

Scholarly Article

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# Refreshing critical pedagogy and citizenship education through the lens of justice and complexity pedagogy

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## Abstract

Maximal citizenship educators are committed to advancing an approach to citizenship learning with the following staple features: learner centred; experiential; problem- and action-oriented; racialised, classed and gendered analysis of power; and strengthening the public sphere and democracy. This type of approach to education shares many similarities with the principles of critical pedagogy. However, there have been valid arguments that Frankfurt School Critical Theory inspired pedagogy still tends to focus on class, at the expense of gender and race, analyses. This paper seeks ways to refresh and extend the language and theoretical frameworks used by critical pedagogues. To do so, it will deploy the terms justice pedagogy and complexity pedagogy. The adjective ‘justice’ does the same work as ‘critical’ in signaling the commitment to using education as a means to bring about a more socially just world. The recent rise in scholarship in complexity thinking lends itself to conceptualising critical pedagogy in necessarily fresh ways. This paper draws attention to the kindred nature of guiding concepts in complexity thinking and critical pedagogy, including grassroots organizing, distributed decision making and emergent learning, before presenting a description of how such approaches might refresh critical pedagogy through a critical citizenship education program using justice pedagogy. **This example illustrates the way that justice pedagogy can inform decisions about appropriate teaching and learning strategies for children and young people today growing up in an increasingly globalized world.**

## Keywords

critical pedagogy, citizenship education, complexity, justice pedagogy

## Introduction

As educators, researchers and scholars, we are committed to advancing an approach to citizenship learning with the following staple features: learner-centred; experiential; problem- and action-oriented; undertaking racial, class and gendered analysis of power; and strengthening the public sphere and democracy. This type of approach to education is aligned with various critical pedagogy traditions. We are, however, seeking ways to refresh and extend the language and theoretical frameworks we use. This is partly because we have some sympathy with arguments that Frankfurt School Critical Theory inspired pedagogy still tends to focus on class, at the expense of gender and race, analyses (Breuer, 2011; hooks, 2003; Lather, 1992). Having said this, we nonetheless wish to avoid debates about what are the most correct definitional frameworks for the various lineages of critical pedagogy. And in this spirit we propose to deploy the terms justice pedagogy and complexity pedagogy. The adjective ‘justice’ does the same work as ‘critical’ in signalling our commitment to using education as a means to bring about a more socially just world, but carries less baggage. We think the recent rise in scholarship in complexity thinking lends itself to conceptualising justice pedagogy in necessarily fresh ways. We draw attention to the kindred nature of guiding concepts in complexity thinking and critical pedagogy.

## The intensified challenges for critical pedagogies

The most recent trends in capitalism – neo-liberalism and hyper-globalisation – continue to transform our lives and society into the image of the market (Nikolakaki, 2014). Despite repeated failings, global capitalism privileges market mechanisms with ever more intensity as the most efficient and rational tool with which to order society. As a consequence, traditional values and cultures are in the process of being swept aside and instead replaced by ideas individualism, detached self-interested rationality and competition between people. Nikolakaki (2014) suggests that the drive to secure rights for the individual has come at the cost of the wider community; unlike in the past, where the state and individuals were partners in a common pursuit, now they are pitted against each other in competition. This state of affairs is, Castoriadis writes, ‘self-destructive politically’ (2003: 48) and requires immediate action to remedy. Nikolakaki suggests the following:

Through individualism and competition people in a society are marginalized, disempowered and manipulated. Instead, communitarian values, solidarity and responsibility, for individual and community autonomy, need to be fostered. (2014: 52)

The intensification of this attack is, of course, felt in the educational sphere. Connell (2014) has written how the domains of knowledge production, and especially higher education, have been restructured by neoliberal globalisation, which has crushed the collective labor of teachers and academics and instead replaced it with a competition where teachers and academics are being subjected to increased requirements regarding accreditation, regulation and accountability. Salhberg (2011) asserts that this intensified hyper-capitalism manifests itself through the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM). There are three key policy and practice features being driven by this movement: more market-led competition will improve educational performances; likewise, so will giving students and families more capacity to choose among schools; and thirdly, more standardised testing will provide necessary information to more market-savvy educational consumers. What follows is increasing interference from government and private industry in the day to day running of schools and educational systems, perhaps nowhere more obvious than in the rise of the ‘edupreneur’ - a strange combination of salesperson and educator. Describing the effect of hyper-capitalism and neoliberalism on schools, Nikolakaki writes:

Educational institutions have become a principal target of marketization agendas that have sought to discursively reconstitute and redefine the nature of education by transforming it from a collective public good into an individualistic commodity that can be bought and sold in the marketplace. (2014: 57)

In the case in Australia and New Zealand, rather than capitalising on the progressive movement in education that prevailed in the 1960s, Bronwyn and Davies suggest that neoliberalism capitalised instead on the questioning of teachers’ authority:

Neoliberalism strongly reinforced the undermining of the teachers’ authority that had been established with progressivism, shifting authority away from both students and teachers to state curriculum and surveillance authorities. In establishing the conditions in which neoliberal subjects might develop, it added competitiveness and individual responsabilization to student ‘freedom’, thus both appropriating and undermining the progressive movement (2007: 256).

This is not to argue against the need for the academic workforce to be accountable to the communities we serve. As researchers, there is a need to engage with our communities and seek to ensure they benefit from the work we undertake – even if some of these benefits are not recognised for a generation. Likewise, we must continue to evolve pedagogically. It is not such accountability that we are concerned with – nor some broader reform within the education sector – but the blind and unquestioned pursuit of the market mechanism in an area that should be dominated by the social good.

## Minimalist Approaches in Australia to Citizenship Education

However, in Australia, recent developments in civics and citizenship education have failed to embrace the critical potential that is available. Australian government curriculum initiatives for civics and citizenship education have emphasised historical understanding and mechanical knowledge of government and institutions. For example, when writing about the Commonwealth Government's *Discovering Democracy* program, Down wrote that it emphasized 'certain core knowledge and understandings about Australia's heritage, its democratic processes and government, its judicial system and its system of public administration' (2004: 22). Robison and Parkin (1997) suggested that such an approach was flawed, in part, because it privileged an individualistic sense of citizenship. This form of citizenship, with its focus on personal responsibilities (like paying taxes or obeying laws) has been characterised as personally responsible citizenship education by Westheimer and Kahne (2004). Such an approach does little to challenge existing inequality within society; it neither raises the consciousness of the students to the point where they can recognise the macro-economic causes for inequality and oppression nor does it equip those students with the skills, knowledge and experiences to collectively challenge such oppression and injustice.

Notwithstanding the original intention of Australian policymakers to develop a curriculum that was intended to encourage active citizenship (Macintyre and Simpson, 2009), and despite the stated goal of the *Melbourne Declaration* (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCCEETYA], 2008) which places the development of active and informed citizens as one of the most important aims of Australian education, formal approaches to civics and citizenship education have been, for the most part, minimal (McLaughlin, 1992) rather than maximal in nature. This was certainly true of *Discovering Democracy*, which was in place from 1997 to 2007. According to David Kemp, the education minister in the Australian Government at the time:

the emphasis on developing active citizenship skills to participate in current civics issues was lessened in order that greater emphasis be placed on knowledge of the historical development of Australian democracy. (Kemp, 1997, in Macintyre and Simpson, 2009).

Kennedy, criticized *Discovering Democracy* because the program had failed to identify:

the things that matter to young people, the things that can help them understand their reality and give them a stake in the future that rightly belongs to them (1997: 3).

The *Australian Curriculum* (the most recent iteration of curriculum in Australia) has adopted a similarly unproblematized approach to citizenship and citizenship education. There have been improvements since *Discovering Democracy* but there is still much with which to be concerned. There is no recognition of the fluid or fragmentary nature of citizenship, and only limited comments about the increasingly globalised nature of citizenship. In addition, the curriculum defers the goal of agency in young people who

are the recipients of the program – treated as being ‘citizens in waiting’ – or a deficit model to citizenship (Collin, 2008; Arvanitakis and Hodge, 2012). This is echoed by Tudball and Henderson (2013: 5), who cite Coleman (1972), highlight the mainstream view of young people as citizens ‘always in preparation, but never acting’. We imagine it is a particular challenge to become an active citizen if one, while learning, only rarely has the opportunity to act as a citizen.

The Australian CCE Curriculum continues to be built on a deficit model. The document does recognise that young people are active outside the classroom and school. Yet this static observation contributes nothing unless there are innovative pathways to bringing this knowledge into the classroom. The obvious agent to create dialogue between the student-at-school and the student-at-large is the educator, yet there is no encouragement or guidelines for teachers to make use of students’ prior knowledge, externally derived knowledge, knowledge forged from lived experience. In critiquing the *Australian Curriculum*, and the subsequent review into it, Zyngier is particularly critical about the emphasis on content knowledge over participation. He writes:

This is in fact what many experts in CCE research suggest is and has been wrong with our historic teaching of civics and what actually turns students off this subject – the focus on how government works in the secondary school classroom instead of deep discussions about how democratic systems can be made more democratic by enhanced participation. (2014, para 41).

## A Commitment to Activist Traditions of Citizenship Education

We distance ourselves from the minimalist, individual focused, neoliberal-inspired approaches to civics and citizenship education described above. Instead, we align ourselves with longstanding activist traditions of citizenship education (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald and Schulz, 2001; Mellor, 2003).

We will now sketch some recent examples of activist traditions of citizenship education. One example is Zyngier’s (2007) *RUMad?* project – and especially *Jessie’s Creek* – both highlighting that by connecting with student’s own cultural knowledge, by placing students at the centre of the learning process and making them equal partners in that learning, by responding critically to students’ lived experiences and by empowering students so that their actions have a positive effect upon their communities, young people can become active citizens determined to engage with issues of injustice in their lives. According to Zyngier (2001, para 1):

these students are more likely to be engaged through 'productive and reciprocal pedagogies' that draw on students 'real life' concerns and enable them to have more control of their lives and be connected to a more participatory social vision of society.

Nor does the community in which students might enact active citizenship need to be a geographically proximal one. The *Global Connects Program*, developed by PLAN International put middle school children in Melbourne in conversation with youth groups in Indonesia for a period of six months. The two groups discussed matters that they felt were of significance in their lives, including letters, posters and short films. In addition, the groups identified common issues, and then developed action plans to address their concerns. According to Schultz, Guevara, Ratnam, Wierenga, Wyn and Sowerby (2009: 1027), the students:

demonstrated a number of skills and personal changes that have allowed them to engage as active citizens, within their own communities and in wider national and global communities, now and in the future.

Such approaches are not limited to compulsory schooling. Indeed, the tertiary education sector has been exposed to the influence of industry's demands about the changing nature of work and the need for universities to address these changes (Kourtis and Arvanitakis, 2016). Further, this has provided an opportunity for academics to engage with the change agenda in creative ways. One such example is the *Citizen Scholar* program at Western Sydney University. According to Kourtis and Arvanitakis, this program:

encourages us to return to the very roots of the Western knowledge tradition and the Socratic ideal. Scholarly pursuit has intrinsic value in itself and should see graduates who are lifelong learners as well as active and engaged citizens. Such citizens aim to live an ethical and fulfilled life, continue their pursuit of knowledge, are prepared to question the status quo and engage with the community (2016: 55).

Based on principles of social justice and community engagement, this program emphasises both academic and experiential learning (Arvanitakis and Hornsby, 2016). Crucially, the experiential learning activities are not add-ons, but are instead central to the course. Inspired by the work of Antonio Gramsci, participants in the *Citizen Scholar* program learn to become organic intellectuals who have 'the potential to emerge and challenge this status quo' (Kourtis and Arvanitakis 2016: 61).

There are two broad features of activist traditions we wish to highlight for the purposes of this paper. Firstly, such approaches adopt a much wider definition of citizenship – one that includes topics like social justice education, human rights education, service learning and democratic education. To our minds, all of these topics should be included as part of a broader civics and citizenship education. The reason for including such a diverse range of topics is linked to the purpose of civics and citizenship education. Much like educators such as Dewey (1916; 1938), Freire (1970; 1974) hooks (1994; 2003) and others, we argue for the primacy of civics and citizenship education within school. Rather than being seen as an 'add-on', we agree with these scholars that

learning to be an active, engaged and informed citizen is central to the school experience. Students need to learn to recognise the causes of systematic oppression, and to take action against that oppression. This action is collective, not individual, based on ideas of solidarity.

From this stems the idea of the teacher as an activist professional. The term ‘activist professional’ comes from the writings of Sachs (2000) and it refers teachers who apply broadly based democratic principles, collective and collaborative action that builds on a community of trust aimed at reducing oppression and exploitation. In this model, the activist professional, acting with passion works with students to confront issues in the wider context of citizenship. The identity of the activist professional is one that challenges the status quo and is concerned to ‘eliminate exploitation, inequality and oppression’ (Sachs and Groundwater Smith 2002: 352). Activist professionals will defend the kind of education which Martha Nussbaum (2009, 2010) considers fundamental to democracy and the development of the decent world citizen; they will work collaboratively and strategically with others and be prepared to take risks to advocate for such an education.

The notion of the activist professional draws from Freire’s critical pedagogy as well as Giddens’s (1991; 1994) generative politics. Freire’s critical pedagogy considers education as a political process, acknowledging the structures of power in the system on the one hand and the strength of individuals to make decisions about their own learning. Giddens’s (1991, 1994) generative politics ‘allows and encourages individuals and groups to make things happen rather than to let things happen to them’ (Sachs 2000: 85).

In the context of teachers and schools, enabling teachers to be activist professionals enables them to raise questions about whose issues become part of the agenda and how to ensure a place for minority voices and how to establish collaborative approaches to tackle societal issues based on the principles of justice and equity.

The second feature we will highlight is the importance of an education that privileges the learners’ experiences, that is centered on students and their knowledges, builds and develops on links within communities, and encourages social advocacy and positive social change. This is a conception of active citizenship that is performative; that is, young people learn to become active citizens by acting in such a way.

## The Need to Re-Invigorate Critical Pedagogy

There are four lineages of critical pedagogy which we will briefly outline below. In extending this theoretical framework, we argue that there is time for a new and fifth one. In the first generation lineage of critical pedagogy, scholars analysed how cultural icons such as Disneyland, Barbie Doll and McDonalds reproduce ideologies that can be sexist, racist and rapaciously capitalistic (Giroux 1998, Kincheloe 2002). A second lineage - experiential, participatory and action oriented pedagogy - draws on traditions of progressive and constructivist education. Notable icons are John Dewey and Paulo Freire. There is the body of work by Australian feminist scholars who write about pedagogies of everyday life, such as Carmen Luke (1996) and Jennifer Gore (1990) who examined how

the domestic and private sphere work pedagogically to teach children and women about gender, race and class. Fourthly, Australian writers in the field of educational and cultural studies like Megan Watkins, Catherine Driscoll and Greg Noble (2015); Anna Hickey-Moodey, Glen Savage and Joel Windle (2010); , Rick Flowers and Elaine Swan (2016) see early lineages of critical pedagogy as overly deterministic, broad brushed and negative and have called for a closer analysis of how pedagogy actually works and for more attention to be paid to affect, bodies, desire, habituation and embodiment.

Despite these avenues, critical pedagogy in the 21st century appears to be at an impasse. Despite being adopted rapidly throughout North America after Freire's work in the 1960s, it has had only limited penetration into formal schooling (Choules, 2007). In addition, there are genuine concerns that the original iterations of critical pedagogy drew too heavily from Marxist perspectives on class and hence ignored other vectors of oppression like race and gender (Gore 1993; hooks 1996). More recently, the influences of the post-discourses such as post-modernism and post-structuralism, have meant that critical pedagogy's claim to a universalising freedom of oppression has been challenged (Ellsworth, 1989; Lather, 1992). While various critical pedagogy scholars have addressed these, giving rise to traditions like border pedagogy, liberation pedagogy and radical pedagogy (Giroux, 1992), other critical pedagogues have suggested that by acknowledging the post-discourses, critical pedagogy has opened itself to the criticism that can be visited upon these theories (McLaren, 2014).

It is not our intention to engage in a definitional debate about which tradition of critical pedagogy or its descendants is the correct one (even were we to accept such a claim); rather, we wish to advance a number of concepts that we feel might help the broader critical pedagogical tradition to address these concerns and hence navigate its way through the definitional mire in which it currently finds itself. It is not enough to repeat calls for more learner-centered, more experiential, more action-oriented, more participatory and more emancipatory approaches to citizenship education. We believe these theoretical tools are important, but we are intent on adding and applying new theoretical tools drawn from the field of complexity thinking. We will now discuss these tools, before putting them into the context of citizenship education to highlight how they might reinvigorate a critical approach.

## Distributed Decision Making and Non-Linearity

Complex systems are characterized by distributed decision-making and non-linearity (Byrne, 2014; Hodge and O'Connell, 2006). As opposed to simple systems, where best practice is reasonably well established and often involves a hierarchical structure with a clear plan and direction to follow, complexity thinking requires us to conceive of learning spaces in a radically different way – and it is for these reasons that we believe this approach will assist us to address some of the previous criticisms of critical pedagogy. In earlier traditions of critical pedagogy, even when it distanced itself from didactic teaching, much emphasis was placed on the role of the teacher, and especially the way she or he led dialogue or enabled participatory forms of deliberation.



Critical pedagogy has also been criticized for replacing one form of indoctrination with another (Ellsworth, 1989; Johnson and Morris, 2010). By adopting complexity thinking and notions of distributed decision-making and non-linearity, it is possible to move beyond the role of the teacher and instead begin to consider the behaviour of the whole environment, which will be a result of the actions of a diverse range of participants. Thus, classroom learning spaces need to reflect that knowledge and learning does not, as some would suggest, flow directly from the teacher or the instructor to the student, who passively accepts it. Rather, it is a many-fold and multi-directional process, where learning occurs between the teacher and student, but also student to the teacher, and students to students, and that this process should be acknowledged as part of the learning process. This means that decision making, if it is to be informed and based on all of the participants' understandings, should be distributed and not strictly hierarchical. Although not specifically writing about critical approaches to education, Davis and Sumara describe the role that distributed decision-making plays in complexity theory approaches to education in a way that de-localizes the nexus of power:

Pragmatically speaking, with regard to shared/distributed work or understandings, the upshot is that a person should never strive to position herself or himself (or a text or other figurehead) as the final authority on matters of appropriate or correct action. Structures can and should be in place to allow students to participate in these decisions. For us, then, an important element in effective educational and research practices is the capacity to disperse control around matters of intention, interpretation, and appropriateness. (2009:42)

## Self-Organising

Critical pedagogues emphasise the importance of grassroots organising and activism (for example, see Staples, 2012). As such, they reject the top-down, authoritarian overtones that can be present within education, where decisions are made in the best interests of students with little input from the students. By adopting this approach critical pedagogues require students to be organised at a grass roots level, but it also requires a level of activism that is often absent in traditional pedagogical approaches.

Central to all critical pedagogy lineages is the notion of immanence – the idea that the purpose of education is not solely to support the status quo, but is intent on challenging oppression and resisting power, in whatever form that is present (Kincheloe, 2008). This is present in complexity thinking through the idea of self-organising systems. Complexity thinking recognises that systems (or organisms) respond to external stimuli, and this behaviour will change both the organism and the external stimuli (Davis and Sumara, 2009). This has direct links to the idea of challenging the status quo, and the requirement for students to be self-organising.

Many traditions of critical pedagogy are described as student-centered (Freire, 1970). However, it is our contention that this is fundamentally different to an approach to student learning that is self-organising; that is, one that is student-led. Student-centered classrooms might have the needs and the interests of the students at heart, but they can

still be places where authoritarian approaches to education, dictated by the teacher and the broader regulatory framework, are practiced. By contrast, a student-led (self-organising) approach to education would be organised and practiced by the students themselves; it would be a bottom-up approach, rather than a top-down one, and in this instance, the role of the teacher would be limited to providing an environment where such an approach might flourish.

## Emergent Learning

Finally, one of the central tenets of critical pedagogy is the process of ‘naming the world’: that is, to become literate in the way that power is presented in society (Freire, 1970). This idea is closely linked to conscientization, which is the process by which a person becomes aware of the way that society works to oppress either them or others through covert means. This has links with the notion of emergent learning and transdisciplinarity in complexity thinking (Davis and Sumara, 2008), which is used to describe the new learnings that take place within a complex system, usually as a result of the interaction between the disparate elements in the system. This new learning affects both the teacher and students, as much as either of those terms have any meaning in complex system, and is characterized by being unpredictable and student-directed.

In terms of refreshing critical pedagogy, this suggests that educators need to be mindful not only of the content of the learning, or the pedagogical approaches that they adopt, but also the environment provided for that learning to take place in. Speaking more broadly, it suggests that educators need to build partnerships that extend beyond the boundaries of educational institutions in a real and authentic way, rather than erecting artificial walls between schools and communities.

## Reinvigorated Critical Pedagogy, Refreshed Citizenship Education and Justice Pedagogy

By using these new tools, it is possible to explore new ways of understanding the way that young people perceive themselves and the way they might be active citizens in their community. This new approach, which we are describing as Justice Pedagogy, was partially developed via *Justice Citizens*. This program was a maximal citizenship education program that was delivered over a period of two years in a high school on the outer suburbs of Western Sydney – a place that has historically seen as Sydney’s ‘other’ and described in terms of a deficit model (Arvanitakis, 2016).

Students were challenged to identify specific issues that they felt were examples of injustice within their communities. They were then required to research these issues, gathering both primary and secondary data, and then film, edit and present a short film about the issue to the community at a local film festival. These films were shown at a local government-based film festival, as well as disseminated widely via social media. The students, who were in Year 9 (aged between 14-15 years), made films about issues like drug and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy, road safety and the treatment of refugees. Students were interviewed before and after the project’s completion, as were a

range of other youth workers, teachers, and parents. By examining their responses, it is possible to identify the way that the concepts of complexity theory might be applied to better understand the development of active citizenship.

## Learner-Centered Democracy and Distributed Decision Making

A central theme of *Justice Citizens* was that young people had a right to be involved in making decisions that would affect their lives and the lives of those around them. In addition, we felt that young people's voices should also be included in the broader public sphere. In order to do this, we emphasized two key concepts as part of *Justice Citizens*: the development of critical literacy and an advocacy for systemic change as part of a learner-centered democracy.

Although we had originally expected students to identify topics for their films that we felt were important – for example, we expected them to look at topics like homelessness or racism – the students responded by identifying topics for their films which they felt were more relevant to their local communities and their personal experiences, including, in one memorable example, dirt-bike safety. This simple approach indicates the centrality of the students in the decision-making process: they had to decide, in their groups, what their films would be about, and we would argue that this decision making is linked both to the learning and the motivation demonstrated by students throughout *Justice Citizens*. This level of freedom was significantly different to their other school experiences with a mandated curriculum and clearly defined outcomes. Students also had a lot of choice in deciding how best to approach the task of film-making. Some chose to attend technical training sessions that we provided, while others preferred an 'experiment and see' approach.

While those examples serve to demonstrate the learner-centered democratic approach we had adopted, it is important to note that Justice Pedagogy encourages much more than student choice in the classroom. Indeed, in *Justice Citizens*, the students had to make a film, and then publish and present it, both in public, as part of a film festival hosted by the local council, but also digitally, via YouTube, to a wider audience. This activity was intended to develop a critical literacy amongst students as they considered the nature of film and social media, and also provide them with the platform for which they could advocate for systemic change by engaging in the debate in the public sphere. By encouraging this engagement in the public sphere, we were showing that students could engage in debates as active citizens even as children, and there was no requirement for them to wait until they were older.

**Young people are growing up in a world that is mediated by technology. Mobile technologies are becoming smaller, more affordable and increasingly ubiquitous. This technology, and the extensive way that a user's experience is tailored to meet their individuality (either through choice or unconscious harvesting of data) means that young people are presented with far more sources of information than previous generations. This provides a challenge in determining what that information means; this necessitates a level of critical literacy – that is, being able to identify and unmask power and ideology – that is far in excess of that**

**needed by previous generations. Justice pedagogy embraces this higher level of critical literacy.**

## Grassroots and Self-Organising

The pedagogical emphasis in *Justice Citizens* was on action oriented learning and student-led learning. The purpose here was to provide the opportunity by which young people could learn to organize themselves to engage in social change campaigning, both in the digital and physical worlds by becoming civic actors (Zuckerman, 2014). This required them to develop the kinds of organizing skills that would allow them to do this. As students underwent the program, they began to think beyond the initial scope given about how they might prolong their involvement with these topics of interest. Students stopped perceiving the course as a requirement of their attendance at school, but rather as an opportunity to be part of broader social movements that aligned with their interests, such as environmental groups.

We drew on the idea of social capital to explain how they were able to leverage the new capital they had developed through the program into ongoing links and connections with organisations that would allow them to continue their work towards equality and justice. A good example of this is the student who joined the environmental protection and recovery group Nepean Waterkeepers, during the project, as she saw it was directly aligned with her interest in environmental justice. At the conclusion of the project, she continued that relationship with the Nepean Waterkeepers, despite it no longer being part of her school experience. In this case, by providing connections with external groups and the opportunity to engage with these groups, *Justice Citizens* allowed students to organize themselves to take action about social issues, in part by building partnerships with other organisations.

**This approach to learning was deliberately chosen; young people and children can no longer rely on the traditional social contract that promised economic surety based on educational success. Factors linked to globalisation means that there are limited opportunities for this available, and there is increased competition for jobs that provide that level of security. If young people are going to challenge this new precariousness, then they need to develop the skills to organise themselves effectively, and that is best done through formal action-oriented and student led learning.**

## Naming the World and Emergent Learning

As part of Justice Pedagogy, we have identified two features that contribute to emergent learning: school-community partnerships and experiential learning. During *Justice Citizens*, we made a conscious effort to de-silo education by building connections between the students and social groups external to the school. This included journalists, environmental groups, community members and politicians. This was done so that students had the opportunity to experience learning in an authentic, real world setting, rather than in the somewhat artificial classroom setting, with the aim of providing an

environment for the emergence of new kinds of knowledge based on the interaction between different groups.

It should be noted that this kind of emergent learning took place for both community members and the students. For example, we felt that we became literate in the concerns that young people felt were an issue in their local communities, and we also became literate in how they felt those concerns might be addressed. The participants, on the other hand, began to explore the various ways in which the community was seeking to address their concerns, as well as the way power was exercised through organisations.

**We felt that such an approach was an important component of justice pedagogy. If young people are going to be able to act as change agents or civic actors in the world that in which they are growing up, it is not enough that they passively learn the skills that might enable them to do that once they are, supposedly, old enough; rather, young people need to develop these skills via experience. Furthermore, they need to develop these skills collectively, building partnerships and sharing experiences with a wide range of other potential actors and thus establishing the networks that will assist them to fulfil this potential in alter life. Hence, the role of school-community partnerships and experiential learning cannot be understated.**

## Conclusion

As we noted in the introduction, these are grim times for critical pedagogues and civics and citizenship educators. Neoliberal forces have engaged in an ongoing assault on the edifice of public education, and the democratic values of solidarity and collectivism are increasingly being challenged, or even replaced by notions of competition and individualism.

Despite its promise, critical pedagogy has failed to neutralize the forces of neoliberalism, and is instead wracked by its own debates about its efficacy and application. However, we believe that critical pedagogy can be advanced, even strengthened, by drawing on conceptual tools from complexity thinking. The application of these tools can reinvigorate critical pedagogy by answering questions about the role of the environment and the teacher's authority in critical pedagogical environments. As an example, these new concepts have been applied to civics and citizenship education, in the form of justice pedagogy, a critical approach to civics and citizenship education, to illustrate that this re-invigorated approach to critical pedagogy can find space to operate and even challenge the dominant neoliberalism present in school environments.

**This is an essential development in these challenging times. Young people are growing up as global citizens in a world that is rife with difficulties, including but not limited to climate change, mass migration, unequal distributions of resources and ever-encroaching neoliberalism and attempted limitations on their rights to act and organise to develop their full potential. The role of civics and citizenship education continues to be important as a means for educating young people about these challenges, but previous iterations of civics and citizenship education, even**

**those inspired by critical pedagogy, have for the most part failed to address these concerns. Justice pedagogy, seeks to combine critical pedagogy with complexity theory in order, and so navigate past the barriers to successful pedagogy, and thus prepare young people for a challenging future.**

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