

Pedagogies of the Possible

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Pedagogies are directly linked to the possible, because they aim to open new and varied trajectories for learning and life. Still, many of the pedagogies enacted in formal schooling are restricted by a focus on what is already known and an emphasis on sameness. Pedagogies of sameness constrain the possible particularly when it comes to creative learning experiences (Beghetto & Vasquez, in press; Beghetto & Yoon, 2021). Paulo Freire has arguably (see Chapter 4, Matusov, 2009) offered the most famous critique of pedagogies of sameness in his 1968 landmark book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 2014), in which he made a strong argument against the ‘banking model of education’. This is a model based on the teacher making mental deposits within the student. A uni-directional transfer of knowledge and information in which teachers know best and know more and students, as passive recipients, are guided to know what the teacher already knows. Working in the context of 20th century Brazil, Freire was sensitive to how this type of education not only limits the agency of students, but potentially contributes to colonizing their minds and to the oppression of marginalised groups within society. If one learns about how disempowering it can be to be part of a specific community, this belief ends up being internalized and curtails further action. Freire’s aim was to help individuals and communities go through a process of ‘conscientization’ in which educational banking deposits are questioned and people develop, through dialogue, a realization of their oppression and start reclaiming their agency, creativity, and future.

There is much to learn from this pedagogical principle, including in contemporary classrooms. In a day and age in which we struggle to respond to the racism, sexism, and xenophobia embedded deep within society, educators around the world have the responsibility to advance equity and social justice and the first step in this long process can be guided by Freire’s conscientization. 21st century education reckons with these and a broad matrix of problems, including the climate emergency and the realities of a (post)pandemic world. These combined challenges call for a new, radical rethinking of pedagogy, one that recognizes oppression as well as possibility. An education that continues its transformation from passing on knowledge and skills, as part of the banking model, to developing creative, ethical and engaged citizens. The current context shows us the value of moving past the world ‘as is’ and towards the world ‘as it becomes’ and as it ‘could be’. There is no denying of the fact that the students of today will face a different landscape of problems and solutions in a few short years. Gearing education towards the present, even while acknowledging this present as dynamic, is not enough. What

we need is a multiplicity of pedagogies matching a multiplicity of known and unknown possible futures (Bruner, 2009).

What would it mean to take on board our own assumptions about the world – e.g., that it is complex, multifaceted, open-ended, unpredictable, ambiguous, continuously changing – and infuse it into educational experiences inside and outside the classroom? How can we move our focus from actuality to possibility in a way that doesn't lose track of 'what is' but considers it through the lenses of 'what is not', 'what is to come', and 'what can be brought about'? Could we envision new forms of pedagogy that let go of past certainties and the need to plan every single educational experience and become infused, instead, with uncertainty, wonder, liminality, hope and possibility? In this brief entry, we express confidence and hope that these new pedagogies are not only possible, they are mandatory. What we need is a better understanding of how we can bring them about; in other words, how we can turn general principles into new practices. We start here from a discussion of the possible and its relation to difference, then continue by focusing on the nature of creative experience and end with some old and new themes that are important for designing for possibility in and outside the classroom.

Possibility and difference

Pedagogies of the possible are eminently plural and this is due to the nature of the possible itself. But what exactly is the possible? Centuries of reflection in philosophy, literary studies and, more recently, psychology, left us with a better understanding of what the possible is not rather than what it is. Two common dichotomies dominate this field of inquiry: possible|actual and possible|impossible. Both these oppositions are problematic. The first places the category of the possible into the realm of illusion and irreality. What is possible is never fully real given that the moment it materializes, one way or another, it passes from possibility into actuality. This understanding effectively separates being from becoming and fails to grasp the fact that possibilities are shaped and, in turn, come to shape 'what is'. The second dichotomy assumes that the impossible closes down all possibility; and yet, imagining impossible things has long been at the heart of human existence – as reflected in utopian thinking – and, thus, served as a driver of action, not the unsurmountable obstacle it is often assumed to be.

For education, these debates are important because they lead to two main approaches to possibility, both of them limited: rejection on the basis that schooling should focus on what is real and not teach students about illusory things, or adoption inasmuch as the possible is reserved for what is likely to happen rather than what can never happen. In either case, we are left with an impoverished curriculum that sends students back to what is fixed, actual, known, likely and, most of the time, what took place in the past. In order to develop pedagogies that invite students to explore the unknown, the uncertain, the hypothetical, the future and even the impossible, we need a shift in perspective and a redefinition of possibility itself.

What we propose here builds on sociocultural approaches to the possible (Glăveanu, 2020a) that operate with a different set of assumptions, many of them directly relevant to the work of

teachers and their classroom experiences. In particular, this approach considers possibility as emerging out of difference and, as a consequence, demanding the existence of multiple ways of thinking, acting, and being. For possibilities to be sensed, anticipated and enacted, we require an understanding of how they differ from 'what is', as well as from each other. Differences of perspective are particularly fertile for the possible as they present the person with a multitude of positions in the world and their associated points of view. And what happens with this multitude is key for how we notice and make the most of existing possibilities (or not).

Educational settings are, by definition, the seat of difference and possibility. There is intrinsic diversity within any group of people, for as homogenous as their members might seem from a given standpoint. What amplifies this diversity is the fact that all the actors in education interact with each other, exchanging, adopting, challenging and proposing new perspectives. These dialogues of perspective substantiate the possible in each classroom, if and when there is genuine openness to the point of view and the experience of other people (Glăveanu & Beghetto, 2017). For as straightforward as this pre-condition of possibility sounds, it is often the most difficult to satisfy. This is because most classrooms are dominated by 'Pedagogies of Sameness' rather than difference and possibility. Providing the same kind of feedback, the same resources, the same level of support, the same tests, using the same scales, matching students with the same careers as before, etc., this principle is antithetic to the use of emergent differences to create, to envision multiple futures, and to learn with and from others.

Experiences of difference – especially radical differences – can be unsettling. And yet, it is precisely in this moment of disbalance, of failing to grasp the perspective of another, of starting to question the taken for granted, that possibility 'irrupts' within our experience and, in doing so, transforms it altogether. In education, these moments are often described as creative experiences and, while possibility cannot be reduced to creativity, the building blocks of a creative experience reflect well the commitment to difference, uncertainty and the future that characterizes what we call here Pedagogies of the Possible (see also Glăveanu, 2020a).

Markers of creative experience

There is an old assumption in the field of creativity studies that schooling tends to 'kill' – or at least harm – creative expression (even if empirical studies debunk this view; Gajda, Karwowski & Beghetto, 2017). Repeated calls have been formulated over the years to foster creativity in the classroom and considerable progress has already been made in this direction. We are witnessing today a gradual but sustained questioning of (and in some cases, move away from) standardization and towards personalized education, from formal schooling to lifewide learning, and from memorization to creative expression. With respect to the latter, important distinctions have been made between 'teaching creativity', 'teaching for creativity' and 'teaching creatively' (Beghetto, 2017). There is increased awareness of the fact that creativity is more than a cognitive skill; it is a way of being, a manner of approaching problems and life itself that is flexible, nonlinear, and open to the future. However, while cultivating creative abilities and associated mindsets is high on today's agenda in education, the assumption remains that there are times and places for 'creating' and times and places for 'learning' and that a focus on

creativity is valid only inasmuch as it helps teachers and students reach pedagogical goals set in advance. In other words, creativity is allowed in the classroom as long as it serves a purpose and that purpose is to attain predetermined learning outcomes.

What hinders creative expression and, with it, the exploration of new possibilities in education takes us back to the dominance of Pedagogies of Sameness. They are reinforced by the fact that, even when creativity is placed in the curriculum, the focus is on creative outcomes (e.g., evaluating their novelty, originality, value, surprise element) rather than creative processes and, especially, the kind of possibility-based relations creativity helps us establish with ourselves, with other people, and with the world. Recently, we advanced the notion of creative experience as essential for understanding creativity. We defined it as an experience specific for those novel person–world encounters characterized by open-endedness, nonlinearity, pluri-perspectives and future-orientation (Glăveanu & Beghetto, 2020).

Taking these in turn, open-endedness captures the fact that, in creative forms of education, both teachers and students alike are interested to explore topics and ideas they don't have clear or final ideas about and to learn from each other in the process. Being open in the classroom means asking more 'unknown questions' rather than questions the teacher, for instance, knows the answer to and guides the student towards. It also means accepting *not knowing* as a productive, generative state rather than something that has to be eliminated or dealt with. Non-linearity captures the dynamic aspect of teaching and learning processes that never fully progress from a predetermined point to another. Even in the most constrained and well-rehearsed episodes of teaching, the meaning being produced by teacher and/or students follows a nonlinear path – there is always room for serendipitous encounters. This is even more the case within classrooms that take a Pedagogies of the Possible approach to cultivating creative experience. Here, lesson unplanning (Beghetto, 2017a) is used as a tool to introduce indeterminacy within an otherwise organized performance. Indeed, it is not the case of throwing all rules out the window; in the end, possibility and creativity both need constraints. Pluri-perspectivism complements these two markers by revealing the possible within everyday classroom interactions. It is because each person holds a multitude of perspectives and shares at least some of them with others that there is the potential for emergence and novelty. Being able to listen to the point of views of others, and respect it as a perspective in their own right (even without agreeing to it), is a necessary (not sufficient) condition of creative experience. Last but not least, pedagogies of the possible orient all the participants in the educational system towards the possible rather than anchoring them in the past alone. The mission of education is not primarily to transmit old knowledge, but to transform this knowledge for the purposes of the present and in view of open-ended, multiple and essentially unknown futures.

Old and new themes within Pedagogies of the Possible

The Pedagogies of the Possible are themselves an emergent category, one that captures a polyphony of voices and perspectives. Within them, it is not only the pedagogies that are plural, but also the possibilities. Eight possibilities for educators are briefly discussed below: not knowing, failure, uncertainty, movement, anticipation, dialogue, care and responsibility. The

first four represent phenomena that are typically less encouraged in the classroom, while the second four capture emerging points of focus in educational theory and practice.

Possibilities of not knowing

Typically, educational efforts are focused primarily on helping students know more and to gain certain and valid knowledge. Although understanding the known is an important pedagogical goal as it fuels creative learning and development (Beghetto, 2019b), a predominate focus on the known is problematic. This is because an overly narrow focus on the already-known ignores, the intrinsic possibilities embedded within experiences of ‘not knowing’ for both teachers and students. Building on contemporary theories of wonder (Glăveanu, 2020b; Schinkel, 2020), we argue for the generative power of ‘dwelling in the unknown’ (Heidegger, 1962), the creative potential that opens from ‘sitting with uncertainty’ (Beghetto, 2016) and related practices that help us defamiliarize the known. The power to make the familiar unfamiliar helps re-present the world for teachers and students alike, to engage in constructive doubt and practices of questioning. This type of inquiry has long historical roots – going back to the *maieutic* method of Socrates – and holds the potential of uncovering new horizons for 21st century education, opening it up to multiple, undetermined outcomes and futures.

Possibilities of failure

Just like not knowing, failure is discouraged in education or, at best, contained to small exercises students are meant to learn from (principally learn the correct answers and, thus, how to avoid future failure). This approach discourages risk taking and creative exploration. More than this, it prevents students from learning from experience (Dewey, 1934) and from seeing failures as new sets of possibilities made apparent by the encounter with what – seems to be – impossible. In this way exploring and sharing narratives of our own and others failures opens new horizons for learning and growth (Beghetto, in press). This exploration of the boundaries of possibility represents a key engine of growth and development because the act of trying out ideas and actions is a rare opportunity to understand oneself and the world. Experiencing different types of possibility-enhancing failures expands the repertoire of methods for those educators who have the courage to teach and learn creatively (Beghetto, 2019b).

Possibilities of anticipation

It is often claimed that education should prepare students for the world of tomorrow and for jobs and challenges that have not yet emerged or been invented. And yet, the way schooling is done prioritizes the past over the present and future – it is the transmission of accumulated knowledge that has precedence, occasionally with applications to the problems of today. We are in dire need of exploring a new set of possibilities in education enabled by our capacity to anticipate (Poli, 2017) and, in doing so, to build multiple, open futures. An education geared toward the future needs to go beyond forecasting exercises that are chained to the past through pre-established causal links and that help students ask ‘what is most likely to happen’.

In exchange, it should cultivate anticipations that lead to foresight or the abductive process of imagining what is to come in complex and nonlinear ways (Glăveanu & Beghetto, 2020).

Possibilities of dialogue

Dialogue has long been recognized as pivotal in education and studied in terms of exchanges between teachers and students, on the one hand, and students and students, on the other. The focus is often on designing dialogues that foster the transmission and reproduction of knowledge. However, there is more to dialogue than reaching a common understanding of things. In fact, from a dialogical point of view, the possibilities of dialogue rest precisely in the fact that there is always an element of new, surprising or unpredictable insight associated with such exchanges (Bakhtin, 1981; Matusov, 2020). Dialogue also rests on perspective-taking and our human propensity to understand the minds of others. We need a more sustained exploration of the way in which dialogues of perspective construct spaces of emergence and possibility in education and how these spaces, in turn, resonate with wider dialogues within society and the alignment and clashes that substantiate them (Glăveanu, 2020a).

Possibilities of care

Another relatively new venue of research in education has to do with affect and what is becoming known as the ‘affective turn’ in this domain (Dernikos, Lesko, McCall & Niccolini, 2020). The discussion of emotions certainly has older roots, going back to an interest in self-esteem at school, but what we are becoming more and more aware of is the need to cultivate empathy and compassion in students and develop their emotional engagement with the world and with other people. The possibilities of care (a notion discussed by Heidegger, 1962, in terms of presence or *Being-there*) transcend any quick, transactional affective states and reveal the importance of opening oneself to the experience of others as part of one’s own being-in-the-world. This necessarily means accepting a degree of vulnerability that helps teachers and students make the most of momentary, ‘creative openings’ in education (Beghetto, 2017b).

Possibilities of uncertainty

Similar to not knowing, uncertainty is not generally welcomed in the classroom. In fact, it is often more difficult to see the learning opportunities embedded in the latter compared to the former. This is because uncertainty is associated with lack of control and education explicitly places teachers in a position of power and control, one from which they can develop student’s ability to replace old uncertainties with newly found certainties. This misses an important and generative space of possibility (Beghetto, 2020) in which certainties can be questioned once again and the uncertain confidently explored. Different practical tools have been recently proposed for educators who are willing to expand these spaces without giving up all structure in the form of lesson un-planning and structured uncertainty (Beghetto 2017c, 2019b). These techniques are based on the principle of cultivating possibilities within otherwise planned lessons and fully exploring their potential for learning, creativity, and development.

Possibilities of movement

Acting upon most of the possibilities outlined in this book depends on movement, either physical or symbolic / psychological. In turn, mobility depends on acts of repositioning and especially position exchange (Gillespie & Martin, 2014). Through the latter, we get to occupy, even if temporarily, the position of the other and, thus, grasp his or her perspective. This contributes to the dialogues of perspective mentioned before and the new possibilities discovered through them (Glăveanu, 2020c). We need to add a new, embodied dimension to these dialogues by focusing on the movements that underpin them. As argued in recent decades within the new mobilities paradigm (Urry, 2016), movement is an integral part of human existence and action and this certainly applies to the domain of education. We should thus examine more closely all the ways in which movements both open up as well as close down possibilities while preventing us from being stuck within singular positions in and perspectives on the world.

Possibilities of responsibility

Pedagogies of the possible concern much more than what happens within the walls of the classroom – they connect us to society and the power dynamic that enhances possibilities for some groups while diminishing them for others. As such, it is imperative for 21st century education to raise key ethical questions and issues that advance a social and environmental agenda preparing students for an engaged life as citizens (Glăveanu, 2015, 2017). The possibilities of responsibility connect us to the world outside of the school and especially the struggle of different marginalized communities to re-imagine society. Developing students' capacity for utopian thinking and for hope (Solnit, 2016) is crucial for the kind of social transformation that starts with education and fundamentally shapes it. In the end, Pedagogies of the Possible are both enablers of and enabled by 'societies of the possible' (Glăveanu, 2020a) and their commitment to plurality, alterity, and to an open future. Moreover, enacting new pedagogies and projects that go beyond the walls of schools and classrooms entail an inherent responsibility of anticipating and monitoring the potential unintended consequences of innovative efforts.

Final thoughts on designing for possibility in education

Pedagogies of the Possible represents a radical new way of looking at education that is guided by the themes discussed above and by the hope and confidence that we can create practices of schooling that not only mirror the changing world of today but understand and lead this change towards a more just, inclusive and sustainable future. New pedagogies are emerging before our eyes, animated by a need to correct racial and social injustices, confront the long shadows of colonialism, tackle the swiftly advancing climate emergency, and adapt to a pandemic and post-pandemic social and educational environment. What these pedagogies have in common, we believe, is a focus on the possible as an emancipatory, participative and emergent category. The possible is not the opposite of the real but its companion and engaging with it is the true marker of human existence and human society. In this sense, Pedagogies of the Possible aim to

rekindle the core feature of pedagogy by inviting us to acknowledge the potential that lies within moments of rupture, of uncertainty, of not knowing and to cultivate this potential within all classrooms, on a global scale, in the learning and lives of all people.

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