Reactivating Social Work Practice as an Emancipatory Project: The Role of Critical Theory, Pedagogy and Reflection

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Acknowledgement of Country

I would like to acknowledge that we are today meeting on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) people. I would also like to acknowledge that I undertook much of the work for this presentation while working on the land of Gubbi Gubbi people.

Introduction

I'm delighted to have the honour of delivering this international keynote address for University of British Colombia's (UBC) School of Social Work 90th Anniversary Celebration. And what a remarkable achievement that is. I note the wonderful vision of UBC social work as a community of learners actively engaged in the development of critical, transformative knowledge for social work practice. We share this vision at QUT where I lead the social work discipline, and it's with this in mind I talk to you today in relation to social work education and practice. I'm also going to contextualise this address specifically in relation to the current global climate emergency. After the recent bushfire and now flooding disasters in Australia, I feel it would be remiss to present at a forum like this, and not consider climate justice as a central issue.

The Australian Bushfires

I have the good fortune to live on the beautiful Sunshine Coast in South East Queensland in Australia. If you enjoy sandy beaches and a subtropical climate, it's a lovely place to live. But, as we have seen over the past few months, it's all rapidly changing.

In the three months prior to Christmas, our local area experienced four major bushfires, resulting in mass evacuations for local residents. Much coastal, subtropical

rainforest—never been known in human history to burn—was lost to fire. My family were personally affected by the first of these fires, which occurred just one week into spring. It was not particularly hot at the time, but conditions were very dry and winds strong. Prior to the floods we are currently experiencing in Australia, we had been in drought for a number of years, so there was more than ample fuel to propel these fires.

Just as night fell, we could see (and smell) the wall of flames from our home. The fire dwarfed the Norfolk pines (and were at least five times their height). Emergency services sent us a text message to warn of a fast moving fire storm (about 300 metres from our home). The message ended with a simple instruction: 'Leave now.' So, my partner and I gathered a few personal items, packed our two German Shepherds into the car, and evacuated. We were unable to return for nearly 72 hours.

As we drove away from our home and the fire, the radio reported that 24 homes had been lost, that our local petrol station had exploded, our supermarket had also been engulfed by the flames and that our little village was burning. My sister said she knew someone who was fighting the fires, and he said it was much worse than what the media reported. Thankfully for us, that wasn't true. Instead, inaccurate and sensationalised journalism made the whole experience far more distressing than it needed to be. None the less, the reports gave a glimpse into a possible future, and preceded the fires that ultimately ravaged other parts of Australia in the months to follow.

Locally, the national park surrounding our community looked like ground zero. Everything was charred for miles. The loss of wildlife was also evident. The village, however, was remarkably unscathed. The fire crews bravely stood their ground and literally managed to stop the flames at our back fences. Quite remarkably only three homes were lost. One belonged to an 89-year-old woman. The ember showers of these fires travelled more than 4km to reach her home, which unfortunately had a thatched roof. As you can imagine, when the embers landed on the roof, the entire house went up. Across the state of Queensland during the months that led to Christmas, it was not uncommon for more than 50 fires to be simultaneously burning out of control. The worst was yet to come; the loss of human and animal life and property would be far more devastating in the New South Wales, Victorian and South Australian fires over the Christmas/New Year period.

At least 33 people died across Australia in the December 2019/January 2020 fires. More than 3000 homes were destroyed, 19 million hectares of land burned and an estimated 1 billion animals perished in the catastrophic fires (Filkov et al., 2020). The loss of wildlife and livestock was so great that mass graves had to be dug in order to avoid the spread of disease (Snape, 2020). In just a few disastrous days, the bushfires released more than two thirds of Australia's usual carbon emissions for the year

(Foley, 2020). Given we contribute 1.3 percent of global emissions for our tiny 0.3 percentage of the population, we are shamefully already punching well above our weight.

The impact of the fires for directly affected communities was profound. With large areas of our south-east declared disaster zones, our death toll rising, our beaches turned into evacuation zones, and with holidaymakers instructed to leave, the fire zones became chaotic. People reported standing in long queues to wait for water, fuel, food and to simply escape (Chain, 2020). The Princes Highway, which essentially connects all the states in Australia, was turned into a car park for hundreds of kilometres as holidaymakers tried to flee. Traffic was reportedly locked in a standstill for 10 hours (Burrows, 2020), and there were concerns that basic supplies would run out as no new deliveries were coming into bushfire affected areas (Chain, 2020).

And I want to talk about the impact of the bushfires on children. Everyone will recall the image of the brave 11-year-old boy wearing with a face mask to protect him from smoke inhalation, who was escaping the fires on a dingy. His family had a fire plan and it worked. However, our Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, has said that he does not want to talk about climate change because it creates unnecessary anxiety for children (Murphy, 2019). But don't you think that having to cling to the side of a pier to avoid being burned alive, might be more anxiety promoting than conversations about climate change that enable preparation? As a child, I lived through Ash Wednesday in Victoria. Despite my being nowhere near the close proximity that these children had to the fires, I know children (and adults) will remember their experience for the rest of their lives. The conditions were apocalyptical, resembling something from a war zone, and likened to the explosion of an atomic bomb (see for example, Davidson, 2019; Smee, 2019). The level of trauma experienced by people so directly impacted by the fires, and involved in trying to fight them, will endure for generations, both individually and collectively (See for example, Charlson, 2020; Smith & Burkle, Jr, 2020). And sadly this experience may well be frequently repeated well into the future, particularly if we continue not to take action on climate change (Harvey, 2020).

The small, Victorian, coastal town of Mallacoota was one of the worst places hit with thousands of people (both local residents and holidaymakers) and their animals forced to gather on a foreshore on New Year's Eve in an effort to escape the flames and embers. While the navy rescued many of them from the town in the following days, others were not able to leave when the flames returned again a few days later. Again, they were advised to escape into the water if the fires came too close (Henriques-Gomes, 2020). For me, this was one of the most defining moments of the fires. Reports and images were released at 2:30pm on a bright summer's day, showing the black sky against an eerie dark red glow as the fire again approached Mallacoota, stealing the

light and the oxygen from the air. Those who could leave, had left. But others, especially children and the elderly, strangely the least prioritised in the naval evacuations, were left behind (Topsfield, 2020). Commentators from Mallacotta reported that people were relatively calm, but scared, and that there were a lot of babies crying (Alison & Hurley, 2020). Others reported the confusion over conflicting instruction about which community locations would provide the safest evacuation options (Davidson, 2019). This is because the fire was so unpredictable and so they were awaiting advice from the Regional Fire Service. But having seen the flames in my own neighbourhood just a few months earlier, and knowing the incredible heat, smoke and roar of the fires, I recall thinking that the evacuation options put forward seemed grossly inadequate.

The reports also told how the people at Mallacoota received these instructions about evacuation options from community members working with a fire service, largely staffed by volunteers, who drove a vehicle around through the flames to shout out advice through a megaphone about where to go. This was of course because all telecommunication was down. There were no phones or computers working (Davis, 2020). It occurred to me—for a society that claims to be so highly developed and civilized, despite all of our emphasis on refining and improving our technologies, all of our emphasis on risk assessment and risk management, and all of our obsession with evidence based practice, which has been completely ignored in policy decisions concerning climate change, we are so poorly prepared in the face of very real existential threats.

Such events foreground the reality that all Australians could potentially become climate change refugees very swiftly (Pandey, 2020). This is indeed ironic given Australia continues to have the harshest policies globally for people seeking asylum (Briskman, 2020).

I think of my own work in a university context. We have to do risk management assessments and training for just about everything. Our research committees are now almost entirely governed by risk assessment, instead of ethics, but when it comes down to it, our responses in the face this climate emergency disaster (and indeed the emerging pandemic) are very primitive. And while more than 30 people died in the fires, it is quite miraculous that more human lives were not lost. When the very essence of our survival is threatened in this way, we have to take stock and consider that life cannot continue in the same way we have previously known it. We have known for some time about the consequences of climate change and the need to take action to prepare for disaster, but this is happening much faster—and with more intensity—than many experts predicted.

For anyone who has some familiarity with my work, you will know I have not written in the area of climate change before. And perhaps I have felt I wouldn't have much to contribute. Of course, climate change is included in my teaching and as part of the social and political landscape of my work, but I now feel the urgency for climate justice to become a core responsibility of my work as a social work educator and researcher. On reflection, I also feel critical social work has much to offer in understanding, as well as responding to, this issue. The very immediate life and death consequences of climate change provides a perspective that has caused me to deeply reflect on how social work might make a difference in contesting the drivers of climate change, and to mobilise for action to support climate justice.

As you will be aware, the forecasted future is not bright. There was however one climate change report by Ross Garnaut in 2008 with the particularly unnerving prediction that Australia would face an extreme bushfire season in 2020.The Garnaut (2008) report also predicts bushfire seasons would progressively begin earlier, finish later and become more severe. The report also makes projected increases in the number of days with extreme fire weather. It claimed that by 2013, there could be up to 25 extreme fire days and as many as 300 fire extreme days by 2067 (Garnaut, 2008). That is a 300% increase on our current situation, which is absolutely horrifying.

However, in the interim, we have also discovered that logging has intensified as there is now a rush to get the trees into the mills before they burn, so we don't further damage industry. After experiencing this unimaginable and unprecedented loss of trees and wildlife, it is unconscionable to intensify that loss, to meet the insatiable needs of industry and economy. The intense logging of some areas, particularly in Victoria, following the fires also resulted in the deaths of dozens of koalas and many more injured and starving, caused by the destruction of the blue gum plantations (DW News, 2020). This greed now risks the endangerment of our iconic wildlife. Continued environmental violations, fuelled by capitalism's relentless drive for consumption, are obviously reckless and ridiculous in the context of climate emergency, but still we persist with this "blatantly unsustainable" system (Ife, 2019, p. viii). As many have said, there is no planet B. Why don't our world leaders seem to understand that? If we destroy our planet, there will be no humanity, and so there will be no economy.

Meanwhile, during the fires, our Australian Prime Minister came under political scrutiny, quite rightly in my view. After all, during some of the worst fires just before Christmas, he decided to go on holidays to Hawaii, symbolically indicating that he had not taken the situation seriously.

While meeting with survivors from fire ravaged communities, Morrison was criticised by locals from Cobargo, where a father and son died trying to protect their property

and where much of the town, including many homes and business, were lost in the disaster (Bungard & Dye, 2020). The visit became a public relations nightmare for Morrison who turned his back on a 20-year-old pregnant woman who lost everything in the fires, after forcing her to shake his hand; and subjected an exhausted volunteer fire fighter, who had also lost his home to the same violation. (For further information see: https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-02/group-of-cobargo-residents-vent-anger-at-pm-youre-not-welcome/11838300).

While many people, including members of parliament from his own party, believed Morrison was given the reception he deserved, the Cobargo residents were soon constructed as 'losers', 'bogans' and other colloquial, derogatory terms, in both mainstream and social media, in an attempt to discredit their claims. However, in thinking critically about the ways climate change exacerbates existing inequalities, and serves to disadvantage already marginalised individuals and communities, compare the experience of the Cobargo residents, who told of having just four trucks respond to the fires, to our experience at Peregian Beach, where 105 trucks and 300 fire crew fought to stop the flames.

Peregian is a relatively affluent area. The Sunshine Coast is a holiday destination resided in by many wealthy, retired residents who vote for the Liberal National Party. The response to Peregian residents demonstrates what is possible, and points to the fact that all communities facing disaster deserve a high level of support and protection. Moreover, the difference between the responses to the Peregian and Cobargo fires, was profound, especially considering both have relatively small populations. There were some variables at play, like multiple fires fronts burning simultaneously during the New South Wales fires, but arguably this was the same in Queensland, and so this disparity highlights how climate change intersects with existing privilege and oppressions, and holds major implications for political redress.

Unfortunately, however, our Prime Minister, Scott Morrison has downplayed the role of global warming, opposed measures to combat climate change and rejected additional funding for fire-fighters. He carried a lump of coal into parliament, and held it up, saying, 'Don't be afraid, don't be scared, it won't hurt you' (Hamilton, 2017). His government apparently ignored several reports from authorities in the area that stressed the need for millions of dollars of additional annual funding for fire services, including a report from a consortium of 23 former fire and emergency services leaders who warned of increasingly catastrophic extreme weather events and similarly called for investment in national fire-fighting resources including water bombing aircraft (ABC News, 2019). As it is, Australia has just seven water bombing aircraft, whereas Canada has over 20. For the sake of comparison, the State of California alone has around 50.

During the fires, Morrison stated: "My simple request is to be patient, to have confidence in the state agencies", (Morrison, quoted in O'Mallon, 2020). This is infuriating because in the context of Morrison's extreme incompetence to respond appropriately to the fires, his appeal to have confidence in the state agencies is a way of shifting responsibility to the states and refusing to lead a national agenda on climate change, despite this clearly being a national issue. He also commented: "I understand the anxiety and I understand the fear that is there for many and I understand the frustration, but this is a natural disaster". (Morrison, quoted in O'Mallon, 2020). The phrase "natural disaster" is equally disturbing as there is nothing 'natural' about human induced climate change.

Inaction in response to climate change is both ideological and economic. It's the old story about global neoliberal capitalism, which consistently puts profit before people. However, with the recent fires expected to cost in excess of $100 billion (Read, 2020), it's difficult to see how failure to take urgent and radical political action for climate justice is defensible.

As I reflected on the national state of emergency that unfolded in Australia over the Christmas/New Year period, and the fact that our support services have been diminished to almost nothing by neoliberal governance, I was struck with how our lack of political leadership leaves us completely unprepared in a society characterised by glaring divisions, crises and change, escalating disparities in wealth and power, and unprecedented ecological despoliation (Morley et al., 2020a). Around the same time, we have had a new global pandemic emerge in the form of COVID-19—the impact of this for the world is not yet known. The American President has openly assassinated an Iranian leader, seemingly trying to initiate a new World War to deflect from the impeachment proceedings he is subject to. Add to this an unexplained missile attack on passenger jet bound for Iran, killing 176 people. I'm aware most of those lives lost were Canadian lives, and I'm so sorry. It's been a sad start to the new decade for your county too.

So, we enter this climate crisis amidst great uncertainty, the contemporary rise of authoritarianism, the resurgence of fascism, and the mobilisation of xenophobic views that scapegoat ethnic and religious difference for the problems caused by global capitalism, and the election of populist right wing governments (Giroux & Filippakou, 2020) (I acknowledge Canada appears to have a somewhat more progressive government than some of these, and New Zealand even more so continues to offer a far more hopeful kind of leadership than what we are experiencing in many countries). But overall, these conditions combined create what Hannah Arendt would have called "dark times" (Giroux, 2015, p. 3). Clearly many people feel that democracy has failed (Straume, 2014), but like many others, I believe there is a significant role for social

work to play in activating alternative responses (See Morley et al., 2019; Morley et al., 2020a; Morley et al., 2020b). So, how might this reconstruction process be helped by critical theory, pedagogy and reflection?

A critical perspective on education, which dates back to Dewey (1916), views democracy and education as symbiotic: the purpose of education is to help build a democratic society; and a democratic society cannot exist without education, as people cannot fully participate in democracy unless they are informed. This is a key factor in many of the problems we face right now. We have observed the cumulative effects of the election of right wing political leaders all over the world. Such leaders follow a specific agenda: facilitate the unification of neoliberalism and fascism to disassemble the social provisions provided by the welfare state that were once guaranteed; deny the role of capitalism and the fossil fuel industry in producing climate change; and blame the victims of inequality for their exclusion, who define "profit making and market freedoms as the essence of democracy" (Giroux & Filipakou, 2020, p. xxi). Though right-wing leaders are sometimes elected by apparently democratic societies, large portions of the electorate lack the political literacy necessary to make informed decisions. This results in policies and agendas that further harm the most disadvantaged groups. For example, there are only a few, very wealthy people, who benefit from getting rid of a carbon tax or a mining tax, or franking credits, in Australia, and yet the majority of the population voted for these—essentially voting against their own interests.

It is incumbent on us to take seriously the political responsibilities and moral obligations of social workers as both educative and political agents in terms of shaping culture and influencing social change. Redefining ourselves as public intellectuals, it is imperative for social workers to locate our practice within the broader concept of public pedagogy which both politicises our work and enables us to interrogate the ideologies that shape it (Giroux & Filippakou, 2020).

How do we do this? We start with critique—the tools for critical analysis and understanding. As a starting point, every social work student needs to know the role of capitalism in producing inequality and driving the consumption patterns that cause climate change. Social work education cannot just be about the micro skills of treating and managing others. Students need to know how to be activists (Morley, 2019), how to educate their constituents, and how to organise for political action for climate justice.

I spoke a moment ago about the ways that the bushfires highlight and exacerbate existing inequalities and division. The recent Australian bushfire crisis has occurred within the context of major wealth inequalities. The inequality is not as pronounced in Australia as it is in the US, but we are advancing towards wealth inequality much

more rapidly than any other OECD country thanks to successive terms of conservative governments (Morley & Ablett, 2016, 2017).

Climate change is occurring in the context of growing wealth inequality. In Australia, wage-earner's portion of the national income has plummeted over the past four decades (Morley & Ablett, 2016). This loss in wages is directly transferred to the coffers of the rich. The top 1% now own the same wealth as the bottom 60% (Morley & Ablett, 2017) with the 2008 global financial crisis intensifying the monopolisation of wealth by the rich. Meanwhile, the bottom 20% rely on 'Newstart', which is our unemployment benefit in Australia. The Newstart payment is 20% below poverty line. It's actually the second lowest income support (relative to GDP) of all OECD countries, because we have a very punitive, victim blaming understanding of disadvantage, which completely ignores structural inequality (Morley et al., 2019a).

This played out for one of the fire fighters who lost his home while defending other people's properties. He was given a really hard time by Centrelink, which is our social security department. It's hard to imagine someone more deserving of assistance but neoliberalism obliterates the category of deserving, so much so that everyone is considered undeserving—even a volunteer fire fighter who has lost his own home while protecting others.

Paul Michael Garrett, in his book, Welfare Words (2018) shows how social security, in the context of defunding the welfare state, has become social insecurity. We can't talk about that, so under neoliberalism the discourse has changed from social insecurity to welfare dependence—operating as a discursive mechanism to humiliate and stigmatise the poor (Garrett, 2018).

Such economic injustice often compounds other forms of oppression along diversity lines, and in the context of the bushfires, we heard about accounts of the elderly, children and people with a disability being the last to be evacuated, or not evacuated at all, from the fires because of access issues (Topsfield, 2020). And unfortunately our practice responses don't necessarily address issues of injustice, as the victim blaming neoliberal mindset has infiltrated our practice, which is now so consumed, in many western societies, with adverse judgments, punitive measures and surveillance mechanisms (Agllias et al., 2015).

The impact of neoliberalism on the HS sector

The neoliberal context in which human service organisations operate promotes uncritical, individualised, technique-driven, formulaic, deontological and competency-focused practices (Morley et al., 2017; Morley et al., 2020a). Contemporary contexts have been dominated by destructive neoliberal policies for more than thirty years (see for example Boryczko, 2019; Ferguson & Lavalette 2006;

Garrett, 2018; Madhu 2011; Rees 1991) in which economic priorities and managerial interventions focused on minimising risk and cost. This means poorly resourced services operate to serve the needs of auditing bodies, rather than the individuals and communities they are designed to help. The accountability mechanisms, surveillance and compliance technologies; dominance of risk assessment and management, and pursuit of evidence-based practice all come at the expense of critical theory, critical analysis and critical self-reflection (Morley et al., 2017; Morley et al., 2019a; Morley et al., 2019b). The consequences include conservatising the profession to make it more "*politically acceptable*" (Dominelli, 1996, p. 163 [italics in original[) to government and industry employers, which shapes practice in the most profound ways.

I recall conducting a group supervision session with the practitioners from the domestic violence refuge I had been working with for many years. I commenced the discussion with open questions about how things had been going since I'd seen them over the last couple of months. The nine practitioners who participated in the session reported things were "going well". They had "streamlined their risk assessment procedures", "implemented clearer policies around eviction", which provided criteria, ostensibly to make decision-making and assessment about eviction easier (effectively removing practitioner discretion); had "achieved some good housing outcomes", and had facilitated a number of their clients to "self check-in".

Staggered by the bureaucratic way they described their work, I asked them why they chose to focus on these things. They said, "Well, This is what we do". But it struck me that so much was missing from this description. If you asked me about my work in sexual assault, for example, it was always about my relationships with the women with whom I worked or what was going on for them. On the other hand, these stories seemed devoid of human interaction, empathy or knowledge of the other. Curious about this, I asked them about their inspiration for doing the work and what excites them about their role. Each practitioner emphasised different aspects of the role:

· finding ways to honour the uniqueness of the client;

· engaging in transformative practice with the client and seeing her connect with a sense of agency and self-determination;

· celebrating the "little things" that make a difference to people's lives and valuing local acts of resistance;

· participating in social and political advocacy; supporting broader social change campaigns (e.g., one practitioner talked about participating in a campaign that joined with other local services to lobby the state government for more affordable housing options);

· finding creative ways to navigate systems to achieve socially just outcomes for clients (e.g., they talked about the joy in not having to say "no" to reasonable requests by made by clients).

When we reflected on why these elements of practice were excluded from their initial comments, it became clear that such practices had become invisibilised and somehow not seen as important or the "real work" of the organisation. Instead the practitioners were being socialised to accept a version of their professional role that was tantamount to a robotic functionary. They were passionate about doing their work with women, yet the aspects they valued most had been excluded. We think through language. In fact, Heidegger (1978) would argue that our humanity is shaped through language. So it follows that if we adopt the technical language of managerialism and allow discourses about social justice to drop off, our work in turn will become more managerial and technical.

In reflecting on their complicity with this we began to focus on the technologies that narrow the role of their work, such as service agreements, auditing and reporting requirements, and the types of practices that support this (like risk assessment and case-management, etc)—that is—the tasks that robots will do better than we can. Robots can calculate more precisely, and they've become better at simulating humans through vocal inflection, facial expressions, etc. So, as robots become better at simulating humans, and at the same time we define social work practice in robotic terms, we seem to be creating a seamless transition for robots to replace the human social work workforce. I can't pursue this further here, but there are many reasons to continue the work of uncovering the subjugated aspects of our roles that are devalued by managerialism; that is, the tasks that robots cannot do—and the same principles should apply for social work education (Morley et al., 2019b).

The impact of neoliberalism on social work education

Not immune from neoliberalism, the same kind of reductive changes sweeping the social services sector are also happening in social work education (Morley et al., 2017; Morley et al., 2020a), as conservative governments throughout the world recognise education can be a powerful source of resistance to neoliberal orthodoxy. Hence, contemporary higher education policy has sought to rid universities of their criticality (Hil, 2012). As Giroux notes, universities are "one of the few public spheres left where people can learn the knowledge and skills necessary to allow them to think critically and hold power and authority accountable" (Giroux, 2014, p. 34).

The most efficient strategy to arrest the counter-hegemonic possibilities of education is dramatic cuts to government funding of higher education and the corporatisation of universities (Morley & Ablett, 2020). This has fundamentally altered the priority of

higher education from fostering social solidarity and democracy, to the foregrounding of consumption and profit making (Giroux & Filippakou, 2020).

In many university social work programs, the result is the elimination of spaces for critical analysis, dissent and debate and simultaneously the promotion of a technicist education, which downgrades learning and teaching to the most cost-effective mode of information transfer from educators to students. This impedes transformative learning, and socialises students to be competent in a robotic, but not necessarily ethical way (Fenton, 2014; Garrett, 2010; Macfarlane, 2016; Morley, 2019). Intensifying this situation is the requirement for educators to be responsive to industry through consultative bodies that expect graduates will uncritically comply with (neoliberal) organisational demands (Morley et al., 2020a). In short, this dilution of social work education ensures social work graduates will not be prepared with the critical thinking faculties that enable ethical and innovative responses to the immediate, complex, social problems of the present and future, including the organisation of a democratic society, redressing wealth inequality and responding to challenges presented by a global climate crisis (Fenton, 2014; Garrett, 2010; Preston & Aslett, 2014).

Critical pedagogy as resistance

Consequently, it is more urgent than ever before to activate social work education, thus producing critical practitioners for the future who can influence the field, and society more generally, in emancipatory ways. Critical theories are central to this project enable us to think beyond dominant discourses, and in Brookfield's (2005) words, to "recognize and challenge ideology… uncover and counter hegemony, unmask power, overcome alienation… pursue liberation, reclaim reason, practice democracy" (p. 39). Critical theories and their contemporary applications in education (i.e., critical pedagogies) are designed to combat inequality, exclusion and cruelty, and create a more compassionate, socially just and sustainable world. In this sense, critical theory is the "enemy of common sense" and an antidote to the "anti-intellectual authoritarianism" promoted by neoliberalism (Giroux in Peters, 2012, p. 697). Critical theory therefore has potential to reinvigorate social work as an emancipatory project, capable of educating citizen activists to be conscious of the many structural factors that cause disadvantage, and also critically reflective about their personal sense of agency to facilitate social change (Morley & Ablett, 2020).

Praxis, or the interconnection between critical theories and practice, is another defining feature of critical pedagogy for social work. Castoriadis (1984) contrasts praxis with technique, which is an important contribution for social work, where there is a disproportionate emphasis on the acquisition of communication skills—or perhaps that's just an Australian trend? I see there is work being done in Canada on critical

clinical social work, and I'm really looking forward to hearing some of these papers during this symposium. Like critically informed clinical social work, praxis is concerned with moral, political and intellectual questions about the nature and purpose of practice (Castoriadis, 1984). Praxis can therefore not be reduced to the 'know how' of technique.

Critical reflection and the interrogation of hegemonic ideas is another essential facet of critical pedagogy. Freire's (1970) notion of 'critical consciousness' is predicated on the assumption that people have been silenced in dominant discourses and power structures. The aim of critical reflection is therefore to unmask how the silencing operates in order to illuminate the potential for change.

Critical reflection creates the conceptual space to think beyond dominant constructions of social problems and to develop new ways of responding to them. It operates through critical questioning, that creates conceptual shifts in our own frames of reference. It can be useful to disrupt what Joan Tronto refers to as 'privileged irresponsibility' and 'epistemological ignorance' (Pease, 2020) in which people with privilege can ignore the needs of others and therefore remain complicit in reproducing injustice (Pease, 2020). In drawing on thinkers like Avaishi Margalit, it can also disrupt social work practices that foster humiliation, instead of autonomy and self respect (Hallahan, 2020).

I encourage you not to limit your thinking about education to social work specifically. The whole vision of critical pedagogy, especially as put forward by Giroux, is to think about education beyond the classroom—as a mode of social transformation not limited to formal educational settings, but as any practices "that shape, mold, socialise and educate individuals" (Kellner, 2003, p. 224). This expansion in the way we think about education is very important for us as social workers. Social work education is not just a practice that occurs in classrooms between students and teachers, but can occur anywhere, in any context, and in any circumstance. Critical pedagogy, then, is intimately connected with critical social work practice that is educative of its people and the communities with whom we engage. This has major implications for social work practice. So, while social work education is of course concerned with preparing students for professional practice, it should also address students' holistically, inspire them, and provide them with the tools to live critically in the world (Morley & Ablett, 2020).

The most effective educators today are probably multi-national companies and governments promoting conservative agendas for profit and power. However, we need to remember that critical theory can be mobilised as a counter pedagogy to resist racism, sexism, homophobia, class oppression, ableism and other harmful social divisions (Morley, 2019; Morley & Ablett, 2020). Applying this understanding of

pedagogy to social work: every interaction we have with the people with whom we work serves a pedagogic purpose, which either supports the status quo, or challenges it. For example, "do we participate in psychoeducation about hegemonic psychiatric constructions of mental illness, or do we raise consciousness about how rates of mental illness are distributed along the lines of disadvantage, while seeking to depathologise personal responses to inequality, precarity, exclusion and oppression?" (Morley & Ablett, 2020, p. 210).

Within this critical vision, the purpose of social work education is to "create the conditions in which forms of agency are available for students to learn how not only to think critically but to act differently" (Giroux, 2011, p. 125). My own experiences of researching the impact of critical pedagogy indicate that it can directly influence social work students' participation in activism (Morley, 2016; Morley, 2019; Morley & Macfarlane, 2014; O'Connor et al., 2016). This includes engagement in social action and protest, and more covert practices including privileging a critical analysis in practice and advocacy to facilitate ethical outcomes for clients.

Conclusion

In concluding, it's worth remembering that many critical theorists argue critical education is a practice of hope and freedom, never just about training or the acquisition of credentials (Morley et al., 2020a). Bell hooks (1994), reminds us that critical pedagogy inspires educators to work towards justice, even when injustices continue. This is an important point returning us to the start of this presentation—our world is unsettled, rapidly changing, and characterised by so much injustice, division and uncertainty. This can feel overwhelming at times, but the need to work towards justice, even when injustices continue is a profound act of resistance. I finish with a quote from of my favourite thinkers, who is one of your colleagues based right here Canada, Henry Giroux: "... we need to educate students to be critical agents, to learn how to take risks, engage in thoughtful dialogue and address what it means to be socially responsible" (quoted Giroux in Peters, 2012, p. 694). Such qualities, I think, are essential for social workers to fight inequality, and to nurture community led responses in the face of disasters caused by extreme weather events, and the fight for the changes that are necessary to protect survival of our planet, and indeed humanity. Thank you.

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