Transformative and Transgressive Learning for a World in Deep Trouble

International Education Conference, Vienna,
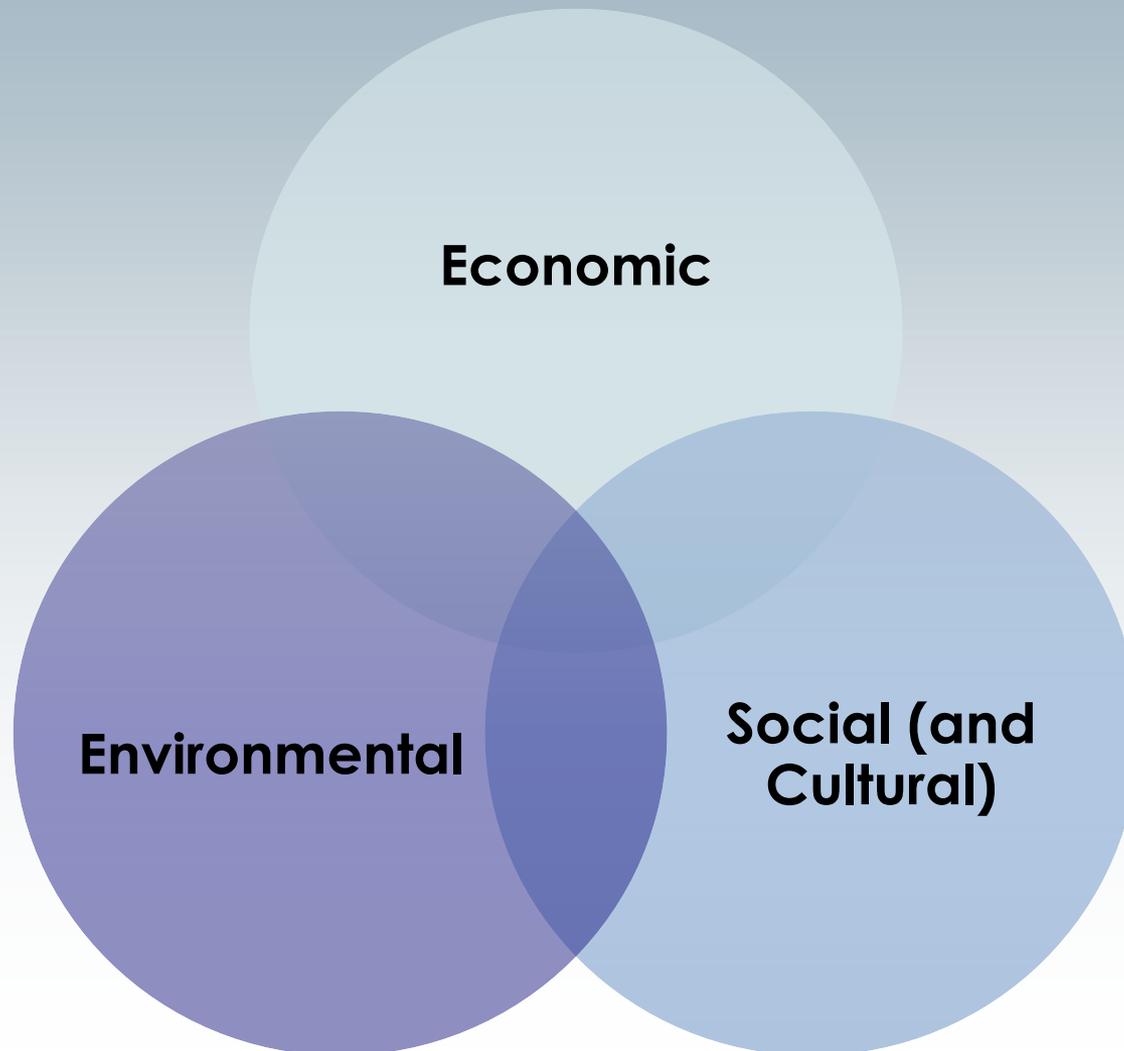29 November 2018

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Sustainability Frontiers

We face:

- ✓ An accelerating global dynamic of dark synergies

- ✓ A multi-crisis syndrome

- ✓ A world of complex, mutually fomenting crises

Education for Sustainability: Transformative Intent and Claims

- 'ESD is holistic and transformational education …empowering learners of any age, in any educational setting, to transform themselves and the society they live in' (*UN Roadmap for Post-2015 ESD Agenda*, UNESCO 2014)

- 'The concept of sustainability goes far beyond environmental concerns, including aspects such as social justice, intergenerational justice, mental and physical well-being, social, economic and cultural transformation' (*Handbook of Sustainability Literacy*, 2009)

- 'Education for sustainability means the creation of space for transformative social learning' (Wals & Corcoran, 2006)

- A key theme of education for sustainability: 'transformative to ensure that individuals, communities, systems move away from unsustainable to sustainable practices' (*New Zealand policy document*, 2004)

Transformative Sustainability Pedagogy (Heather Burns, 2015)

- *Draws upon ecological wisdom and mirrors ecosystems in the design of learning programs*

- *Draws upon indigenous wisdom concerning the 'Whole Self' so that an expanded conception of self is integral to learning*

- *Employs an active pedagogy that critically questions dominant norms, draws upon diversity of perspective and is grounded in specific place*

Transformative Sustainability Learning (Matthew Harmin et al. 2017)

- Calls for *epistemological stretching*, i.e. learning that, alongside the scientific, draws on vernacular, indigenized, non-rational - oral, emotional, intuitive, spiritual, and embodied - and other ways of knowing that have been marginalized

- Extends to listening to the voice of nature and other-than-human sentient beings as sources of knowledge, inspiration and revelation

- Is interdisciplinary and intercultural

Six Threshold Concepts for Transformative Sustainability Learning (according to M.J. Barratt et al, 2017)

- There are different ways of knowing (many of them suppressed)

- We can communicate with nature and non-human nature can communicate with us

- Knowledge is relational (i.e. situated and emerging out of inter-relationship with other people, nature and non-human others)

- Intuition and embodied knowing are valuable and valued ways of knowing

- Our worldview is the way through which we experience reality and the implications of this presents uncomfortable challenges

- Dominant beliefs, in their power and stranglehold, can undermine the validity of particular ways of knowing

Transformative and Transgressive Pedagogy for Sustainability Education
(Heila Lotz-Sisitka, 2015)

Needs to include action-learning experiences directed towards:

- Undermining the resilience of unsustainable systems and practices

- Developing disruptive competence and confidence

- Multi-voiced engagement with different actors

- Addressing root causes of climate change and global dysfunction by speaking truth to power

- Disrupting and breaking through disciplinary and other inhibiting boundaries in learning institutions

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Jason Weintraub

Contained Learning

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Dissolution

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Regeneration

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Engagement

Ilya Prigogine: Dissipative Structures

❖ **Systems at (or close to) equilibrium** → Hard to change → Creativity low → Relationships with the contiguous

❖ **Systems pushed far from equilibrium** → Volatile → Deep creativity → Non-linear, non-contiguous, unpredictable connections to reach new (more complex) equilibrium

❖ **Learning Communities as Dissipative Structures**

Growth Fetishism

-Clive Hamilton, *Requiem for a Species*, 2010

'In affluent societies religious value seems to be invested in the most profane object, growth of the economy. Our political leaders and commentators believe it has magical powers that provide the answer to every problem. Growth alone will save the poor. If inequality causes concern, a rising tide lifts all boats. Growth will solve unemployment. If we want better schools and more hospitals then economic growth will provide. And if the environment is in decline then higher growth will generate the means to fix it.'

Naomi Klein: This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate

'At the heart of the matter is a choice between accepting levels of climate disruption that will change pretty much everything about our world or, alternatively, changing pretty much everything about our economy to avoid that fate.'

Metamorphic Learning for Sustainability: Proposal 1

Have learners:

- ✓ Interrogate and assess the global economic growth agenda, its culpability for the multi-crisis syndrome we face

- ✓ Be challenged by slow growth, no-growth ('steady state') and de-growth proposals and projects from around the world

- ✓ Engage with and, if convinced, advocate for localized counter-growth and counter-globalization economies based on demonetized exchange, a gift economy, coinage of locally-accepted validity that supports an 'economy of proximity'

Consumerism

➢ 'Consumption beyond the level of dignified sufficiency' (Alastair McIntosh, 2008)

➢ 'A constant feeling of dissatisfaction to sustain spending is essential. Unhappiness sustains economic growth (Clive Hamilton, 2010)

Metamorphic Learning for Sustainability: Proposal 2

Have Learners:

- ✓ Examine how consumerism relies on systematic exploitation of peoples and environments

- ✓ Examine how consumerism has become key to personal identity in the North of the planet and amongst elites in the South

- ✓ Facilitate processes of socio-emotional learning around identity and values, sources of insecurity and unhappiness

- ✓ Experience and reflect on alternatives to consumer gratification

- ✓ Scrutinize and challenge vested interests – government, the corporate sector, media and advertising – that is, the structural scaffolding of rampant consumerism

'EYES WIDE SHUT'

'We're Doomed'

The world's population must globally move to zero emissions across agriculture, air travel, shipping, heating homes – every aspect of our economy. Can it be done without a collapse of civilization? I don't think so. Can you see everyone in a democracy volunteering to give up flying? Can you see the majority of the population becoming vegan?

- Mayer Hillman, 2018

Metamorphic Learning for Sustainability: Proposal 3

Have Learners:

✓ Develop media literacy skills for decoding and deconstructing climate change messages from whatever source

✓ Develop the skills and capacities to detect, identify and confront climate change denial and prevarication from whatever source (government, teacher, neighbor)

✓ Respond emotionally and empathetically to climate changed personal stories, disaster, loss, voices from the future

✓ Become activists in combatting disinformation, denial, inaction (stirring up 'beautiful trouble')

Metamorphic Learning for Sustainability: Proposal 4

Have Learners:

✓ Listen to the non-appropriated voice of the South as they speak of climate change destroying lives, livelihoods, cultures and futures

✓ Engage in North-South cosmopolitan dialog (face-to-face and virtual)

✓ Take on 'educative activism' through research, interaction, community engagement including awareness raising and protest events

'What value do we give to butterflies, to birdsong? Are they just written off as the great ruination of nature gathers pace?'

Michael McCarthy, *The Moth Snowstorm* (2015)

Missing Concepts in ESD

- Beauty
- Attunement
- Awe
- Ecstasy
- Enchantment

- Reverence
- Rhapsody
- Joy
- Wonder

Vernacular Environmentalism

'To celebrate the lexis of landscape is not nostalgic, but urgent. It is the harbinger of concern and activism' (Robert Macfarlane, 2015)

'People *exploit* what they have concluded to be of value, but they *defend* what they love and to defend what we love we need a particularizing language for we love what we particularly know (Wendell Berry, 2000)

Die Zeit, die du für deine Rose verloren hast, sie macht deine Rose so wichtig.

Antoine de Saint-Exupery, *Le Petit Prince*

Sheri Klein: Coming to Our Senses: Landscape and Transformative Learning (2018)

Beholding

attentive awareness, attunement, receptivity

Immersion

lingering, noticing detail, becoming aware of relationships and impermanence

Reflection

stepping back, making meaning, feeling wider connectivity

Metamorphic Learning for Sustainability: Proposal 5

Have the learner:

- ✓ Experience vernacular learning as a core element in sustainability learning

- ✓ Experience aesthetic, sensorial, somatic and numinous engagement with the *genius loci* (not just scientific engagement)

- ✓ Cultivate a 'sense of wonder' (Rachel Carson)

- ✓ Develop close affinity with nature as harbinger of activism

- ✓ Conceive the parochial as *aperture* or *portal* to the wider world (and avoid letting globalization close off intimately-known place as source of moral inspiration)

AUTHENTIC HOPE or INAUTHENTIC HOPE?

Metamorphic Learning for Sustainability: Proposal 6

Have Learners:

- ✓ Voice, hear and value shared feelings of despair and loss within supportive and trusting dialogic forums

- ✓ Use creative expression of feelings using different art forms

- ✓ Use meditative modalities that center mind with emotion for working through despair

- ✓ Honor pain of loss through ceremony

- ✓ Use future visualization to envision and feel dystopian futures and see a way through them

'Despair, Accept, Act'

-Clive Hamilton, *Requiem for a Species*, 2010

An Alternative and Provocative Lexicon for **Metamorphic** Learning

- ❖ Environment ➔ Nature/Natural world
- ❖ Biodiversity ➔ Species profusion
- ❖ Climate change ➔ Climatebreakdown/turmoil
- ❖ Global warming ➔ Global heating
- ❖ Natural resources ➔ Living systems/Earth fabric
- ❖ Natural capital ➔ Nature/living world
- ❖ Ecosystem services ➔ Life enabling systems
- ❖ Nature reserves ➔ Nature-rich areas
- ❖ Extinction ➔ biocide/ecocide
- ❖ The planet ➔ Gaia, living, life-modulating planet

A Pedagogical Memorandum for Metamorphic (Deep Transformative) Learning (1)

Dissolution [The Soup]

- *Learning that stretches how we know and that is grounded in cognitive justice*

- *Learning that challenges and dissolves the assumptions and paradigms – the shibboleths – we live by*

- *Learning that pushes learners far from equilibrium, giving space for deeper creativity, the surfacing of the unpredictable, the connecting of the unassociated*

- *Learning that mirrors ecosystems in its diversity and multi-directional flows and connections*

- *Learning that creates optimal conditions for deep personal shift in understanding of self and/in the world*

- *Learning that is open to nature, landscape and the other-than-human as source of deep wisdom, inspiration and self-reflection*

A Pedagogical Memorandum for Metamorphic (Deep Transformative) Learning (2)

Regeneration [Re-emergence of Form]

- *Learning that folds together and coalesces diverse ways of knowing towards a reframed way of seeing the world*

- *Learning that guides the learner through the pain of our times towards new resolve and sense of purpose*

- *Learning that builds active hope from within the despair and pessimism bred by the global condition*

- *Learning that opens up and takes the learner along restorative avenues for living, for being and becoming*

- *Learning that brings the learner to a state of 'blessed unrest'*

- *Learning that creates the disposition to forsake the unsustainable*

- *Learning that fosters activism (the butterfly feels it wings)*

Thank you very much!

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