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Epilogue – Modes of Inquiry for a World Worth Living in For All ...

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Introduction

To nurture modalities of inquiry in, and through, this book we have created space for various dimensions of research and researching to be unfolded by authors. We see the world through their eyes both in how they write and in the insight which writing can prompt. We see the approaches and methods they grapple with. We learn about their motivations, collaborations, decisions, hopes and difficulties. We see taken-for-granted tools and underpinning ideologies made problematic. We see how the use of perspectives and concepts can enrich their, and challenge our, view of phenomena. The overall goal has been to stimulate discussion, share practice and explore challenges around current and new approaches to inquiry. The purpose of this epilogue is to extend this discussion towards what our inquiry means for the world. This closing chapter seeks to re-direct our focus from our discipline and consider (i) what is the world asking of us and (ii) how do we nurture modes of inquiry for a world worth living in for all? These questions are posed by educational scholars Biesta (2021) and Kemmis (2023) and compel a (re)consideration of priorities given the limitations and possibilities of the real world. Thinking inspired by these questions is woven together with insights from this volume as well as considerations developed through a recent research project (Brentnall & Higgins, 2023), which had concerns about un/sustainability at its heart. By combining these perspectives, contributions and experiences this epilogue aims to provoke thinking – and action – towards how we move intentionally, indeed, intentionally create a movement towards, considering the non-human as well as the human, the ecological as well as the social in our inquiries.

What is the world asking?

We are living in an age so different to what has come before that it has been given a name. As Chapter 10 reminds us, we are in the Anthropocene. This is a new operating state of the planet (Crutzen & Stoermer, 2000), which articulates the ways in which human activity is having a dominating (negative) presence on multiple aspects of the natural world (Steffen et al., 2011). This epoch is characterised by the immediate consequences and long-term implications of ecological overshoot (Fanning et al., 2021; Steffen et al., 2015). Overshoot has been written about for some time (cf. Catton, 1982; Wackernagel et al., 2002), but is making itself visible through more frequent extreme weather, droughts, forest fires and floods. Such events interact with existing global and social inequalities to create harm for half the world's population (Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change, 2021, 2022). As Chapter 11 concludes, there are power dynamics between the Global North and the Global South which demand attention. Regarding overshoot, a key issue is that it is the resource and energy use required for economic growth and consumption in the Global North which is outstripping the planet's capacity to replenish itself (Hickel, 2019). What does this mean for a field such as entrepreneurship, which for so long has been articulated in relationship to economic growth (Audretsch, 2018; Audrestch et al., 2008; Baumol & Strom, 2007), when such growth is unsustainable and unjust (Hickel, 2020; Raworth, 2017; Rockström, 2015)? These dynamics of inequity and harm mean that alternative conceptualisations of the Anthropocene have been proposed. The Capitalocene (Moore, 2017) articulates the role of the global capitalist system in driving climate and ecological breakdown. The necrocene (McBrien, 2016) underscores the extinction which is characteristic of this time. At the time of writing this chapter, the recent news has reported: people dying in heatwaves in India and Texas, floods in California, the Congo and Haiti; mass die-offs of fish in Thailand and England; sea birds starving in Mexico as their prey swims away from heated coastal waters. At the same time, the news has also reported: fossil fuel companies reporting multi-billion dollar profits for the first quarter of the year, the number of billionaires growing (along with their share of global wealth) and rising corporate profits being the cause of inflation. Such events are illustrations of what has been called the big disconnect (Dyllick & Muff, 2015), where progress for companies and individual entrepreneurs co-exists with an accelerating deterioration of the global state of the environment and society.

With this in mind, let us return to the first question posed in the opening paragraph of this epilogue and inspired by Biesta (2021): what is the world asking of us at such a time? Let us come at this from a practical perspective. What is policy asking of us at this time? In my home country, like many around the world, the government has declared a climate and ecological emergency (Hansard, 2019). Various reviews have followed, such as the ‘Mission Zero’ review (Skidmore, 2022), a biodiversity review (Dasgupta, 2021) and a Department for Education Sustainability and Climate Change strategy (Department for Education, 2022). This last strategy covers all levels of education from early years to higher education. It says that young people must be supported to meet the formidable challenge of climate change with determination not just despair, offered not just the truth but also hope that they can be agents of change (Department for Education, 2022). In Higher Education, the implications of this demand are wide ranging for all disciplines, but particularly so for entrepreneurship. After all, the focus on entrepreneurial value creation for present generations ignores the consequences for generations to come and means unsustainable entrepreneurship creates a ‘tragedy of the commons’ (Hummels & Argyrou, 2021). As Chapter 14 shows, entrepreneurship tools such as the Business Model Canvas (BMC) omit sustainability aspects and socialise students into the logic of the growth economy. This chapter asks why the BMC is adopted into teaching despite being critiqued in contemporary literature. It illuminates another disconnection – between teaching and research – where the content and methods we use in teaching are separated from our knowledge as researchers. Yet, it also illustrates the importance of teaching and the role of the educator-scholar in exploring and unsettling practices which do not support, or which actively undermine, sustainability. This inquiry can take place at different levels, from looking at practices to exploring the paradigmatic underpinnings of practice. As highlighted in Chapter 15, the ideological spirit of entrepreneurship is that of the capitalist spirit, and this ends up directing and influencing behaviours in practice and research. This reflexive contribution deftly illustrates what Moore discusses through the idea of the Capitalocene (2017), that capitalism is a system of power, culture and ideas, rather than just economics.

What might this mean for our modes of inquiry? Biesta (2021) provides one possible response when he articulates the necessity of putting the world at the centre of concerns. His overarching idea is that education should help students turn towards the world – the natural world, the physical world, the social world – and experience its integrity, that is the limits and boundaries of the world. In this view ‘the world is not a shop, where we can simply walk in and get what we want and walk out again with any consequences’ (Biesta, 2023, p. 19). Indeed, as an aside, Biesta provides another conceptualisation of the epoch we have entered when he describes an ‘age of shopping’, characterised by impulsivity and the desire for instant gratification (Biesta, 2019). His concern is how can we help the new generation exist in and with the world without thinking one is, can or ought to be at the centre of it. Applying this principle to modes of inquiry might mean asking: how do we de-centre ourselves, or rather, more specifically, how do we move the world to the centre of our inquiry? Moving the world to the centre is no easy task, not least because we are socialised to focus on humanistic concerns and outcomes. In searching for alternatives to these approaches I have found the work of scholars describing post-qualitative and post-humanist inquiry useful to think with. For example, Elizabeth St Pierre (2011) coined the term ‘post qualitative inquiry’ as a counter to conventional humanist qualitative methodology. In the context of this epilogue, what is important to know about her work is that she connects the need to forge new modes of inquiry with the existential necessity for research approaches that address the problems of the 21st century (St. Pierre, 2021). This is not simply a creative endeavour or the latest ‘turn’ to unsettle research-as-usual but a pressing, ethical obligation. Rather the haunting concern is that the ‘post-human’ will soon be all too real – ‘an earth without humans’ (St. Pierre, 2021, p. 1). Scholars are advised that it is the ‘very exploration’ of ‘more than human relations [which generates]... possibilities for response-ability and ethical renewed futures’ (Young et al., 2022, p. 314). Leaving these more-than-human relations unexplored limits the possibilities for ethically renewed futures.

Such an assertion might prompt us to consider how many historic (and recent) entrepreneurship (and related education) models and frameworks include a visualisation of the ecological system in which humans are embedded. Even the metaphors developed to help describe the entrepreneurial experience,

such as the pilot in the plane (Sarasvathy, 2008), inspire images of thought of the independent entrepreneur, setting their own direction, creating value from the resources they have without any broader limitations. Implicitly, through their invisibility, the more-than-humans – animals, rivers, nature, insects, the environment – become servants to humans who are seen as ‘separate from everything else and, usually, master of the universe’ (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 618). To maintain this invisibility is to support the perpetuation of the philosophies and paradigms which have enabled the extraction, exploitation and extinction which now threatens the very stability of the biosphere on which humans depend. This is the challenge that entrepreneurship research faces, to de-centre the human, or specifically for us, to de-centre the entrepreneur, the micro-business, the family business, the SME, the student entrepreneur, the entrepreneurship educator, the entrepreneurship programme and its learning outcomes, and to turn towards the world, with its real ecological limitations, and consider – what is it asking of us?

Modes of Inquiry for a World Worth Living in For All

While the first question – considering ‘what is the world asking?’ – articulates a reckoning with the natural, physical and social world as it is, the second question aims that modes of inquiry generate possibilities for a better world. This idea is borrowed from Kemmis (2023), who argues that there is a double purpose to education, which is to figure out: how do we help people live well in a world worth living for all? (Kemmis, 2023). Education has always been associated with social issues and changing society (Young et al., 2022), but this now involves the art of living on a damaged planet (Tsing et al., 2017). Kemmis’ argument is that institutions involved in education, be these schools, colleges or universities, are often involved in conserving recognisable forms of life; but they may also (in moments of crisis and opportunity) produce changed forms of life for individuals and society (Kemmis, 2023). Therefore, at this time of crisis, there is an opportunity to reconfigure what we say, what we do and the relationships which shape forms of life, and put into motion new sayings, new doings and new relationships for a world worth living in for all (Kemmis, 2023).

One of the issues in terms of nurturing modes of inquiry for such a world is how we are trained into (human-centred), ways of inquiring and that it is very hard to escape our training (St. Pierre, 2021). Yet, we cannot revise our understandings of human relations to the planet unless we unlearn anthropomorphic ways of researching and educating about the world (Malone, 2016). In regard to entrepreneurship, a Humboldtian approach has been called for, which develops citizens, not simply consumers and workers (Hytti, 2018; Kuckertz, 2021). In addition, a Humboldtian approach has been shown to extend beyond the character building of citizens and to make explicit the inter-connectedness between people, their contexts/cultures and their environment (Lehner & Kyriacou, 2023). Thus, nurturing modes of inquiry for a world worth living in for all involves breaking the habit into which we have been socialised: finding and describing a given. Instead, we must ‘first think possible worlds in which we might live differently’ (St. Pierre, 2013, p. 225). Such inquiry will be provocative and risky: ‘it should challenge our foundational assumptions and transform the world’ (St. Pierre, 2011, p. 623, emphasis added). How to do this? Make space for difference (in journals, books, conference tracks) and found a movement (St. Pierre, 2021).

Making Movement

In my entrepreneurship inquiry sub-field – education – wider, ecological concerns are already being strongly asserted into the mainstream conversation (Dodd et al., 2022; Klapper & Fayolle, 2023; Loi et al., 2021). And yet ... my lived experience is still that many everyday activities, programmes, assumptions and scholarly activity may either minimise or erase sustainability concerns or work against them. In a research project to create a process to influence EE practice towards sustainability (Brentnall & Higgins, 2023), workshops were developed to share motivations and broader (ecological) concerns. At one such event (EEUK, 2023), an earth systems scientist, Professor Tim Lenton, gave an online talk to a group of enterprise educators, entrepreneurship scholars and practitioners involved in start-up and business support. The presentation was about climate tipping points and social tipping points. The scientist gave the bad news about multiple, interacting and unpredictable climate tipping points which may push the earth system into abrupt or irreversible

climate change (Lenton et al., 2022). These include droughts, dieback and wildfires in the Boreal forest and amazon rainforest, the accelerated melting of icesheets, the influx of melted freshwater into the seas slowing down ocean circulation and leading to more extreme weather, coral die-off as oceans warm and acidify and permafrost melting which releases methane into the atmosphere. this seminar provided an example of turning towards the world and confronting its limits and limitations. The scientist also asserted that the idea of tipping points might be harnessed to influence positive changes that re-shape social systems and help accelerate progress towards a more sustainable future. Lenton used the example of the Fridays for Future movement which started after Swedish student Greta Thunberg staged a 'School Strike for Climate'. In august 2018, and by March 2019 hundreds of global strikes were taking place across 125 countries. Transformation requires social change; Lenton's message was to find positive tipping points where small interventions trigger self-reinforcing feedbacks to accelerate such change.

While entrepreneurship is often associated with ideas of creative destruction, re-imagining and re-making the world, it has been suggested recently that its innovative contribution has been empty (Hallonsten, 2023). Innovation has too often focused on consumption or growth – or, in the words of Biesta, shopping. There have been diminishing returns on this model and the economy is now characterised by corporate dominance, profit extraction and poor quality/low paying jobs (Naudé, 2023). If entrepreneurship has been a creative driver behind unsustainable development patterns and socio-economic marginalisation might it be re-oriented to be a driver for regenerative development patterns (Burch & di Bella, 2021)? Such developments need new modes of inquiry. That is because new ways of being in the world need modes of inquiry, modes of inquiry which move away from explaining, measuring and representing the world as it is, and bring in the new (St. Pierre, 2011). The power dynamics underpinning this possibility have not gone unacknowledged, not least that such developments must attend to the political and historical advantages which underpin inquiry (Gerrard et al., 2017). The climate and ecological crisis is not simply an economic, political or environmental problem, but also a problem of how knowledge is organised, valued and shared (Facer, 2020). The domination of Western ideals has led to an ingrained cognitive injustice and fails to recognise diverse ways of knowing which might build the conviviality and solidarity the world needs (Santos, 2014). Returning to the idea of geological ages, a lexicon, Anthropocene Unseen (Howe & Pandian, 2020), offers another name for this epoch. The possibility of a Betacene is proposed: 'a time to test, engage, and experiment with new ways of being in and with the world' (Howe & Pandian, 2020, p. 21). This possibility – to test, engage and experiment with new ways of being in and with the world – is existential and pressing for humans and non-humans. Global ecological and social inequalities. overshoot. Biodiversity destruction. Climate tipping points. Social tipping points. Scholarship that confronts historical, political, institutional, corporate and social power. Scholarship that builds towards renewed, sustainable, ethical futures. Scholarship that puts the world at the centre. Scholarship that brings in the new. Connect. Join a movement. Make a movement. Nurture modes of inquiry for a world worth living in for all.

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