

Chapter 16

Conclusion: Forging Future Worlds Worth Living in for All



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Abstract This chapter concludes the volume, the series and the *World Worth Living in for All* project. It discusses how the contributors in this book have actively sought to change their worlds in order to make them better for all. The discussion highlights how authors and those they have engaged with over time recognise that education needs disrupting and transforming, and for its boundaries to be expanded. We see in these chapters that people can, and do, actively explore possible futures in their daily lives. In this summary of varied projects engaged in actively making future worlds worth living in, this chapter looks to the past for some wisdom. What began as a listening project, has in itself expanded to one that has documented a range of activist educators who will continue to strive to make a world more worth living in for all.

Keywords Praxis · Disruption · Transformation · Future worlds · Educator activists

For an episode of the World Worth Living In Podcast connected to this chapter, please click here:
<https://open.spotify.com/episode/5uFmPaD4sjmdhAVbHUjB04?si=dc0bf3bb6e104b1e>

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Introduction

Although this chapter signals the end of this volume, this book series and the project, the work of finding and creating ‘Worlds Worth Living in for All’ will never be finished. Just as education is never finished. Education is always expanding, disrupting, exploring, activating, visualising, and making, as these chapters attest. This book meets us in the process—of becoming, of grappling, of transforming, and of holding our present forms of education in front of us. We see educators starting to shape education and the world into what we need as we step, together, into our future.

At the beginning of this project, we anticipated that this volume would be looking to the future, because “futurity is embedded at the heart of the educational process... and our desires and fears for that future are latent in our increasingly urgent search for educational alternatives” (Facer, 2016, p. 64). Reading through the chapters now, however, it occurs to us that this future focus may not always be clear to the reader. This is because, we believe, none of the chapters are interested in a predetermined future; that is, they do not forecast what or *how* the future might be. Instead, they are interested in actively engaging in practices to make the future one where it is possible for everyone and everything to live well. In any case, we know that the past, present, and future are always intertwined. What is evident throughout the two volumes of the *Living Well in a World Worth Living in for All* series is that various types of hopeful action are under way, in the present, to create a future that is worth living in. They exemplify the ‘logic of hope’ that Kemmis, Reimer, and Mahon noted in Chap. 2 in this volume. And the authors of all chapters show a commitment to “*praxis*; history-making action” (Kemmis, 2023, p. 15, italics in original), albeit in a world where the future is looking increasingly precarious.

When writing the concluding chapter to volume 1 of this series in November 2021, Stephen Kemmis and Kathleen Mahon discussed the urgency of the ecological crisis and the failure of the United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP26) on Climate Change to limit global warming to 1.5 °C by the end of the century. As we write this chapter in November 2023, the urgency of the climate crisis has not diminished. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2023) AR6 synthesis report released in March 2023 repeats the same message: actions to combat climate change are urgently needed. And since that last book, the world has continued to present us with one global catastrophe after another (Pedersen et al., 2022) including Russia’s illegal invasion of the Ukraine and the life-shattering conflict in Gaza between the militant group Hamas and the Israeli Defence Forces. Even though the climate crisis and the wars in Ukraine and Gaza are in many ways quite different, they are both rooted in accumulated errors in human practice, have grave consequences for the quality of life of humans, non-human animals, and the planet at large, and will continue to cause suffering until they are resolved.

Reflecting on these pressing and very-much-in-the-present ‘nested crises’ (Kaukko et al., 2021), we see that practices have histories and so, for this concluding chapter of the series, we draw upon some of this history (Gordon, 2016). We draw

upon this history while keeping in mind that educational practices are always future-focused. This volume's contributors and editors have in numerous and varied constellations remained mindful of John Dewey's (1938) caution about being so preoccupied with preparing for a supposed future that the "temporality at play within the present goes unseen" (Ek & Macintyre Latta, 2013, p. 88). As Dewey reminds us, "the present affects the future anyway" (1938, p. 50).

The contributions to this book are examples of disrupting an existing future and bringing into being another future. Like Dewey, Norwegian sociologist and peace theorist Galtung (1974) promoted education as a tool for building peace and democracy because, he argued, critical thinking and a deep understanding of the root causes of crises, conflict, and violence are the only ways to find creative and peaceful solutions. This aligns with Biesta's (2022) more recent claim that what we do in education is first and foremost an existential question. It raises questions about how we, as human beings, exist 'in' and 'with' the natural and social world, and importantly in education, how we can equip, encourage, and give hope for the next generation to exist 'in' and 'with' the world in their own right. Biesta argues that existing in one's own right does not mean that people can just do what they want. Instead, and returning to education, we need to bear in mind that in order to exist 'in' and 'with' the world we need to be humble to the limits of the natural and social world. This brings questions of democracy and ecology into education (Biesta, 2022). While we recognise that education alone cannot solve world-wide problems of this scale, their magnitude does not mean that they are beyond our reach. And although the sense of urgency is increasing, the world does not have to be changed completely or all at once. As the chapters of the book suggest, the momentum to act is already here. Change is not something to be imagined in the potential future; it is already happening in this present moment.

Expanding the Boundaries of Education

The drive to expand the boundaries of what education is, means, and should do is clearly articulated in Chap. 3 of this volume by Rauno Huttunen and Hannu Heikkinen. They urge us to act with the knowledge that human wellbeing can never be uncoupled from planetary wellbeing, and we continue to consider and value human life over and above the more-than-human world at our peril. As many scholars of feminist and post/decolonial traditions argue (see, for example, Andreotti, 2016, 2021; Andreotti et al., 2018; Fraser, 2012; Stein et al., 2022), tackling human-induced catastrophes requires coming up with new ways to draw upon the wisdom of Indigenous peoples who have lived on this planet in sustainable and relatively harmonious ways for millennia. We can even see attempts in that direction have been made in the most recent IPCC report, in which the authors specifically attempted to incorporate 'ways of knowing' from Indigenous peoples (Mustonen, 2023). In Chap. 13, Katrina Thorpe, Cathie Burgess, and Christine Grice show how pushing cultural, geographical, and educational boundaries in teacher education is possible. They describe a

unique initiative that engages student teachers with important Indigenous ideas of *Country* while studying in a large city. The *Learning from Country* program, which aims to enhance the application of Aboriginal curriculum and pedagogies in the daily teaching practice of early career teachers, draws on an ontology of relationality. The Australian Aboriginal notion of *Country* has many layered meanings and requires us to consider all things—all living things, the water, and the land—and connects these things “to each other and multiple spiritual and symbolic realms” as Aunty Laklak Burarrwanga explains (in Wright et al., 2012, p. 54). That a program such as *Learning from Country* is so novel shows us that the present and persistent effects of colonisation on current education practices have reduced the boundaries of what education is, yet, at the same time, the chapter offers hope that these boundaries can once again be expanded.

Disrupting and Transforming Education

In many of these chapters, we see educators taking risks, as Biesta (2013) encourages us to do in his book *The Beautiful Risk of Education*. They are disrupting established patterns and practices in education that have by now become stale or brittle, and, from the points of view of these teachers and students, unsuited to twenty-first century problems, issues, crises, and tastes. These contributors are exploring new ways for education to reproduce and transform established cultures, material realities, and social and political circumstances. In Chap. 12, for example, Kristin Reimer describes an alternative university entry pathway, and recounts the experiences of a cohort of students who have previously experienced educational disruption, or as she puts it, have “had educational disadvantage” (p. 169). Reimer shows us how the intentionally relational *Monash Access Program* has given the mature age students of the program an “educational advantage” and a space to reflect on education’s role in helping us to live well in a world worth living. Leila Khaled in Chap. 11 also outlines a form of disruption to established patterns and practices in education when she argues for the importance of online Special Religious Education (SRE). Khaled notes that students have had the right to receive religious education “by a clergyman or other religious teacher” (p. 151) in the Australian state of New South Wales since 1866 and that many schools offer some form of SRE. However, she shows that the participation rate among students is low and probably dropping. In making the case for online Muslim SRE, Khaled argues that because “Muslim youth’s lives, identity and feelings of belonging have been impacted by public scrutiny, counter-radicalisation and counter-terrorism policies, and excessive hostile media directed at them” (p. 151), measures are needed to enhance the wellbeing of this group in particular. Khaled explains that religion has traditionally been the context to which young people have turned to find meaning, so finding alternative ways to provide SRE is crucial.

Exploring Possible Futures in Education

Some of the chapters explore how it might be possible to nurture new possible futures or ways of being for people individually, and, at the same time, new forms of culture, economies, environments, and social life for us all collectively. In Chap. 7, Mervi Kaukko, Nick Haswell, and Jane Wilkinson in their research of migrant and refugee children in Australia and Finland show how play in educational settings allows children to imagine their future lives, especially for this group who are experiencing new ways of being in the present. Play, they argue, is not just important for children, but it should be considered “broadly as an element of [a] good life... playing is more or less the same as living well and if playing is inclusive and welcoming to all, the world can be made a little more liveable for all” (p. 79). Nicole Brunker, in Chap. 8, spoke to eleven children between the ages of 4 and 14 about their experiences in and out of school and asked them how they expected that these experiences would shape their lives in the future. While the children recognised that their school lives and their out-of-school lives were different, they showed an awareness of how school had shaped them in terms of becoming ‘good students’ and hoped that it would help prepare them for more fulfilling lives in their futures. In Chap. 10, Gørill Warvik Vedeler, Merete Saus, Tatiana Wara, Hilde Sollid, and Astrid Strandbu considered how a group of pre-service teachers who choose to live and study in areas north of the Arctic Circle in Norway are able to do so well. In conversations with the researchers, these young people, all under 25 years of age, described their negotiation of ‘translocational’ positionalities and identities. They often referred to the tensions and power imbalance between the North and the South of Norway, yet ultimately their sense of belonging and identity was developed by fostering their relationships with “the environment, nature and culture” (p. 133), which strengthened connections to place. Linda Mahony, in Chap. 9, reports on what it means for families to live well in the aftermath of separation and divorce in an interview study of 12 mothers in Australia. As Mahony describes, when parents of children separate, the lives of many others, not least of all their children, are affected. Her study concludes that when families and schools have a shared sense of responsibility which involves providing proactive support rather than merely reacting, the wellbeing of children is enhanced.

Educators as Activists

What we see in this volume is the understanding that transformation is not something that is in the future, it is already happening. The contributions in this book highlight that issues can be addressed by changing people’s practices. Mahon and colleagues (2019, p. 464) define critical educational praxis, “as a kind of social-justice oriented, educational practice/praxis, with a focus on asking critical questions and creating conditions for positive change”. In other words, the chapters are examples of critical scholarship that is transformative and activist (Stetsenko, 2015), involving educators

working towards a better world, and recognising their responsibility to support urgent action for change. Katina Thelin and Anette Forssten Seiser, in Chap. 4, recount their exploration of Swedish school principals' perspectives on living well in a world with living in for all. The school principals understand their role as one to actively make the world a better place and to encourage and support others to make positive changes. They argue that the role of a school principal is not just important in educational settings but is important for civic change as well. In Chap. 6, Andi Salamon, Leanne Gibbs, and Mandy Cooke compare three case studies in an exploration of right-based approaches in early childhood education (ECE). The case studies focused on different groups within ECE: leaders, educators, and children, but, when explored in connection with each other, highlight how and when ECE educators and leaders can 'fulfil' the responsibility of initiating young children into a world where they can act and interact, and be "oriented towards the good for each person... and... the good for humankind" (p. 61). In Chap. 14, Stephanie Garoni, Jo Lampert, and Lutz Hoff show us how four early career teachers who recently graduated from the 'Nexus' teacher education program responded to the idea of living well in a world worth living in. The Nexus program is designed to place graduates in schools considered hard-to-staff in the state of Victoria, Australia. These new teachers entered Nexus with the desire to make change in schools and showed how it is possible to bring the notion of a life worth living into their classrooms despite those classrooms being in schools considered to have multiple challenges.

Each chapter in this book has sought to understand how different aspects of education in the present might change lives in the future. In Chap. 5, Fiona Longmuir highlights that common school practices do little to orient school students, many of whom are disengaged from schooling, towards a hopeful future. She argues that when youth voice and participation are constrained, we reduce the capacity of these young people to engage in their own futures. Longmuir cites Biesta and Tedder (2007) who posit that fostering agency be done with the "intention to bring about a future that is different from the present and the past" (p. 136). In Chap. 15, Susanne Francisco and Ela Sjølie describe research conducted in Australia and Norway where 30 academics (14 in Australia and 16 in Norway) kept journals and were interviewed on two occasions during the COVID-19 pandemic. In the second interviews, which took place in December 2020 and January 2021, participants were asked to explicitly reflect on what a world worth living in was to them. The academics in both countries felt that living through the pandemic reinforced their desire to work towards (and, if needed, *fight* for) "a just society [and] a sustainable future" (p. 225). The participants in Francisco and Sjølie's research believed that in their work they held great responsibility to bring better worlds into being for the students they teach and the societies in which they live.

Making and Seeing ‘The World’ Worth Living in

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt (1958/1998) distinguishes ‘the earth’ from ‘the world’. The earth, she explains, is all which is given by nature (natural givens), and which humans consume in order to survive. The world is not natural but rather “the artificial product of human work and the site of human actions” (Ephraim, 2017, p. 34). Arendt (1954) only wrote a little that focused explicitly on education, yet she believed that education and schools in particular play a key role in reforming ‘the world’ (or society). Arendt believed education provided ubiquitous sites where children should gradually be introduced to the existing and conventional world by adults. Yet paradoxically, she acknowledged that without fresh perspectives the world becomes ritualistic and stale; it “is the new generation itself, which has the power to envision a future very different not only from the present but also from the present’s hopes for the future” (Higgins, 2010, p. 378). Arendt (1954) outlined an argument that the crisis in education can be seen “first and foremost as refusal of adults to take responsibility for the world” (Biesta, 2010, p. 564). Throughout the chapters in this series, we see adults taking responsibility for world building, walking the fine line between introducing new generations to the world, yet listening to and collaborating with the young to ensure their developing perspectives can shape a future world worth living in.

We end this chapter, this volume, and this project by reaching even further into the past to the writings of Charles Darwin. In the last paragraph of the first edition of Darwin’s (1859/2006) *On the Origin of Species*, he evocatively describes ‘an entangled bank’, full of all kinds of life forms that have evolved in relation to one another. He writes:

It is interesting to contemplate an entangled bank, clothed with many plants of many kinds, with birds singing on the bushes, with various insects flitting about, and with worms crawling through the damp earth, and reflect that these elaborately constructed forms, so different from each other, and dependent on each other in so complex a manner, have all been produced by laws acting around us. These laws, taken in the largest sense, being Growth with Reproduction; Inheritance which is almost implied by reproduction; Variability from the direct and indirect action of the external conditions of life, and from use and disuse; a Ratio of Increase so high as to lead to a Struggle for Life, and as a consequence to Natural Selection entailing Divergence of Character and Extinction of less-improved forms. Thus, from the war of nature, from famine and death, the most exalted object we are capable of conceiving, namely, the production of the higher animals, directly follows. There is grandeur in this view of life, with its several powers, having been originally breathed into several life forms, or into one; and that, whilst this planet has gone cycling on according to the fixed law of gravity, from so simple a beginning endless forms most beautiful and most wonderful have been, and are being, evolved. (1859/2006, p. 388)

Perhaps we can see something like this ‘entangled bank’ when we look back on the chapters of this second volume of *Living Well in Worlds Worth Living in for All*. In these pages, we see ordinary people in schools and other everyday educational settings trying new things, in a Deweyan spirit of experimentation, to help others live well in worlds worth living in for all. Before our eyes, established institutional forms of education are being varied, and they are mutating and evolving into new forms.

We see educational practices evolving, pushing around and beyond the confines of their present niches to colonise new habitats and to extend the boundaries of what education is and means in our present and future here in the twenty-first century. The contributors to this volume have listened to the voices of some of the pioneers who have ventured bravely into new ways of living and doing education, and, through these pages, they tell their travellers' tales. As Kaukko et al. (2023) wrote in Volume 1, the contributors are those who “spend time seeking a world worth living in, [in order] to understand what more [can be done] and what else is a world worth living in” (p. 3). The authors and those they have collaborated and engaged with in the course of their research studies, show sustained efforts, over many years, to be an active part of education's double purpose: to foster a “good life for each person,... conducted in ways that model and foster the good life for humankind—what it means to live well in a world worth living in” (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 40). Hargreaves and Shirley (2009) asked, how we can collectively and deliberately attend to and act in the present in ways that “bequeath to the next generation a world that will be worth inheriting?” (p. 2534). The contributors whose chapters appear in these two volumes of *Living Well in a World Worth Living in for All* have offered answers—perhaps hesitant, cautious, and incomplete—to that question, and in doing so, have ventured beyond the forms of education that currently reproduce the problems that deform and distort our world, our cultures, our economies, our environments, and the forms of our social and political life.

Within these reproductive tendencies, new life is stirring. Old forms are being contested. New forms are being tried. People are grappling towards new ways of being that respond to the nested crises that humanity currently confronts, and that all other species and the world's geophysical systems also face, thanks to the ingenuity of human beings and our ignorance of the ramifying consequences of so many of our actions. Perhaps the chrysalis is shattering, and rising generations of students and teachers are beginning to occupy new niches in the world's ecosystems in ways that will ameliorate at least some of the damage that their predecessors have done. It is a source of inspiration and hope to consider that, like the web of life that evolved into Darwin's imagined 'entangled bank', new forms of education are also emerging, helping rising generations to find their ways towards more reasonable forms of culture, more productive and sustainable economies and environments, and more just and democratic forms of social life. But these new forms will not come by themselves. To achieve them, there is much to overcome, and not just complacency, conservatism, and the power of self-interests. As Susanne Francisco and Ela Sjølie indicated in Chap. 15 of this volume, new forms of life, in new worlds, will be the ones that rising generations and their allies fight for. And win.

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