The Pandemic Summer School

I teach three semesters.

*When do you go on holiday?*

*Going away anywhere for the incredibly long holiday?*

You might hear these mild annoyances once in a while.

Not this year.

Now you might hear the birds’ raucous song for the first time. You may see foxes roaming the streets and rummaging in the bins. You may hear and feel the silence. The emptiness of streets with stationary cars. The world stopped. People inside and keeping their distance.

I teach three semesters.

This means that my embodied focus is directed for most of the year at The University. Its campus; the buildings; ‘the September’ to ‘the September’.

This may be a year.

In a pandemic it may be a lifetime.

In these three semesters I teach philosophy of education.

In the School of Education, I am committed to the study of education, in all its dirtiness.

I embrace its problematic avenues, its ridiculous structures, its labyrinthine policies… its aims (if ever present).

I ‘teach’ about the role of education in the Anthropocene. This is the age where evidence shows the significant human impact on the more than human world. The age of climate catastrophe.

Influenced by socialisation, reductionist notions of knowledge, education as regurgitation; the human impact on the world is laid bare for all to see and for some to ignore.

For those who see, they become aware of ‘the other’ – that which/whom is not me.

I become the other, when…

I teach three semesters.

There are teachers, headteachers, inclusion officers, widening access professionals, widening participation coordinators, all of whom descend into this third semester. They, like me, are tired by the year. This year especially.

In saying that I *teach three semesters*, I am one of the few who in the school who has a module that starts and ends in the space of a week, or in a global pandemic, four weeks.

In this module, we become ‘the other’ together (if that is possible), and sustain this throughout our time together.

We acknowledge the challenges from our homes. The commitments. The straying of minds to something less difficult, less challenging. To where the mood wants to take us, instead of where zoom facilitates us.

The certainty of tried and tested methods now gone, concerns in our collective otherness emerge:

Will the internet work?

Will the cat walk across the keyboa l;kjsdf xc9-0[]pol’;>qaawefsd?

Can we sustain this level of thinking for this long?

Will they/we/I show my face?

Are they OK?

Am I OK?

Is the assessment achievable?

What’s the point anyway?

The module started at a time of significant social and ecological change. The module being about social justice and social change, it would be inauthentic to continue the myth that education is someway separate from the world.

Education isn’t separate.

Education isn’t preparation.

Education is.

Education is not static; we are beyond the liberation of the mind from the here and now. We are beyond the isolated present and content transaction. We are sick from the gorging of inert information for assessed regurgitation.

At the time of the third semester.

George Floyd’s name is sung across the world; “I can’t breathe; We can’t breathe”. Climate catastrophe looms closer; populism rife in the corridors of international powers and oils slick special relationships.

Educational systems can remain inert, ignoring the white washing, the sexism, the attainment gaps, the access gaps, the injustices…

or it can give space

Space to understand how these acts and beliefs come about is necessary for deep thinking. Importantly, it can create space to call common sense into doubt.

The teaching was not a hidden manipulative soap box. This would have been self-defeating – one can only indoctrinate by indoctrination, only the content for regurgitation would have been different.

Regurgitation was challenged, unwelcome in fact, in Semester C. Our task was to *think* for four weeks of summer.

The possibilities for education were lifted up into air, unsettling deeply held preconceptions about teaching, learning, knowing and acting. The view of the world on the cusp of change loomed large in the close heat of summer.

A world scarred.

Nature charred.

What is next for the oppressed?

What of the education of the more than human world?

Can we conjure possibilities for an incomprehensible future?

In Semester C became a place that created space.

A networked place many hundreds of miles apart.

A place created by a handful of dedicate, inspiring, Masters students to think about their place in education; the world they wanted to create as learners, as educators, because theirs for the making.

Charged with confronting their realities, consciousness, norms and actions.

Confronted with the brotherhood and sisterhood of Black Lives Matter.

Reconciling that, for some, they were part of it, but unable to comprehend it.

Seeing the death of life support systems

(metaphorical and real)

that sustain human life,

before their eyes.

In a pandemic, it seems, our thinking was more astute. Noticing more:

Birds.

Places of otherness.

Places of Home.

My group.

Not my group.

‘Same side of the streeters’.

‘Steer Clearers’.

‘Welcome in-ers’.

Book clubbers: Akala’s *Natives*.

In Semester C, we walked through our everyday places with different eyes; different thoughts. What it meant to ‘be a knower’ became ‘a knower in my position’, ‘a knower in *your* position’.

We searched for the possibilities of collective knowing and the value of ‘unknowing’.

Being in an ‘other’ space – like that which the pandemic affords – helped us, as a group of learners and educators recalibrate thought.

The purpose, if there *had* to be one*,* was to go beyond the ‘aims’ and ‘intended outcomes’ and

to *listen* with attentiveness

to what *others* had to say:

humans and

more-than-humans.

To *listen* to the song of fellow humans and birds in the time of a global pandemic, of ambient anxiety, is to make the only reasonable request an educator can make of ‘their students’ under such conditions.

Pragmatics have their place and time – timing is of course everything.

In this case, in this place and in this time.

Starting with awareness of ourselves, raising consciousness of *the other* (ourselves as the ‘other’ included), can be the only reasonable educational activity for an ever

changing

world.