Chapter 8
Critical Praxis for Critical Times

Kirsten Petrie, Stephen Kemmis, and Christine Edwards-Groves

Abstract  This final chapter recalls the view of education that animates this volume: education to help people live well in a world worth living in. The authors outline some of the challenging historical, cultural, economic, environmental, social, and political conditions of our contemporary times. These are also challenges for education, which must be renewed to confront the challenges of our time. The authors use the theory of education outlined at the beginning of the chapter as a critical framework for finding ways to resist the bureaucratising and deprofessionalising tendencies of education systems locally, nationally, and globally, and to restore hope for forms of contemporary educational practice that can help people to live well in worlds worth living in—and for the practice architectures (conditions of possibility) that make critical educational praxis possible. The authors show that the work of the Pedagogy, Education, and Praxis (PEP) international research network in the years 2008–2018 has included a variety of kinds of research that have contributed to the realisation of educational praxis—research by educators, research with educators, and research for educators. The chapter concludes by encouraging resilience and resistance in the face of an intensely pressurised system of education dominated by performativity, management, and surveillance in our neoliberal times, and resources for a journey of hope in the task of realising education in the form of educational practices that in fact help children, young people, and adults to live well in a world worth living in.

K. Petrie (✉)
The University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand
E-mail: kpetrie@waikato.ac.nz

S. Kemmis · C. Edwards-Groves
Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, Australia
Education for Living Well in a World Worth Living In

In the opening of this book, the authors drew on a definition of education first presented by Kemmis et al. (2014) in *Changing Practices, Changing Education*. Given the centrality of this notion to how we understand education, it is worth quoting again:

In our view, education, properly speaking, is the process by which children, young people and adults are initiated into forms of understanding, modes of action, and ways of relating to one another and the world, that foster (respectively) individual and collective self-expression, individual and collective self-development and individual and collective self-determination, and that are, in these senses, oriented towards the good for each person and the good for humankind. (p. 26).

Since 2014, this definition has been refined and extended and is depicted diagrammatically in Fig. 8.1, in a form that incorporates the theory of practice architectures, which has informed much of the research of the Pedagogy, Education, and Praxis (PEP) research network from 2008 to 2018. Drawing on the work of Kemmis (2018, p. 248), Kemmis and Edwards-Groves (2018, pp. 17–18) state:

First, [education] promotes and enhances individual and collective self-expression, and thus it works to secure a *culture based on reason*.1 Second, education promotes and enhances individual and collective self-development, and thus it works to secure a *productive and sustainable economy and environment*. And third, education promotes and enhances individual and collective self-determination, and thus it works to secure a *just and democratic society*. These, it seems to me, are three crucial elements of the good for humankind, and ‘a world worth living in’.

This view of education might be thought of simply as an aspiration—a high-flown ideal. But the authors in this volume do not regard it so. For us, this view provides a *critical frame* against which to interrogate current practices and institutions now said to be “educational”. We make the distinction between “education” and “schooling” (as in the phrase, “education in an era of schooling”, the title of the volume edited by Edwards-Groves, Grootenboer, and Wilkinson, 2018a, b) in order to test whether instances of schooling actually do have this educational character. When we use this view of education as a critical lens, much of what is said to be “educational” in fact falls short. For example, while a school or university may initiate students into forms of understanding, it may nevertheless fall short of the intention to foster individual and collective self-expression to secure a culture based on reason. Furthermore, the dominance of focus on formal systems education is often dislocated from being educated (from learning) in everyday circumstances in all facets of our everyday life; for example, in community education programs (e.g. growing vegetables, painting, or

---

1By “reason” here, we do not mean a narrow rationalistic view of knowledge or reasoning, but also the reason of the heart. As the French Philosopher Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) put it (in his *Pensées [Meditations]*, 1670/1958, §277), “The heart has its reasons, which reason does not know”. On this view, we should include reasonableness and reason-giving as part of what is meant by “a culture based on reason”. 
Fig. 8.1 Theory of education incorporating the theory of practice architectures. (Adapted from Kemmis, 2013, p. 41 with permission from Stephen Kemmis and the Finnish Education Research Association)
amateur ornithology), or being coached sports (e.g. football, or hockey, or wheelchair basketball).

This view of education, like the European concept of \textit{bildung} discussed in Chaps. 1, 2 and 5 in this volume, maintains that education has a double purpose: the formation of persons and the formation of societies. We capture this double purpose of education in the slogan of “helping people to live well in a world worth living in”. On this view, education aims for the good for each person and the good for humankind or, we might now say, the good for the community of life on Earth. Much of what passes as education today does not proceed in ways that respect this double purpose, and many schools (at every level of education) remain deaf or blind to the good for humankind, or the good for the community of life on Earth. Because “the good for each person” and “the good for humankind” are always contested concepts (people take different views of what constitutes these goods), many people, including in schools, simply give up on pursuing them. In our view, giving substance and form to these goods is a professional responsibility for all educators, and they must give these notions substance and form on the basis of deliberating with their peers and others in their communities and societies, including learners, about how to bring these goods to life in everyday educational practice.

\section*{The World We Live in is in Danger of Becoming a World not Being Worth Living In}

At this moment in human history, the Earth is under immense pressure. Since the Industrial Revolution, anthropogenic climate change has produced major transformations. There has been a sharp increase in the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events (drought, floods, bushfires, tornadoes, cyclones). Science has shown that the ocean has warmed to such an extent that many marine species struggle to survive; coral bleaching is widespread, for example, but many other ocean species have been unable to find the environmental niches necessary for their survival. In May 2019, the United Nations, Intergovernmental Panel Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), drawing on over 15,000 scientific publications, estimated that around a million species are now endangered, even as human beings remain ignorant about the intricate ecological interdependencies among hundreds of thousands of these species.

Human societies are also under immense pressure. Population growth imposes a huge burden on the planet’s capacity for food production, and agriculture needs to be transformed to be sustainable. Climate change is already producing climate refugees moving from low-lying areas, on islands and coastlines, increasingly prone to flooding. Political violence is similarly producing waves of refugees, for example, moving across the Mediterranean Sea from war-torn states in Africa to Europe. These movements of refugees also sometimes exacerbate confrontations between local cultures and the cultures of successive incomers. In some nation states, not
only in Europe, cultural tensions within increasingly multicultural populations have fostered right-wing activism and increased the popularity of political parties with nativist, anti-immigrant platforms.

In many nation states, deep post-colonial tensions divide Indigenous peoples and now-long-settled coloniser populations. The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples continues to be an aspiration for many Indigenous peoples; and yet it is not enshrined in state law and everyday social and political practice in those states. As a result, Indigenous peoples across the world struggle to keep their languages and cultures alive and in many instances continue to endure the trauma of practices that perpetuate inequities.

Industrial economies are slowly changing, but unrealistic ideas about limitless economic growth persist. New technologies are emerging at unprecedented rates, but most of the world remains in the spell of late capitalism, with divisive economic, social, cultural, and political consequences. Green shoots of new forms of economic activity and relations emerge here and there (like micro-businesses in the Indian sub-continent, for example, or local community barter systems in some countries), but the dominant form of the late capitalist, transnational economy continues its hegemony and sustains and deepens the consequent inequalities.

The political life of many states around the world has also been increasingly unruly. Forced migration due to civil unrest or other geopolitical forces has created conditions that are difficult for people to live in, let alone live well in. Under such circumstances, the possibility of education is being eroded under the weight of deeply entrenched views and rusted-on practices that counter the good. Even away from nations where tyrants and warlords struggle to achieve dominance, in their own interests and the interests of their followers, the internal civic life of many leading Western democracies has become increasingly uncivil. In many places, political debate is increasingly polarised. Followers of different political parties seem increasingly unwilling to countenance the possibility that, whichever party is in power, it will govern in the interests of the whole nation. In this context, we are reminded of the words of the Jesuit theologian James Courtney Murray (1960, p. 14, quoted by Richard Bernstein, 1992, p. 339):

Barbarism … threatens when [people] cease to talk together according to reasonable laws. There are laws of argument, the observance of which is imperative if discourse is to be civilised. Argument ceases to be civil when it is dominated by passion and prejudice; when its vocabulary becomes solipsist, premised on the theory that my insight is mine alone and cannot be shared; when dialogue gives way to a series of monologues; when the parties to the conversation cease to listen to one another, or hear only what they want to hear, or see the other’s argument only through the screen of their own categories …. When things like this happen, [people] cannot be locked together in argument. Conversation become merely quarrelsome or querulous. Civility dies with the death of dialogue.

We have reached this state—the death of dialogue—and political life in many places is now conducted uncivilly.

In addition to the problem of incivility, the world faces difficulties in valuing human life and the community of life on the planet in other-than-economic terms.
As we saw in Chap. 3 (this volume), in the discussion of neoliberalism and neoliberalisation, the imperatives of national and international administrative and economic systems increasingly colonise the lifeworlds of human communities, obscuring, where they do not obliterate, values other than economic value (on the colonisation of lifeworlds by the imperatives of systems, see Habermas, 1984, 1987). It turns out that administrative and economic systems are unable to value human life (though some economists attempt to put an economic value on a human life), let alone recognise and respect the values that justify the pursuit of cultures based on reason, productive and sustainable economies and environments, and just and democratic societies.

We are in a critical space. While these paragraphs were written, an entirely new crisis has erupted to confront humankind: COVID-19. Human lives and forms of life have been savagely transformed; the crises listed above have all been abruptly and massively reframed by the new historical conditions imposed by this pandemic. These challenges, their consequences, and the opportunities that emerge alongside them will be taken up in new research and future writing, as we learn from this to-be-lived experience.

An Education Problem

So the world faces immense and testing ecological, cultural, economic, technological, social, and political challenges. Given the problems we face, it seems that we cannot yet say that we live in a world that is, in all respects, “a world worth living in”. These problems are not only problems of ecology, culture, economics, technology, society, or politics, they are also problems of—and for—education. And we must recognise the irony that some of these problems have been produced by education, like the economics education that bred the sophisticated financial instruments whose collapse led to the 2007–2009 Global Financial Crisis of 2008, or the chemical and agricultural education that led to the widespread use of ecologically dangerous herbicides and pesticides that have degraded underground ecologies in soils in and near many farms in Europe, Australia, and the USA. Even as our personal and interpersonal reliance on a technologised virtual world takes hold, we nevertheless valorise the continual innovation made possible by the digital revolution; this, we also know, has had an effect on our treatment of each other, in such untoward activities as cyberbullying, for example, and also manifest in cybercrime or virtual warfare. Education made such consequences possible.

The critical task we must tackle today is to re-articulate the problems we face to provide at least the faint outlines of a roadmap that might lead us out of the problems we have now, in part produced by our current forms of education, and promise to lead us towards a better world—a world really worth living in. This is an urgent, critical task—a task of overcoming irrationality and unreasonableness in our knowledges, practices, and cultures; destruction and unsustainability in our knowledges, practices, economies, and environments; and unjust and antidemocratic conditions in our knowledges, practices, and political life.
In his (1852) Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte Marx remarked that

[People] make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brains of the living. And just as they seem to be occupied with revolutionizing themselves and things, creating something that did not exist before, precisely in such epochs of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service, borrowing from them names, battle slogans, and costumes in order to present this new scene in world history in time-honoured disguise and borrowed language. Thus, Luther put on the mask of the Apostle Paul, the Revolution of 1789–1814 draped itself alternately in the guise of the Roman Republic and the Roman Empire, and the Revolution of 1848 knew nothing better to do than to parody, now 1789, now the revolutionary tradition of 1793–95. In like manner, the beginner who has learned a new language always translates it back into [her/his] mother tongue, but [s/he] assimilates the spirit of the new language and expresses [him/herself] freely in it only when [s/he] moves in it without recalling the old and when [s/he] forgets [her/his] native tongue. (pp. 15–16).

At this critical juncture in our world, and in education for our world, we must recognise that “the tradition of all dead generations” in education “weighs like a nightmare” on our brains. And we, too, must beware of conjuring up figures of thought from past traditions that might undermine our aspirations for new forms of education for our new, and menacingly critical, times. In our turn, we need to develop and learn new practices of education, justified in new languages, manifested in changed forms of educational work, and conducted in new kinds of relationships of solidarity and power.

At this historic moment, however, we as educators are hard pressed to form a clear image of what a culture based on reason might look like for upcoming generations, including having an idea about all the kinds of knowledge and practices needed to attain and sustain such a culture. We have a similarly challenging time imagining what a productive and sustainable economy and environment might look like, and all the kinds of knowledges and practices needed to attain and sustain them. And we have a hard time arriving at an answer about the kinds of knowledges and practices needed to attain and sustain a just and democratic political life for our nations. Moreover, in each case—culture, economy, environment, politics—there is contestation about the knowledges and practices most needed for a sustainable future. On the basis of our own practical deliberation and communicative action with colleagues and communities, it thus falls to each of us educators to make professional judgements about what knowledges and practices are most needed for our own educational sites and our current historical circumstances and situations.

Without a clearer idea of the substantive content of knowledge and practices needed for 2030 or 2050, it is difficult to know what curricula ought to include at every level of schooling from early childhood education through to post-secondary higher education and vocational education, as well as for adult and community education. That, nevertheless, is the challenge. In addition, we also need to consider that education occurs across multiple sites (on sports fields, prisons, as “health” promotion at local and national levels, in churches, in homes and community settings, and
in different forms for many Indigenous communities, let alone the lifestyle “business” model of life coaching/education) and that our formal educational institutions are not solely responsible for curricula that will foster education for living well in a world worth living in. That said, for now, our immediate focus is on the challenges of the formal education settings.

The challenge for educators today is not the preservation of the existing, largely industrial, curricula of knowledges at every level and in every species of formal education. It is the challenge of initiating rising generations of children, young people, and adults into the different forms of knowledge and practice needed for a sustainable world. These are not small challenges. Yet the spectre of an unsustainable world sometime after 2030, or perhaps 2050, shows that there is no alternative. Just as “there is no Planet B”, there is no alternative for educators than to prepare children, young people, and adults for a sustainable world—to initiate them into the knowledges and practices that will secure a sustainable world through cultures based on reason, productive and sustainable economies and environments, and just and democratic societies. And there is some urgency: the world needs all of that by 2030, or, at worst, 2050. Yep: we will have to build this plane while we are in the air.

As the world responds, locally, nationally, and globally to the COVID-19 pandemic, we are currently building such a plane. We are learning that massive transformations are needed in health systems, the global economy, cultures, environments, societies, and polities—and thus is an education problem.

We might take some comfort from the knowledge that this critical challenge turns out to be the same critical challenge that educators everywhere, for millennia, have confronted: in our own times and in our own local sites, the challenge is to develop the kinds and content of educational experiences that form persons so they can live well in the cultures, economies, and environments, and polities of their societies, and to form those cultures, economies, and environments, and polities so that, together, they constitute a world worth living in. This task takes one form for an early childhood educator, another for a professor of chemical engineering in a university, another for a high school English teacher, another for an IT teacher in vocational education and training, and yet another for an educator working outside formal education settings. Each must work with their current curricula, modes of pedagogy, and ways of doing assessment, and either abandon them to produce new ones, or transform their existing ones so they are more appropriate when judged against the critical framework presented in the view of education with which we began this chapter. Setting aside the totality of education everywhere and for all, we can begin with smaller steps—locally and immediately.

Transforming curricula, pedagogies, and ways of doing assessment can thus be, for every educator, a journey of hope. Our critical times may breed uncertainty, anxiety, and even despair, especially among students and other learners, but the tasks of educational transformation needed for these critical times are tasks of building a new future for humankind and the community of life on Earth. Imbued with the spirit of building a new future, transforming education to produce transformative education will be a noble, and perhaps even a joyful task, especially when done “in the company of others” (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2006, p. 6), including friends, colleagues,
and communities in collective site-based education development—the development of education for a better world locally as well as globally.

In this way, all educators can, in their own ways, become educators for sustainability (not only in terms of the environment, but also in terms of culture, economies, and social and political life), developing curricula, pedagogies, and ways of doing assessment as interdependent practices of education for sustainability in their own sites and communities, in their own fields, among the background of their own and their communities’ historical circumstances. Such a view of education champions critical praxis in critical times—for living well in a world worth living in on all fronts: ecological, cultural, economic, social, and political.

A Focus on Critical Educational Praxis: Pathways to Hope and Resistance

Chapter 2 (this volume) discusses various meanings of “praxis”. In the research of the Pedagogy, Education, and Praxis (PEP) international research network, praxis has been understood as having two lineages, and two meanings in the different contemporary intellectual traditions of the Anglophone world and Europe. On the one hand, in the Anglophone world, following a neo-Aristotelian tradition, praxis is understood as morally committed action. On this view, praxis is action that aims to do what is right, for the good of humankind. On the other hand, in Europe, following a post-Hegelian, Marxian tradition, praxis is frequently understood as “history-making action”. On this view, praxis is manifested in actions that have moral and political consequences (some good and some bad), and everyone who acts is aware that, in their actions, they are forming themselves as well as the world they share with others. PEP researchers have come to recognise both understandings of praxis and to use the term conscious of both meanings.

These two readings of “praxis” yield criteria for judging whether a practice was or was not praxis. On the first reading of praxis as “right action”, we can ask whether an action was likely or not likely to be for the good for humankind; on the second reading of praxis as “history-making action”, we can ask whether an action did or did not yield untoward moral or political consequences, and, if so, for whom (or for what).

These critical criteria allow us to form a view of critical praxis as practice that aims for the good for each person and the good for humankind and that endeavours to avoid untoward consequences. Considering this from the perspective of the view of education we articulated at the beginning of this chapter, we can then form a view of critical educational praxis, by asking whether a practice is for the good for the person, and for the good of humankind, and whether it enables or constrains
• Individual and collective self-expression, to secure cultures based on reason;
• Individual and collective self-development, to secure productive and sustainable economies and environments; and
• Individual and collective self-determination, to secure just and democratic societies.

We can ask these questions not only about global cultures, global economies and environments, or the global polity; we can also ask them about how practices do or do not promote these things locally, in our own local educational institution, our own local community, and our own society. This view of critical educational praxis invites us to interrogate our practice—before, while, and after we act—to determine whether our practice or its consequences will breach these criteria in some way. Examples of practice in education (or schooling) which breach these criteria include such things as follows:

• Forms of teaching that constrain learners’ individual and collective self-expression, or that impose forms of language (including dominant non-Indigenous languages and forms of expression that ignore those celebrated by Indigenous communities) that do not foster the development of a culture based on reason, for example by imposing ideas or discourses without allowing learners to think through whether these discourses are justified and appropriate in their situation and circumstances (e.g. the unreasoned imposition of “correct” ways of speaking or thinking that learners do not have the opportunity to explore, and to determine whether they are justified by reason);
• Forms of teaching that constrain learners’ individual and collective self-development, or that impose modes of action that do not foster the development of productive and sustainable economies and environments, for example by imposing modes of activity or work on learners that learners themselves do not believe to be justified in terms of their contribution to learners’ self-development, or which they (and/or their caregivers or communities) believe to be unproductive or unsustainable; or
• Forms of teaching that constrain learners’ individual and collective self-determination, or that impose ways of relating to one another and the world that learners themselves do not believe to be justified in terms of their contribution to their own self-development, or which they believe to be unjust or undemocratic, or that simply reproduce current inequities.

A critical view of educational praxis does not stop with critique of educational practices alone; it also aims to help learners to take a critical view of their world, and their knowledge and practices in the world. It aims to “call out” those forms of thinking, acting, and relating that have untoward consequences in terms of individual and collective self-expression in a culture based on reason; individual and collective self-development in productive and sustainable economies and societies; and individual and collective self-determination in just and democratic societies. For example:
Critical mathematics educators might help learners understand the maldistribution of wealth in societies or globally;

Critical environmental educators might help learners understand how global warming is affecting local ecosystems;

Critical literacy educators might help learners understand how ideologies are woven into ways of thinking and reading and writing, and into different kinds of texts; and

Critical health educators might support learners to recognise that their own state of well-being is not an individual responsibility, but is determined by a wide range of social determinants that they have little control over.

In short, critical educational praxis aims to be both reflexively self-critical and to help learners take a critical view of the world around them, using for example, the critical framework offered by the theory of education presented at the beginning of this chapter.

So the journey of critical educational praxis is also a journey of hope. It supports the educator’s critical task of discerning, in conjunction with their learners and communities, what “a world worth living in” might be like in their own particular circumstances, community—and in the substantive subject–matter they teach, at their particular level and sector in education. The notion of critical educational praxis also leads us to site-based education development of the kind described in Chap. 9 of Kemmis et al. (2014) Changing Education, Changing Practices—changing what each educator does, in their own historical circumstances, to make the world a better place.

Collective Action to Advance Critical Praxis in Education

Collective action is necessary to advance critical praxis in education, and so there is value in forming relationships with colleagues, learners, and communities that help us all, as educators, to advance educational practice for the good of the people involved and for the good for humankind. As evidenced across this volume, the Pedagogy, Education, and Praxis international research network and its Action Research and Practice Theory research program provides an example of such an endeavour. More particularly, as shown in Chap. 3 (this volume), this research program proceeded through some research studies conducted “from the outside”, for example in the mode of ethnographic observation studies of practice in early childhood education settings, schools, universities, vocational education and training, workplaces, and community settings. Other research studies were conducted “from the inside”, for example in the mode of participatory action research in which the researchers studied their own teaching or research practice; for example, in various “Teacher Talk” projects in which PEP researchers studied the ways their own efforts to attain critical educational praxis were enabled or constrained by the working conditions in their own universities. And still another range of research studies was conducted “in
between”, for example, studies conducted by university researchers in partnership with teachers in early childhood, school, vocational education and training, and other workplace or community settings. In some cases, long-term studies that began in the mode of ethnographic research gradually evolved into action research partnerships between university researchers and, for example, teachers in schools.

One of the features of the research fostered by the PEP network has been that it has aimed to open communicative space between participants in the research. It recognises that different participants enter the research with different needs, interests, and perspectives. The critical participatory action research advocated by various PEP researchers also aims to foster communicative action (Habermas, 1987), which is different from the usual strategic action we take when we do the usual things in pursuit of “getting things done” in “the way we do things around here”. In practical situations in everyday life, when things seem to be becoming strange in some way, people interrupt what they are doing and ask “What is going on here?”. They may then enter the mode of communicative action in which they sincerely strive for (1) intersubjective agreement about words and ideas in the language they use, (2) mutual understanding of one another’s perspectives and points of view (without necessarily reaching agreement), and (3) unforced consensus about what to do under the circumstances. In communicative action, they aim to reach across the horizons of their own perspectives and to encounter the horizons of others (who are equally unique as persons, shaped by their own particular life histories, and experiences). This is a dialogic endeavour that generates a form of active listening, with the aim of collaborative practical deliberation.

In opening up these communicative spaces across research settings, PEP researchers have encountered diverse people and perspectives different from their own, for example, in many PEP studies with, for and by refugees in early childhood, school, and university settings. At the same time, in coming together to work collectively during international meetings, PEP researchers have encountered profound cultural and linguistic differences. As a consequence, some PEP researchers have begun to grapple with their own responsibility to advocate as, with, and for Indigenous perspectives and colleagues, and support people from low and low–middle-income countries, if we are to really demonstrate our commitment to education to empower individuals and communities to live well in a world worth living in. This requires we all extend our research aims to recognise and respect not only Indigenous perspectives, but also Indigenous research methodologies, and find ways to support the work of Indigenous researchers and educators work. If we take the authors of this chapter as an example, New Zealand PEP researcher Kirsten Petrie recognises and respects the importance premise of kaupapa; Māori methodologies which advocate for a Māori worldview in all research by Māori, with Māori, for Māori, in contrast to a more traditional and colonial research agenda focused on or about Māori people (be it in education, health, or other fields). Similarly, Australian PEP researchers Stephen Kemmis and Christine Edwards-Groves recognise and respect the values of Yindyamarra central to the Wiradjuri nation in the lands on which most campuses
of Charles Sturt University (Australia) stand: the values of acting slowly and with deliberation, thoughtfulness, deep respect for others and for one’s own connectedness with all things, and profound care for Wiradjuri culture and language, land, and law. Conducting research with and for “others” entails entering partnerships, in which the research also becomes research by these groups. Being self-conscious and self-aware about the need to proceed in the mode of communicative action—seeking intersubjective agreement, mutual understanding, and unforced agreement about what to do—has helped PEP researchers articulate views about how research can be conducted in the mode of partnership and recognition (the name of a former transnational collaborative research group in PEP²).

Across the PEP network, another strand of work has aimed more directly at transforming educational practice for the good of the people involved and for the good for humankind—or, as we might now say in the light of our arguments above for education for sustainability in every field and at every level of education, for the good for the community of life on Earth. Many of these studies were conducted in partnership with people in schools and other educational settings. Some focused on fostering critical educational praxis aimed at avoiding or overcoming conditions that deform or disfigure educational practice so it produces untoward consequences, culturally, economically, environmentally, or politically. In general, people involved in these studies were principally motivated by a commitment to improve or develop their educational practice—or, as argued in Chap. 5 (this volume), their pedagogical practice. In much the same way, by working as a collective, members of PEP engaged in the Action Research and Practice Theory research program have aimed at elucidating the nature of practice itself—as well as the nature of praxis and critical educational praxis. This strand of work yielded, for example, the theory of practice architectures and theoretical clarifications of the notions of “pedagogy”, “education”, and “praxis” as they are understood in different intellectual traditions.

The PEP network, and the diverse range of research studies it has fostered, has demonstrated (1) that teachers can be extremely effective researchers into their own practice, (2) that university researchers can form effective research partnerships with teachers in other settings to transform educational and pedagogical practices for the good, and (3) that incisive research into the nature of practice can inform and educate teachers about what their practices are composed of, how their practices are enabled and constrained by practice architectures, and how to transform their existing educational and pedagogical practices, and the practice architectures that support them, for the good. Through these different kinds of research and partnerships, the PEP network has also demonstrated a deep commitment to the notions of teachers as “extended professionals” (see Chap. 6, this volume) and as “activist professionals” (as described by Sachs, 2000, 2003; Groundwater-Smith & Sachs, 2002).

²See for example; Edwards-Groves, C., Olin, A., & Karlberg-Granlund, G. (Eds) (2018). Partnership and Recognition in Action Research: Pedagogy and practice theory. London, UK: Routledge.
All of this shows us that teachers can and do transform education through site-based education development and that they need not do it alone. Forming collaborative partnerships with other teachers, and with university researchers (for example), can help them in the struggle to make education today more educational (and less non- or anti-educational), and to develop educational practices that will, indeed, assist learners to live well in a world worth living in.

The Enduring Pursuit of Praxis: Critical Research for Sustaining Strong Educational Futures

Across this book, the authors have aimed to contribute to the contemporary literature of education and to recover deeper understandings, and an enriched practice, of “education” in an era of schooling. To take just a few examples, the literature the authors had in mind includes such works as Gert Biesta’s (2005) critique of the language of learning in recent educational writing and policy, his (2013) notion of the “learnification” of education, and Nicole Mockler and Susan Groundwater-Smith’s (2018) critique of the language of improvement and reform in education. Overall, in this volume, the authors have aimed to clarify and re-articulate educational praxis as a key notion for education in contemporary times. They used the notion of praxis as a critical concept against which to interrogate contemporary experiences of education (in relation to teaching and student learning, leading, professional learning, and research and reflection) in a variety of educational settings across our different countries.

Centrally in Chap. 4, but also in other chapters, PEP researchers have responded with a forceful critique of the pervasive influence of neoliberal regimes of educational evaluation, research, assessment, management, surveillance, and accountability being imposed on education systems internationally. The critique of neoliberalism presented in this volume is not based on “hidden” assumptions, presuppositions, or values; the aim of producing the critique was an explicit point of departure for the transnational collaborative research endeavours of researchers in the PEP network. As this volume demonstrates, producing this critique has also allowed PEP researchers more clearly to understand how the conditions that have hobbled and constrained educational practice in recent decades can be resisted, opposed, and overcome.

And yet, within the everyday lifeworlds of educational practice, the aspiration to and achievement of education persist. Many PEP research studies show that educators have resiliently resisted the blandishments of schooling to sustain the practice of education, even under conditions designed to favour mere schooling—the production of “learning outcomes” measured by state and international education authorities, and the production of domesticated “learners” suited to the needs of contemporary administrative and economic systems in the guises of the “docile citizen” and “work-ready worker”. The critique presented in this volume has also articulated enhanced
and enriched understandings of how educational practice is shaped in very different ways by the different kinds of practice architectures that enable and constrain education in different sites, in different sectors of education, and in different countries and internationally.

Our enduring pursuit of praxis is part of a conversation of traditions underpinned by critical research focused on sustaining strong educational futures for all learners in all communities. This is a task that requires the collective efforts of all education researchers whose commitment to critical educational praxis binds them in their endeavours and underpins their practices, even when arrangements beyond their control feel overwhelming.

Conclusion

The research conducted across the PEP network, 2008 to 2018, has shown that educational practice is at risk of being diminished in the contemporary era of schooling—as schooling is understood by neoliberal policy-makers and administrators, if not by many of the teachers, leaders, students, and communities we worked with in our research studies, at the local level. At the same time, however, there are resources of hope: teachers are indeed resisting and opposing the bureaucratisation and deprofessionalisation of their work, and they are continuing to practise education despite some of the demoralising conditions imposed on them. Teachers nevertheless continue—sometimes covertly—to practise as educators, following their deep values and commitments to educate students, despite the increasingly domesticating conditions imposed upon teachers, students, and school leaders by education systems. After a summer of devastating bushfires in Australia, 2019–2020, where the rain has come, green shoots are once again appearing; where rain has fallen on the scorched ground, it has already begun to germinate seeds hidden in the seed bank in the soil beneath. It is an apt metaphor for considering a forward-looking education: where teachers and leaders and professional learning leaders create new conditions of possibility (practice architectures) for educational practice, educational practice can and does thrive anew—as many examples in the research reported in this volume show.

While clearly impelled by the tensions and contradictions between education and schooling, and the ways they erupt into educational practice, policy, and administration, the researchers in the network also maintain a profound hope that education (and other aspects of contemporary life) can avoid or at least minimise the extent to which the imperatives of neoliberal economic and administrative systems deface and disfigure educational practice. The authors in this volume have sought ways to understand and enact educational practice in forms that maintain the commitment of educators, across the different countries in the network, to helping children, young people, and adults to live well in a world worth living in. This is a profound, revitalising, and renewing lifeworld commitment to education and to the lifeworlds in which the practice of education is conducted.
It is our hope that this volume shows ways to support teachers, through leadership and professional learning, how better to nurture and sustain that lifeworld commitment. And we hope that it also demonstrates the potency and power of different forms of educational research, reflection, and evaluation to nurture educational practice that will, in our challenging times, continue the pursuit of the good for each person, the good for humankind, and the good for the community of life of Earth.

References

Bernstein, R. J. (1992). *The new constellation: The ethical-political horizons of modernity/postmodernity*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Biesta, G. (2005). Against learning. Reclaiming a language for education in an age of learning. *Nordisk Pedagogik*, 25, 54–66.

Biesta, G. (2013). Giving teaching back to education: Responding to the disappearance of the teacher. *Phenomenology and Practice*, 6(2), 35–49.

Edwards-Groves, C., Grootenboer, P., & Wilkinson, J. (Eds.). (2018). *Education in an era of schooling: Critical perspectives of educational practice and action research*. A festschrift for Stephen Kemmis. Singapore: Springer.

Edwards-Groves, C., Olin, A., & Karlberg-Granlund, G. (Eds.). (2018). *Partnership and recognition in action research: Pedagogy and practice theory*. London, UK: Routledge.

Groundwater-Smith, S., & Mockler, N. (2006). Research that counts: Practitioner research and the academy. *Review of Australian Research in Education* [Special issue of the Australian Educational Researcher, 6, 105–118.

Groundwater-Smith, S., & Sachs, J. (2002). The activist professional and the reinstatement of trust. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 32(3), 341–358.

Habermas, J. (1984). *Theory of communicative action, volume I: Reason and the rationalization of society* (trans. T. McCarthy). Boston: Beacon.

Habermas, J. (1987). *Theory of communicative action, volume II: Lifeworld and system: A critique of functionalist reason* (trans. Thomas McCarthy). Boston: Beacon.

Kemmis, S. (2018). *Life in practices: Challenges for education and educational research*. In C. Edwards-Groves, P. Grootenboer, & J. Wilkinson (Eds.), *Education in an era of schooling: Critical perspectives of educational practice and action research*. A festschrift for Stephen Kemmis (pp. 239–254). Singapore: Springer.

Kemmis, S., & Edwards-Groves, C. (2018). *Understanding education: History, politics, practice*. Singapore: Springer.

Kemmis, S., Wilkinson, J., Edwards-Groves, C., Hardy, I., Grootenboer, P., & Bristol, L. (2014). *Changing practices, changing education*. Singapore: Springer.

Marx, K. (1852). *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, trans. S.K. Padover from the German end of 1869. Chapter 1: [https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-bruma/htm](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1852/18th-bruma/cht01.htm).

Mockler, N., & Groundwater-Smith, S. (2018). *Questioning the language of improvement and reform in education: Reclaiming meaning*. Oxon: Routledge.

Murray, J. C. (1960). *We hold these truths*. New York: Sheed and Ward.

Sachs, J. (2000). The activist professional. *Journal of Educational Change, 1*, 77–94.

Sachs, J. (2003). *The activist teaching profession*. Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press.

United Nations, Intergovernmental Panel Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES). (2019). *IPBES Global Assessment on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*, (May, 2019). [https://web.archive.org/web/20190627065419/https://www.ipbes.net/](https://web.archive.org/web/20190627065419/https://www.ipbes.net/).