indian born and Swedish based yogic monk Dada Shambhushivananda Avadhuta, who holds a PhD in Business, also argues for universal values couched in local expression.

‘Human Society is one and indivisible especially in a spiritual sense. Cultural differences are mere different styles to reflect the inherent diversity of human minds. Through universal rational outlook, service spirit and progressive technologies, we can begin to lay the foundations for a new free society where prosperity and happiness abound and harmony increases day by day.’

Asha finds this ‘universality’ in nature:

‘Nature is something unparalleled as Creator. Culture gets its expression in arts, poetry, crafts, music, dance, drama which is a universal in the sense that every culture would have these diversities. Thus all creativity can be seen from the prism of nature which is shared by every human being. Any education system which is close to nature with its most diverse manifestations would be acceptable as intercultural education.’

Dada sees this as new paradigm consciousness in which entrepreneurial spirit is understood as a process which develops both the individual and the collective and leaves no one behind.

‘Inter-cultural Entrepreneurship for Sustainable Futures appears to be a product of a ‘new paradigm’ to counteract the disturbing results of globalisation where ecology is neglected, humans are made subservient and disparities abound in all walks of life. In this new paradigm, the needs of all – rich and poor are considered to be of equal importance and the contributions of all are valued equally. Furthermore, the new approach employs cross-cultural, inter-generational and more democratic modalities to fulfill the needs of all and to help redirect the social wealth towards areas of social importance.’

In Australia futurist Marcus Bussey is working at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland, where he seeks to extend student learning through developing their sense of agency. Empowerment for him lies at the heart of learning and this involves both new skill sets as well as new concepts to better understand the world. Thus he notes:

‘Students at my university are often passionate about issues related to sustainability but many are time strapped so they take quite pragmatic steps to gaining a degree. I am looking at linking the intercultural entrepreneurship platform with tangible outcomes for students – in other words shifting them from informal engagements to more formal ones. This will increase the interest in this mode of learning/becoming.’

For Marcus the work of intercultural entrepreneurship is an open-ended and emergent process requiring creativity, planning and business savvy. In this regard he has found social change advocate David Gershon’s comment useful: ‘Creating and manifesting a transformative social innovation bridges art, science and craft. It requires the aesthetic sensibility of the artisan to be open to inspiration, the precise knowledge of the architect to design it, and the business acumen of the entrepreneur to bring it into the world’ (2009 p. 200)

Finally, in Bolivia indigenous teacher Leonel Cerruto casts a shamanic eye over the question of intercultural entrepreneurship and what might constitute pedagogies of possibility. Leonel finds the universal in the particular. Thus he notes:

‘This proposal aims at creating contributions from diverse cultures to construct planetary consciousness for the support of the diversity of lives. There is not only one perspective of life, but many different ones; in the same way there is not only one perspective of knowledge, but many – therefore it is necessary to find a diversity of pedagogies. It is necessary to discover the pedagogies of diversity to help us to find diverse paths to strengthen the diversity of lives, to help us to see the diverse perspectives of life of each living being, of each culture and which will contribute to vitalise our planet. To reach this aim it is necessary to construct intercultural and horizontal relationships. One instrument for this can be intercultural, open and horizontal learning processes. This would be one of the purposes of our network, or perhaps we should call it weaving, not network, an alliance for action and practical work for open learning processes.’

Weaving is a wonderful metaphor as it recognises that pattern emerges out of interaction. This is a weakness in the network metaphor which is highly mechanistic. Weaving also suggests that we need to stand back, and have a perspective (a unique position) to see the patterns before us and around us. In standing back we also acknowledge that we do not need to see the same pattern. Thus universality dissolves into what Leonel calls pluriversality. In this way he links pedagogies of possibility with pluriversal vision:

‘It is necessary to work interculturally, pluriversally and in a polycentric way, without any hegemonies, but based on reciprocal and complementary relations. This can start immediately, based on processes of community based learning to vitalise the life from each local reality and contributing globally. Pedagogies of possibility should also be pedagogies of pluriversality, since I understand possibility as something that can be realised in different ways, which as a result creates multiplication and diversification of possibilities and its’ pedagogies.’

Leonel’s vision is shared by us all and Åse, in describing the dissatisfaction that unites our caravan of fellow travelers, drives this point home. In the following observation she notes that possibility lies in our diversity and that the encounters that emerge from this collective engagement will enrich the pedagogical terrain over which we now travel:

‘What unites us is our dissatisfaction with current stories and thereby our joint quest for new stories regarding our shared futures. Hopefully we will get plenty of different stories, most likely contradicting dominant perspectives. Outcomes can end up ranging from practical wood-saving stoves to PhD projects, as well as drama performances. We exist in various contexts around the globe and the beauty with the intercultural network approach is that we do not have to be likeminded, cheer for the same team, have the same beliefs. We may not agree on all the matters in life but Your other way of doing can be vital for my understanding of what I do and who I am and vice versa. And perhaps – most important of all- with the varieties of possible stories we will get rid of the dangerous misconception that things can only be done in one way.’

Weaving Pedagogies of Possibility

Designing the course, developing the relational net, identifying the five principles, exploring technological and social curricula options and learning to listen to and play with one another have taken time. ESD involves us in developing a sense of timelessness in our pedagogy. This timelessness invites a stepping out of linear time and our entering contemplative relational time in which both slow scholarship and slow education emerge as corner-stones to this project (Bussey in press-b). This timelessness allows for form and function to flow freely across intercultural space and for us to learn to trust and be patient.

Tolerance for multiplicity, divergence and difference are ingredients we need for a creative engagement with intercultural learning as it spills out of formal contexts and enters the life-worlds of non-formal and informal learning. This implies a trans-structural sensitivity that accommodates multiple gestalts and the gestalt-switching that Wals describes (2010). This accommodation of multiple sites, multiple identities and multiple perspectives is a core element of ESD and the basis for the resilient individual and social identities our pedagogies of possibility seek to nurture.

Finally, it is in the multiple, the polycentric and pluriversal that we place our trust. Here uncertainty is the dominant context of our work. Yet such is the resilience of our acephalous series of nodes, hubs and nets that authority exists both everywhere and nowhere. We have a sense that the future lies in the collective ownership of this task and in the weaving of pluriversal pedagogies. This sense fosters the feeling of belonging and shared story that over lays our individual narratives.

Our Stories are our Pedagogy

The narratives we tell are routes to our pedagogies. They are as diverse as is our group yet they are all peppered with a shared vision of sustainable societies existing beyond the horizon imposed on us by convention, habit and those vested interests that benefit from the *status quo*. This is an imaginative path based on the five agreements and committed to processes of trust, relationship and expansion.

Our weaving is as much an intellectual journey as a cultural quest. We look towards a time when our humanity and reason are on good terms again, both working towards the well being of our planet. As Leonel notes:

‘As our ancestors considered the water, air, earth, and fire as sacred elements to benefit all living beings, the same way the knowledge, science, research and technologies should be free and open to benefit the life of all human beings and all other living beings. Our planet is in danger, it is urgent to save it. We need to awaken planetary consciousness among people and in order to reach this we need in many situations another pedagogy, another education.’

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