

Beyond School. The challenge of co-producing and commoning a different episteme for education.

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Abstract

This paper develops previous work in which we deployed a form of Foucauldian critique to clear a space in which it might be possible to think education differently. Here, in that space, we are hoping to ‘get lost’ in some unexplored spaces of possibility. We sketch some starting points, some ‘lines of flight’ for such thinking.. To do this we begin from the concatenation of three crises and discuss their inter-relationships. The first, COVID, offers a moment, a space, in which we might think of ourselves, others, and the world differently. The second, climate, brings to bear a pressing urgency for change in the way that we think of our relation to the world in practical, political and epistemological ways. The third, education in relation to crises, is an opening within which some thinking might be undertaken about what it means to be educated, and in which the relation between education and sustainability, in a variety of senses, might be pursued. In the final sections, using concepts from Foucault, Olssen, Lewis and others, we seek to find inspiration from and an accommodation between Foucault’s *self-formation* and *commoning* - a practice of collaborating and sharing to meet every day needs and achieve the well-being of individuals, communities, and environments- as a new way to think education beyond modern episteme.

Key words: COVID, climate crisis, education, school, Foucault, self-formation, commoning.

1. Introduction

In our hyper-globalised world, the COVID pandemic has been both a catalyst for the end of things traditional and a disruption in which fundamental questions about the continuation of things, indeed of our species, have been raised (Bylund, et al., 2021). Nonetheless, over and against this, for most governments and many organisations and individuals, the pandemic is seen as a parenthesis, a challenge to be overcome by a return to ‘growth’. The limits and dangers of that normality – and its social relations are left unaddressed¹. There is both a political yearning for a return to ‘normality’, at the same time as some degree of recognition, in some quarters, that ‘normality’ is dangerous and unsustainable and threatens our continuation as a species (see below).

¹ Many commentators argue that at the heart of the critical ecological analysis is the modern enlightenment belief in progress, and its concomitant – growth. Increase is the main strategy for everything. More always means better, new always means better, growth always means better. But the earth has limits, and it is impossible to move beyond them. Of course, schooling is itself a main partner of the growth paradigm.

Education seems almost entirely caught up in the first – pandemic talk in education speaks of lost time that must be made up for, performance gaps that must be closed, more money needed, more schemes, more teachers. The economic relations and ‘benefits’ of schooling are reasserted. Education has been relaunched as before with little thought as to how it currently contributes to our extinction or how it might possibly contribute to our continuation². Here we argue that the pandemic could be a point from which to begin to think differently about education and that the climate emergency confronts us with an obligation to undertake that thinking.

The discourse of crisis and the discourse of normality exist in parallel. Politicians flip and flop between them and there is rarely any interaction between [these] two complex global assemblages, one environmental the other social and economic³; and ‘education’ hovers uncertainly somewhere between these. Almost all the proposals for the promotion of ecological sustainability have put education as a key component for thinking and enacting the future differently – a future in which ‘We must urgently learn to live differently’. At least since the Agenda 21 (Sustainable Development Goals, UN 1992) participation process, enacted in countries, regions and municipalities around the world, sustainability education in general and in schools in particular has been proposed as one of the key sites from which to promote new patterns of consumption, recycling, etc. The argument is that schools should be places where different knowledges, consciousness, values, and practices about sustainability might be explored, and different human ecological subjectivities produced. However, 30 years on, Komatsu and Rappleye (2017) offer a strident critical evaluation of schools as vehicles for change – and suggest that schools may not be part of the solution to the climate crisis, but are indeed part of the problem. Learning in the modern school is for the most part a reiteration, indeed a celebration, of the limits to thought and of the impossibility of moving beyond those limits. Against these limits to thinking (2017, 168):

We need to radically rethink our starting assumptions about modern mass schooling, one rooted in the modernist western paradigm, and consider whether education is in fact a solution or a cause of the trouble we now face...it is clear that the Earth does not need more ‘educated’ consumers of knowledge – a mere refurbishment of the long-standing Western turned- modern assumption that knowledge alone will allow us to reach the ‘good’ life. Instead, we must first fundamentally change ways of being, then (re)describe the world including education in those terms.

From a material perspective (more schools, more pupils, more years of compulsory school, more choice⁴, more education technology etc.), but also from a symbolic one, school is an enlightenment

² <https://www.transformingsociety.co.uk/2021/11/01/have-you-seen-the-elephant-in-the-room-at-cop26/>

³ <https://www.transformingsociety.co.uk/2020/03/09/why-current-climate-change-policies-are-necessary-but-insufficient/>

⁴ As one example in the UK ‘a generation ago, 70% of us walked to school. Now it’s less than half. That’s despite most people living within two miles of their closest primary school. As a result, one in four cars on the road during the morning peak are families

institution par excellence: an institution that promises ‘better’ individual subjects in moral terms; and a ‘better’ society with more educated people, and more knowledge and skills⁵. And indeed, the incitement to educational growth has caught the attention of capital, and ‘schooling’ and its accoutrements are now the object of massive private sector investment. The unassailable ‘goodness’ and irrefutable ‘necessity’ of the school (and its relation to the economy) is now also an opportunity for profit and capital is assuming the moral responsibilities of the state in the delivery of educational services – ‘doing well by doing good’ (Ball and Grimaldi, 2021)

Despite decades of a discourse of sustainability education (which is perhaps more evident in texts than actual practices), the modern school is still producing subjects who view the world, ‘their’ world as one of growth and progress, and see happiness as founded on material acquisition, mobility, consumption and waste – ‘unsustainable subjects’ – quintessentially ‘modern’ subjects, neoliberal, self-interested subjects. In producing these individualised, competitive, entrepreneurial subjects, the school produces students who are against the world rather than ‘in’ or ‘of’ it, and students who think ‘for/of’ themselves rather than ‘for’ others and ‘for’ the planet. Like those ecological and economic analyses that seek to make us aware that we are facing the limits of the earth and the need to reshape human patterns of life, consumption, travel, city organisation, energy, transport, etc., our sociological analysis confronts the modern school and modern school systems with their limits and the need to rethink what it means to be educated in order to produce new/different subjectivities. We will return to this.

Our point here is that the school as such is not fit for purpose, for the purpose of *continuance*. The school is a factory of learning, a modernist institution of government, set within the ontology of environmental exploitation (Latouche, 2010). Despite the failures of and the intolerability of the modern school institution, as highlighted in a multitude of sociological critiques (Fielding and Moss, 2011; Illich, 2013; Author, 2020; Hargreaves, Quick and Buchanan, 2021; among others) and its inability to live up to its promises, the belief in the necessity and perfectibility of the modern school remains firmly in place (Ainscow et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2021; OECD, 2021). That is to say, the belief survives, despite decades of research that suggests otherwise, that schooling is still motivated by an essential goodness (Allen, 2017, 5). We assert that this belief and the hope in and for education that it sustains are misguided; the problem is not with the ambitions of goodness, but its vehicle – the modern school and schooling, as the default signifiers of education. We take it as axiomatic that the school is not as necessary as all that, indeed that it is a block, an obstacle, an inhibition to freedom, to ‘learning’, to the move to a different sort of sustainable society. We take the school to be, intolerable and irredeemable. It is irreparable. (Authors, 2021)

on the school run, contributing to half a million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions annually – that’s more than the carbon footprint of some small countries’ <https://energysavingtrust.org.uk/why-walking-to-school-is-the-path-to-net-zero/>.

⁵ <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/education/overview#1>

We argue then for the urgent need to think education without school, to dispense with the institutional form and its baggage and to start somewhere else. For us, that somewhere else has a triple focus: on self-formation, on our relations with others (based on tolerance and care), and on our relation to the world (based on *continuance*). That is, the recognition of ourselves as part of a social and ecological collectivity. Modern schools are fundamentally ill-suited for the delivery of an education within which the modern rationalities related to growth, winning, individualism, competition, etc. and their attendant identities and subjectivities, might be subject to ‘insolent assertion’ and a permanent orientation of scepticism. And yet, such insolence and scepticism are a necessary basis for thinking beyond the normal. The question then is how can we begin to think differently about education and *continuance*, in relation and together?

2. First thoughts and new paths to think education differently

As Bylund et al. (2021) and Komatsu and Rappleye (2017) argue, we need a different episteme, a different ‘schema of perception’ (Foucault, 1970) that will enable us to unthink/rethink school in the space created by critique - a different way of thinking and new ways of knowing.

The first challenge and task then, as Taylor Webb and Mikulan (2021, 5) argue, is to ‘escape’ – that is, to dispense with enlightenment thinking and “romantic modernism and neoliberal pragmatics” – and to dispense with the school. The second is to begin to consider different ways of thinking ourselves and the world and ourselves in relation to the world and in relation to education. As noted already, this means avoiding the stunted method of alternatives, of binaries, of simply thinking against ‘what we do not want’. Rather we need to “let go” and accept the risk of and possibility of “stupidity” (Colebrook, 2013), or perhaps rather the possibility of a different stupidity. We need spaces in which we can undertake the ethical project of *self-formation*, a project founded upon: ‘The critique of what we are and experiments with the possibility of going beyond’ (Foucault in Rabinow 1987, p. 108). This paper sketches one set of possibilities, starting points, ‘lines of flight’, stupidities, fields of sense. We urge for the need to struggle to find the limits of ourselves and to transgress those limits and to develop relevant and useful agentic skills appropriate to that challenge. Olssen (2009, p. 267) suggests, drawing on Sen and Nussbaum, that all of this presupposes ‘a range of capabilities’ that education must develop and he goes on to offer a list of requirements for such an education - the opening up of vulnerability, audacity, unruly curiosity, fearlessness and frank speaking and always the valuing of ‘difference’. That said, we accept that this is:

Difficult to envisage in practice, all of this has to be created by experiment. This is an open-ended process, ethical self-formation and future making have no end, no conclusion, and they are contextual – education would be one of many sites in which the subject is in struggle and contingent – not existential. Thus Foucault sought a non-manipulative

education where power relationships were minimized, but how this was to be achieved in practice is far from clear, especially in his own teaching. (Marshall, 1990, p. 10)

Crucially, and emphatically, these experiments of self-formation and possibility are not lonely and individualistic. Rather as Olssen (2007, p. 207) makes clear: ‘Ethical action is not, for Foucault, an individual affair but presupposes a certain political and social structure with respect to liberty’. Self-formation is not a lonely narcissism but is only possible within what Falzon (1998, p. 36) calls ‘the fundamental encounter with the other’. And further, as Olssen goes on to say, this rests on ‘a relation between the individual and the future of society as a system’ (2021, p. 118) – a sustainable future. Rather than trade on unacknowledged metaphysical normativities, as happens in the modern school, education as self-formation could become one arena in which practical possibilities for action in relation to *life-continuance* are investigated and experimented with. From a Foucauldian perspective, self-formation is not a matter of what one knows, but how one lives, as Komatsu and Rappleye (2017) above argue. And, related to the climate crisis, we can take this literally, in terms of our existence and constitution in a material sense – how we live in the world, how we conduct ourselves, how we recognize ourselves – a very real ontological relation to ourselves and to truth (Moghtader, 2016, p. 86). This challenge of self-formation rests on a reversal of the usual framework of authority that the school represents – one of submission – and rather requires that we resist authority and actively seek to dismantle universality. Indeed, it requires the courage of truth in the face of authority – *parrhesia* (Foucault, 2001, p. 106): ‘a practice, which tries to shape the specific relation individuals have to themselves’, the task of education in these terms is ‘not to persuade the assembly, but to convince someone that he must take care of himself and of others; and this means that he must *change his life*’. Or:

.. if you take proper care of yourself, that is, if you know ontologically what you are, if you know what you are capable of, if you know what it means for you to be a citizen of a city... [of a planet] if you know what things you should and should not fear, if you know what you can reasonably hope for and, on the other hand, what things should not matter to you, if you know, finally, that you should not be afraid of death – if you know all this, you cannot abuse your power over others. (Foucault, 1997, p. 31).

Self-formation and the care of the self ‘becomes a question of learning, teaching and applying oneself...’ (Moghtader, 2016, p. 69). To change the world and our relation to it, we must change ourselves. And in doing so we must come to see our well-being as inextricably linked to the well-being of the others and the planet. And to reiterate, as Sicilia-Camacho & Fernandez-Balboa (2009, 455) put it ‘Far from being a lonely and selfish process, self-care fosters generosity and solidarity, enables stronger and more meaningful ties with others’, in stark contrast to liberalism which constantly under-estimates ‘the extent to which people are members of, and derive their identity from, public shared structures of community’ (Olssen, 2009, p. 97). In a world of scarcity and environmental danger the complex interconnections of biological, social and material life have

never been clearer. Olssen (2009, p. 206) asserts that “the new crises facing mankind alter the calculus of ‘self’ versus ‘common’ interest and increase the shadow of the future on human affairs, introducing [or not] a new objective sense of shared purpose”.

In order to both circumvent the epistemic limits of the modern school and to construct a different epistemic basis for education, we begin by addressing three basic tenets of schooling. This serves to elaborate the points adumbrated above as a basis for a different education, one that is a fitting response to the crises named above.

2.1 The formation and enactment of practices within the school presumes a preeminent individuality rather than a recognition of community.

To think of education outside or beyond institutions, beyond schooling, is to take seriously the point Foucault makes in *Discipline and Punish* (1975, p. 194) when he writes, “The individual is no doubt the fictitious atom of an ‘ideological’ representation of society; but he is also a reality fabricated by this specific technology of power that I have called ‘discipline’”. This is what Bellah et al. (2008, p. 143) call ontological individualism, that is, the assumption that “the individual is prior to society”. Such fictitious individuals, “are more prone to ignoring social and environmental problems, seeing them as unrelated to themselves (...) and also tend to be ineffective in collaborating with others in a given society to tackle these problems” (Komatsu and Rappleye, 2021, p. 7). Thus, to think education differently, it is necessary to challenge modern institutions *tout court*, their ontology and episteme, their disciplinary methods, and outcomes of subjection/production – their technology of power - and to propose a different form for the individual, and a different art of power, or rather perhaps a different form of thought. And that form of thought is *critique*. Critique is ‘a quintessentially [post]modern form of thought, critique is tied to the “will not to be governed”’ (Chignola, 2019, p. 111) or perhaps more accurately, not to be governed ‘like this’⁶. Rather than a site (see below) of discipline, in these terms, education might become the vehicle for a transformative and *ethopoietic* pedagogy, an incitement to *parrhēssia*, to frank speaking. Speaking is such a way that, ‘Care is freed from the pedagogical scheme of one’s preparation to adult life’ (Chignola, 2019, p. 112) and becomes instead a way of telling the truth, of reproach, of antagonism, of undoing, of giving effect to words, of understanding ourselves differently, of seeing the historical contingency of things. This begets us as a different kind of subject, a moral subject, an active subject, an ethical subject – we become: ‘Individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realised’ (Foucault, 1993, p. 221). And in all of this:

What critique must avoid in order that it may be practised as such – to wit, as the fire of innovation, transformation and resistance within the governmental ellipse – is the

⁶ We are attempting here to both advocate and practice such critique.

enchantment by which power struggles to exorcise the *parrhēssia* of the governed as it tries to recover its surplus in the dispositive of sovereignty. (Chignola, 2019 p. 125)

Self-formation, formation as an ethical subject needs an epistemology, an ethics, and a politics of its own, and the main goal is to be otherwise, different. But here the experience of what “we” mean is necessarily a very ‘concrete, palpable experience’ (Falzon, 1998, p. 33). This is ‘the art of living dangerously’ (Allan, 1999, p. 58). The care of the self, in these terms, is made up agonistically rather than didactically, in a process of ongoing insubordination, curiosity and possibility. That is:

... ethical self-formation based on a permanent critique could mean that instead of ‘finding’ already existing values and causes within the community, learners should actively practise critique by investigating how their own community and other communities have been formed in relation to each other and how the (different) ways we live our lives affect and are affected by others. (Byland et al., 2021, p. 13)

2.2 The school as a non-place and decontextualized institution

Over and against the school as an institution, as ‘no-place’, a ‘non-place’, as a decontextualized block, with its overbearing materialisation of disciplinary power, we want to re-focus on the conceptualisation of education/school as an inter-relation of place, context and meaning. Against the inclination of modern institutions to produce schools as non-places, and against the logic of schooling that considers places and communities merely as the scenery for their work (Author, 2020), other educations were/are/might be based on and start from *places* rather than institutions. In relation to place as a concatenation (connection and interplay) of learning and environment, the individual and collective learner are brought into an immediate relation to the meaning and well-being of the community and the planet – that is place both in a more general and a very immediate sense. Thus, according ESD for 2030, the transformation of pedagogy and learning environments should enable learners to ‘live what they learn and learn what they live’. And as Byland et al., (2021, p. 13-14) argue that “if learners are to ‘live what they learn’ the key for radical change seems to be to focus on how young people, regardless of their wealth, location or gender, and the intersectionality between these factors, can learn to live in an ethical and sustainable way in relation to other humans and other living species”.

Thus, education as a self-formation is not a matter of abstract, universal, decontextualized and disengaged and distant knowledge (what one knows), but about how one lives and the co-construction of a life that deserves to be lived in common with others and in relation to the environment. In modern mass schooling there is a simplistic, individualistic and mechanical conception of learning: we teach children abstract theories, and they will transform these into concrete practices - something that we know very well does not work e.g. education for

sustainability (Komatsu and Rappleye, p. 2021). In contrast, education as self-formation might well begin with open, real and contextualised questions and challenges that involve incertitude, relations, emotions, cooperation, conflicts, politics, complexity. When education is an ethical activity, knowledge is always a relevant, engaged, questioning, destabilising and open-ended process (Pérez-Gómez, 2010). Here, education is not practiced in abstract and decontextualised terms, it is about facing both social, environmental and political challenges and is part of the co-construction of oneself with others. Hilary Cremin develops this point:

in the same way that agriculture and farming are turning away from massification, monocultures and an over-reliance on human intervention and chemicals, education needs to turn away from standardisation and an over-reliance on modernist and enlightenment ways of being and knowing. In the same way that landscapes are benefitting from processes of rewilding, education can benefit from reclaiming teaching and learning as natural, dynamic and creative processes that are deeply embedded within complex ecosystems. (personal communication)

2.3 Schools against the common (good)

Let us think about the relation between place, education and subjectivity in another way and in doing so highlight again the contingency of the school. This other way of thinking draws on the idea of *the commons*. This takes up the Marxist focus on the enclosure of common resources (lands, pastures, water, forest...) and the process wherein both natural commons (forests and lands) and social commons (knowledge, social capital...) became thoroughly capitalised and privatised within the economic and financial dynamics of early modernity. That movement of human capitalisation and natural, social, and educational privatisation has transformed economic, social, political, community, ethnic and gender relations through/within particular social and subjective forms of knowledge, habits, language, etc. and we are rendered by these as *homo economicus* – the only possible subject of capitalism (see Federici, Linebaugh, Zizek, Hardt and Negri, etc.). *Homo economicus* “appears precisely as someone manageable, someone who responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment”⁷ or in the other sense of the word – against the environment. *Homo economicus* is someone eminently governable and the “correlate of a governmentality which will act on the environment and systematically modify its variables” (Foucault, 2008, p. 270-1).

Education has played and continues to play a key role in the production of the governable, enclosed subject. But not as a simple process of oppression - education makes us up, and makes us into who/what we can be, but only in particular ways. Indeed, modern schools are one form of modern social enclosure, alongside others, like hospitals, prisons, welfare hostels, etc. - they all rest on the disciplinary rationality. As Foucault puts (1975, p. 170), it is precisely “Discipline 'makes'

⁷ <https://economicsociology.org/2020/11/18/foucault-neoliberalism-redefined-homo-economicus/>

individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise”. The school enacts the enclosure and institutionalisation of children and the displacement of community learning, local customs and ties based on family, neighbourhood, place, craft, and faith, to produce isolated “individuals”. What was fought against/for and lost during the 17th-19th centuries, was not only access to pastures and forests, but the loss of participation in a common world, and a relation to a truth, a form of self-government and self-care, an identity, a common rationality, and a way of life (Thompson, 1992). Rather, children were produced as “free” workers “well” socialised in the new economy of the time (time is money) and ready to fit into the new urban market society. That is, as Thompson put it “when they arrive to be 6 or 7, they should have naturalised the time, the work and the fatigue” (1992, p. 510).

We make this point not to conjure up a romantic vision of an idyllic lost world but to highlight a juxtaposition between an individualised ‘good’ and a common good and between the onto-epistemology of modern schooling and *commoning*. That is, the collective work of co-producing and co-instituting the common good. The necessary co-implication and co-engagement of social subjects in a world that is common. Or what different authors have defined as *commoning* (as a verb, as a relation, as an action) to distinguish it from the common (noun – goods) and the common good (adjective) (Bollier, 2014; Laval and Dardot, 2015; Linebaugh, 2019, etc.). That is, *commoning* understood as the social practices, norms, relations and dynamics of being, living, working and managing goods, symbols, rituals and conflict in common.

In the final part of the paper, we will try to think about what a different education understood as *commoning*/self-formation, as an ethical activity focused on how we live and what kind of life deserves to be lived, might look like. In particular, the climate crisis and its consequences and implications demands that we radically question the current “education normality” and think in new and different ways about education and its relation to individual and collective well-being.

3. What would education as a ‘commoning’ activity of self-care look like?

3.1 *Commoning education as self-formation: with or without schools?*

Is it possible to think about a relation, a dialogue, between *commoning*, the care of the self, and others and the planet? We could ask: Could a *commoning* relation be seen as an educational process, an ethical and political activity and technique of self-formation? If self-formation is “those reflective and voluntary practices by which men not only set themselves rules of conduct, but seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make of their life into an oeuvre that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria” (Foucault, 1992, p. 10) then there does seem to be an affinity here. Especially when Foucault defines the ethical and political activity of the care of the self, others, community and context (1983) as totally

interdependent, that is, as an activity in common. So, could *commoning* be a concrete way of taking care of yourself (*epimesthai sautou*) in a relation with others and with the community and the environment? Could doing and holding things in common be a technique “not to discover who we are, but to refuse it”, a way to “produce freedom” beyond the forms of individualisation that schools, states and the market instil in us (Foucault, 1990, p. 24)? Might *commoning* offer a pedagogical compliment to and an enactment of self-formation? To a great extent, discussion and debates around the commons have been focused on the common as noun (goods). That is, the fight against the enclosure of lands, water, culture, knowledge or the internet, whereas our emphasis is on social relations and subjectivity and hence on education (Bollier, 2014). Indeed, relatively little attention has been paid to the modern school as a process of enclosure and the exclusion of common knowledge and collective social relations. As Means et al., (2017, p. 3) put:

It must be understood that the fault lines and generative tensions of commoning and enclosing, by enabling or constraining ways of being, knowing, working, and relating, literally *teach us*. In this way, to suggest that commoning and enclosing are *pedagogical* relations is also to recognize that they are *political* relations.

However, despite the acknowledgement that modern schools: a) played a key role in the processes of enclosure of lands and goods and the formation of the modern state; and b) were a key factor in the process of enclosure of persons into disciplinary institutions (alongside hospitals, prison, factories, etc.) and their ontological transformation into individuals, very few of those writing in the commons tradition are ready to give up on the school. For example, Means, Ford and Slater (2017, p. 12), are critical of the “tendency to view all forms of institutional structure and authority as necessarily oppressive and not as sites that can be harnessed and reconceiving for achieving broadly progressive and emancipatory aims” and are willing to accept the existence of schools and “just” to question their orientation to oppression or emancipation. For them, radical change is a matter of ‘re-appropriating the school’ but for us this redemptive discourse is self-defeating (Author, 2020). Similarly, Korsgaard, quoting Alex Means says “If we are not speaking about a public school as something that can be reclaimed, but as something that must be abandoned and replaced by *exopedagogy*, what then will be the basis of it, and without institutionalisation how is it to be maintained?” (2019, p. 450). This seems to us to be both an incitement to criticise modernity but nonetheless remain in its thrall, to remain dependent on institutionalisation, and thus on discipline. It is paradoxical that advocates of commoning both propose a radical reshaping of the internet, culture and the environment, but remain committed to the modern (public) school as the “natural” place for a *commoning* education. Korsgaard (2019, p. 447), following the proposal of Masschelein and Simons (2013), conceives of “schools as common spaces—spaces that are not yet appropriated, enclosed or privatised by political and economic interests—and schooling as a process of commoning—of teaching and learning about the world in common”. De Lissovoy, Means and Saltman (2014) offer a similar vision of a common public education against privatisation, enclosure and individualisation. Rather, as we have tried to make clear, schools are intolerable institutions (Authors, 2021) and they are irredeemable and cannot be reclaimed if ‘real’

change to the ‘deep logic’ of contemporary education is to be achieved. As Hunter puts it (1996, p. 149) “The school system is not bureaucratic and disciplinary by default, having betrayed its mission of self-realisation to repressive State or a rapacious economy. It is positively and irrevocably bureaucratic and disciplinary”. Any proposal to overcome modern enclosures and their ontological, epistemological and subjective consequences, needs to go beyond the school. That is, beyond the institutions, the technics, the procedures, the mechanisms, and the logic that produce productive, individual and docile subjects (Foucault, 1975).

3.2 Commoning as self-formation: what kind of organisation?

A ‘different’ education capable of co-constructing subjects able to face the big challenges of humanity would involve leaving behind the organisational form and non-space we call school and rather foster a direct pedagogical engagement with the environment and its problems - our world ‘in common’. That is, an education that is healthy, and that enables flourishing and wellbeing, rather than just “about” health and wellness. An education that is sustainable, rather than just ‘about’ sustainability – as it is school “does very little, and quite probably nothing to enhance our chances of mutual survival” (Postman and Weingartner, 1971, p. 2). What is needed is an education for commonwealth, an education that is undertaken through practices rather than through the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake. An education “for subversion” (Postman and Weingartner, 1971, p. 6). This would involve bringing thinking into living (Moghtader, 2016 p. 86) and learning to ask questions rather than learning answers; practicing ethics rather than studying them; politicising and troubling common issues rather than knowing or memorising them (Author, 2022). Lewis finds a model for organizing this commonwealth in the work of Ivan Illich, whose idea of *learning networks* speaks to the urgent political and pedagogical need for an ‘escape’ from the conceptual vocabulary that defines much of the contemporary field of educational theory. This is what Lewis calls *exopedagogy* - form of pedagogy wherein the school must be de-institutionalised. Here the prefix “exo” designates the beyond, an education out of bounds, whose location resides at the very limits of the recognisable – where we learn to study in the zone of uninhabitability that indicates the untimely arrival of a swarm of monsters and strangers. It is, in other words, a pedagogy that concerns the sudden appearance of “strange facts” (Daston and Park, 1998). For example, Lewis and Kahn (2011) argue for making teaching spaces — not just classrooms, but public spaces — zones for uncanny happenings, affective communal undertakings, uncomfortable becomings. Or Lewis and Valk (2020) propose what they call ‘social choreography’ as collective tendencies of movement out of bounds as another example of exopedagogy. That is, in Foucault’s terms, sites of transgression, limit testing and crossing. As Lewis puts it (2012, p. 852–853).

I am suggesting that at this historical moment what is needed most in critical educational theory is a push toward the farthest edge of the educational imagination in order to reconceptualise ‘common education’ detached from both state control and private

ownership.

In complementary fashion, Garcés (2013, p. 86) proposes that education as *commoning*/self-formation, that is, an ethical activity that can interrupt the modern fixation with progress and growth, can be organised and practiced in three forms: a) as a collaborative horizontal network, that is, as an expanded education, as an open reciprocal and cooperative experience based on reciprocity, a common stock of knowledge and convivial communities (Illich, 2014); b) as collective practices of implication and transformation of the spaces in which we live (urban, social, cultural...). A system of community assemblies that debate and co-decide communal work for the common good. Practices that assume that what is common belongs to us collectively and not to the state or the market and that to live in common always means to live ethically, politically and collectively; and c) education as a *commoning*/self-formation as an opportunity for the construction of a subjectivity that is antagonistic to modernity and capitalism. An opportunity “not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are” (Foucault, 1993, p. 216).

3.3 Commoning self-formation tenets and goals

If education is to begin from and rest on the care of the self (and others and the planet), and if “the care of the self is the care of the activity and not the care of the soul-as-substance” (Foucault 1990, p. 59) - the question is, on what ontological basis might we practice education differently and what purposes guide this ‘different’ education. *Commoning* as a concrete conception for how things are and might be done, as an ethical and political activity beyond ideological representations and abstract pedagogical expertise, might be one place to start from - a practical tenet for an education beyond school. A tenet that relates the individual to place (specifically and generally) and to others in a shared experiment of living and becoming, based on an ontology that eschews the categories of modernity-capitalism-state. The latter is sustained by the separation between humanity and nature; a form of humanity oriented to competition, production, consumption, efficiency and assessment; a subjectivity articulated as an entrepreneur of the self (Foucault, 2014, p. 228); and an economic and social philosophy of endless growth and the unfettered exploitation of natural resources; etc. (Bollier and Helfrich, 2020, p. 48-55). In contrast, *commoning* draws from an ontology based on deep relationality, interdependency connectivity, intertwining and intersubjectivity. Here the affinity, noted above, becomes evident. Care of the self involves, requires, necessitates the care of others, in relation to broader question of government. And it is on this affinity that the paper rests. This is also what, for example the concept of Ubuntu tries to capture: a common and relational ontology but one that is without unity, without fixed borders, not a totalising community but a “thin” one, as Olssen calls it. One that is “compatible with diversity and difference internal to such a way of life” (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 233) and fundamentally attuned to life *continuance* rather than consumption, to sustainability rather than growth and natural, social and human exploitation. As Olssen (2021, p. 157), argues *continuance* is:

An objective rather than subjective theory of value and is concerned with (1) survival as a collective and individual project, and (2) well-being, where well-being is satisfied if (a) basic needs are provided for, and (b) opportunities, benefits and burdens are distributed justly. Normatively, it specifies an ethic of equal consideration for all where such an ethic can be justified both instrumentally and probabilistically as constituting the best (i.e., most likely) policy to ensure life continuance for all.

Based on such an episteme and such an ontology, education becomes a process that “is established and reproduced by voluntary acts of free and equal citizens” (Olssen et al, 2004, p. 235) or as Rancière (1991) puts it, one that starts with the radical recognition of the equal capacities and intelligences of all humans. Education would no longer be a space in which inequalities are reproduced or opportunities are allocated, nor a place where unequal capacities and rights are confirmed, nor within which the inequality and incapacity of the pupils is certified (Author, 2020). Rather education becomes a site and a means of resistance against modern power-knowledge, a process of critique of “everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself, and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way” (Foucault, 1983). The business of education in these terms would be not to categorise differences but foster human capabilities, as Sen (1999) and Nussbaum (1997) propose.

4. Conclusion

What we have attempted here is the initial outline of a set of possibilities for thinking otherwise about education in relation to the concatenation of contemporary social, political, health and environmental crises. This articulates a set of concepts and a language which start from a refusal of school and an avoidance of the architecture of education that schooling provides (see table 1 for a summary of the differences between commoning - care of the self-education and modern schooling – although the tabular form over-simplifies some of these differences).

Table 1

Dimension	Education as the commoning activity of the care of the self	Modern school institutions
<i>Onto-epistemology</i>	Relational onto-epistemology	Individualistic onto-epistemology
<i>Type of education</i>	Common education	Enclosed education
	Open activity	Closed activity
<i>Main dimension of education</i>	Relation	Institution
<i>Point of depart</i>	Equal relation	Disciplinary and hierarchical
<i>Space</i>	Place education	Non-place education
<i>Context</i>	Contextual education	Decontextualised education

<i>Tenet</i>	Diversity	Normalisation
<i>Deep logic</i>	Common good	Market - bureaucracy logics
<i>Main Goals</i>	Self-formation with one-self, the others, the community, and the environment	Individualisation
	Creation of new ways of being and living, learning, etc.	Evaluation of the past content
	Main goal: how to live together	Main goal: what to learn individually

Source: own elaboration.

We have sought to trace and transgress the limits set by the school as an institution and as a set of disciplinary technologies. The point here is to envisage an education that is fit for purpose, that is relevant to our shared problems and crises in the here and now. An education that is for the state we find ourselves in and over and against what it is that we have become. This is a point of departure for what Freire called the “ontological vocation of people to intervene in the world”. This means, as he says, not being “a simple spectator but to intervene in reality, to modify, creating or recreating the cultural heritage (...) and responding to the current challenges” (2002, p. 30-31). This vocation is made up of a set of capabilities and dispositions that enable us and require us to take responsibility for ourselves and for others – for what we might become and for life continuance – in order to survive and flourish. Education in this sense is about the creation of social beings “who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done—[people] who are creative, inventive, and discoverers.” (Piaget quoted in Durworth 1964, p. 499). That is, as we envisage education as a set of *commoning* and self-forming activities, that begin and end with the care of the self, of others, of the community and of the environment. As Batters (2011, p. 4) explains, referring to ancient Greece, “Care of the self, then, became a focal point for individual freedom, positive relationships with others, and, potentially, ethical participation in politics” – the basic tenets of *commoning*.

We have indicated some kind of affinity between the principles of *commoning* and those of self-formation. So, education as self-formation means engagement in a set of cooperative everyday relations *in common*, wherein children, young people, families and “educators” (see Ball 2017 for a discussion of the role of the educator), act and interact in many different respects (playing, sports, reading, building, shopping, cooking, speaking, conversing, corresponding, social engagement, meditation, journal-writing, researching, singing, questioning and doing critique, reflection) always experimenting, always failing, but always trying again and failing better. As Olssen (2021, p. xviii) suggests this has parallels with Dewey’s sense of learning as “a cooperative and collaborative activity centred upon experiential, creative responses to contingent sets of relations to cope with uncertainty in a never-ending quest.” There is no template to follow here, there are no guidelines for a such educational programme. Despite our best efforts, we must accept that we

may simply be offering another form of *stupidity* (Colebrook, 2013) but perhaps one that would be better than our current state of absurdity. Perhaps then the next step is to consider more specifically how this other form of stupidity, this different educational programme, beyond school, might become an open process of common dialogue and an ethical and political exercise of care of the self and others.

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