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Globalisation, marketisation, monetisation and the growth of hyper-capitalism have all impacted on modern universities. As mass higher education has developed, universities have become severely marginalised from their communities and original purposes.

The idea that mass participation can solve the problems on its own has proved illusory. The output of graduates does not compensate for the poor quality of jobs available for many and for the elitist assumptions which drive selection for the 'top' institutions and induction into the leading professions.

The learning and teaching we now have is not sufficiently engaged with the critical issues facing our society. Some of these issues are to do with belonging, community, identity, nationhood and culture whilst others include poverty, exclusion, migration, war, terrorism, global climate change, and environmental degradation. These issues raise questions which test our humanity and the appropriateness of our universities and their curricula.

The other key concern is the impact of technology on 'life and labour' which is abolishing meaningful work for many and making some traditional communities obsolete. The internet and digital life must be democratically controlled and we must understand its complexity.

The proposed Co-operative University could become an 'engaged university' with a distinctive learning programme which addresses the issues raised above. A critical pedagogy is needed as well as a critical curriculum.

The Problems

The idea of university engagement for the public good has been prominent in the discourses surrounding higher education in recent years. However, the reality is that universities compete with one-another for places in a hierarchy of league tables. Higher education is now part of the hyper-capitalistic growth of mass-production of goods and services involving mass-distribution and consumption through consumer networks. The university experience has become a commodity; it is largely monetised and it can be bought by those who have the funds. Of course it is also more than this and for many, it is the best if not the only way to a fulfilling life and well-paid work where qualifications and learning bring justified rewards. It represents the high water mark for social democratic and meritocratic achievement; mass higher education is the signal for a more equal and fair society.

However, the idea that mass participation, with up to 50% of an age cohort attending higher education, is a solution to the problems of modern Britain is at best naïve and at worst a delusion. The output of graduates does not compensate for the poor quality of jobs available for many and for the elitist assumptions which drive selection for the 'top' institutions and induction into the leading professions. A complex social class structure (Savage 2015; Reay 2013; 2015) requires a critically informed response, not a set of differentiated university league tables to justify a false concept of meritocracy.

Globalisation, marketisation, monetisation and the growth of hyper-capitalism have all impacted on modern universities. As mass higher education has developed universities have become severely marginalised from their communities and their original purposes have been lost. For many, learning is a 'consumer good' and an opportunity for those who succeed in it to have the benefits which accrue to individuals. Meanwhile the needs of communities and the social purposes of state-funded education are ignored and learning opportunities for ordinary and working-class people are diminished.

The learning and teaching we now have in conventional universities is not sufficiently engaged with the critical issues facing our society. Some of these issues are to do with belonging,

community, identity, nationhood, and culture rather than simply with the economic questions of stagnant wages, diminished social welfare, the growth of foodbanks, and feelings of powerlessness. These are part of the 'subjective' and felt aspects of understanding whilst the 'objective' aspects include poverty, exclusion, migration, war, terrorism, global climate change, and environmental degradation. At the personal level, for many people learning and education as well as politics fail to address the big questions such as what makes a fair society, who belongs in a society or community and who gets left behind in a global world where older communities seem to be abandoned. Universities themselves have become semi-detached from the communities they claim to serve whilst simultaneously failing to develop a curriculum which addresses key problems. These issues raise questions which test our humanity and our politics and raise questions about the curriculum universities might offer to their students if we were to take a different starting point.

In looking at critical thinking for universities this paper will consider notions of community, identity, belonging, and the contexts in which beliefs, values and actions are played out. These include the pervasive impact of digital technology and the internet and the impact of global mass migration. For those of us involved in learning and teaching there has been a failure to identify and counter the stultifying effects of compliant rather than critical thinking around many of these issues. The second part of the paper will consider the issues that can be said to drive our search for relevant knowledge and three suggestions for themes on which we might build a critical curriculum.

There are problems however, firstly with the concept of engagement here. We are not sufficiently clear about the things we are supposed to be engaged with, including the idea of 'community' itself. And yet universities think of themselves as being part of 'the community'. Many writers of great insight have commented on the problematical nature of community. Zygmunt Bauman (2001) was one such social scientist who noted the difficulties of maintaining the boundaries of community when members no longer share the 'sameness' of previous generations. Communities are defined equally by their differences as by their commonalities. In a globalised world it is possible to view questions of identity, nationalism, ethnicity, race, and belonging through the prism of 'community' or any other concept which suggests belonging, such as religion, but it is equally clear that such categories are also potentially about exclusion. Universities are not usually 'engaged' with communities which seek to exclude certain categories of people, except on the grounds of academic competence or 'lack of excellence' in achieving grades for admission to courses of study. So how does a university engage with the reality of very different and sometimes opposed notions of community? It does this by declaration — that is to say, it declares a 'mission' to serve its community and since there is no single community to serve, it will insist on serving concurrently all of the various and diverse communities in its hinterland. It serves all and therefore serves few. Thinking about which community we serve must be a critically evaluated view, not just a taken-for granted bland multicultural inclusion of every social group or category of people.

The realities are that we live in fragmented and heterogeneous places which are increasingly 'transnational' in having many different ethnic groups, social classes, religions, cultures, and 'races'. We are united often only in wishing to stress our differences and distinctiveness from others, that is to say, we are united in stating that we are diverse. What such communities may share may be of the utmost worth and value, especially if social and cultural differences are contained and expressed in ways which do no harm to their opponents and respect everyone's rights to be different within the law. We may also be a community resting on a legalistic, contractual, respectful, formal, constitutional, and civic basis; a set of agreements to respect our differences. But it may not be a community rooted in shared experience, values, expectations, and feelings of common belonging and origin.

Does this matter? Well, yes since it appears to be one of the driving forces of political dissent from the right and left. The political debates over the nature of 'community' often involve race, ethnicity and belonging and have permeated right through the responses by communities on a world scale to mass migration, refugees across the globe, economic scarcity and poverty,

climate change and environmental destruction, and of course the devastation brought about by war, religious persecution, and terrorism. These global events have changed massively the idea of community and of how one community might join or relate to another 'community'. Yet the issues that arise are rarely seen to be part of our engagement with the nature and content of higher education. Neither do they impact on most of the taught curricula of conventional universities.

If there is to be a Co-operative University then it must address questions of what kind of communities it is intended for? How will its community of interest be defined? What kind of knowledge is appropriate for a different university? With luck or good guidance a seeker may chance upon the work of John Berger (1989; 1992; 2005) who noted and recorded in his inimical ways the persistence of a 'longing for community'. There exists a need for a challenge to the market-led systems so that relationships in work, in social life, in communal life and in social labour can be the basis for university engagement. This is the building of social capital to meet the needs of communities.

If we need to re-think the place of community for a university then we also must re-assess our sense of our own personal and social identity. We might need to re-learn our identity. This may be painful because modern times and institutions are complex and separation and division can lead to forms of apartheid. We have in the United Kingdom already a fractured and separated rather than shared culture between many different ethnic and religious groups. A critical approach should surely insist on a shared and common interest and future whilst valuing diversity and difference. These are not easily reconciled concepts and perspectives.

Even where the community of the global elite and the community of the weak and deprived bear little resemblance to each other, we can see that no matter what the history of each group tells us, both are forced to share the same risk society. The very rich may live in 'extraterritoriality' (Bauman, 2001), outside the immediate reach of any given state but they too will share the eventual fate of everyone else as climate change and global warming, pollution, and global poverty impact on everyone. Even the powerful cannot live without some shared sense of community and identity. One question that arises is how far the poor and deprived, who have few realistic choices, actually share the same notion of identity and culture as the very rich, who can choose to have mobility and context free communication at the heart of their existence? A truly relevant and critical university education must surely put these concerns at the heart of the curriculum.

A Democratic Education Relevant to the Digital Age?

If we have problems with our conception of community and identity and we are uncertain about our histories then we may be equally uncertain about our relationship with the internet and the world of digital technology. Schools and universities were once thought of as being democratising institutions (Porter, 1999) but this idea has lost credibility in the face of the massive and persistent inequalities and few commentators argue that education in itself will successfully challenge the great problems facing the world. Porter has argued that globalisation actually threatens to limit democratic education, notwithstanding the fact that increases in literacy are key to economic growth and social justice. What has been happening in recent years is in fact the marketisation and monetisation of learning and education, especially in the university sector. On the one hand universities have become a massive presence in our economies and are a central part of social, cultural and economic life of any given nation. They help define what it is to be a 'cultured' nation and community. On the other hand, we can see that the great problems of our time do not figure as the central concerns of the curriculum.

Competitive advantage for national growth is, however, often cited as a key national objective. The question is how far have we now neutralised our educational institutions as democratic and independent forces which can contribute to the needed transformations of the global economy and society? The issue of curriculum is at the heart of this question since not for nothing is

state educational policy and funding often geared towards economic success. Centralised control of what is taught and learned is common and the supposed autonomy and freedoms of universities are constantly under threat, especially where economic and social issues are unresolved. It is in these circumstances that we encounter the importance of the 'horizon of relevance', by which we mean the way in which knowledge and understanding of our social and psychological environments is shaped and used. The ideas and processes by which we decide what is important or not are shaped by both the content of what we learn and the ways in which we learn. For universities the question arises then of whether we have a critical knowledge capable of identifying and engaging with the big issues? These big issues have been referred to as "the wicked issues" (Firth, 2017) and can be said to include, amongst others, poverty, climate change/global warming, air and marine pollution, the threat of regional wars, and the sense of uncertainty over a global future which appears ever more fractured and alienated from young people in particular. Loss of belonging and loss of identity seems to be a global phenomenon and is intimately related to the kinds of knowledge we need of ourselves and our world as it evolves into a hyper-marketised, consumerised and global shopping mall.

For the argument here, the new technologies, embracing for example, automisation, digitalisation, computerisation, robotisation, artificial intelligence and the networked society, come to represent knowledge that has almost literally exploded into availability. People the world over are internet driven: much everyday work, a great deal of leisure, entertainment and sport, much learning and knowledge transfer, and a great deal of social interaction including with music now takes place only with the support and costs associated with digital communication technology. To a significant degree the reality of life 'lived' has been replaced with the reality of life experienced and mediated by the internet. Life is, like the consumer items we desire, available on the internet. It can be consumed by any individual and in almost any situation; alone in the bedroom; at the family dining table or living room; on a train or bus; in a public street or space; in the classroom; in the car and in the deepest forest or most distant desert. It is easily transportable and no social act seems immune to its presence. It is ubiquitous. For many it represents an existential state without which, life as it is known, has become impossible to conceive. There is therefore digital dependency of an unprecedented degree. The mediations of the computer and/or hand-held machine and its representations through the software and programmes separate out contact with the world. As Mathew Crawford has put it, such developments in the digitalisation of our lives:

> Collapse the basic axis of proximity and distance by which an embodied being orients in the world and draws a horizon of relevance around itself … [it is] … a design philosophy that severs the bonds between action and perception … our experiences are manufactured for us (Crawford, 2015: 117).

When we step out of the house to check the weather to see if we need an umbrella today we do not look up to the sky to see which way the wind blows, how the clouds are forming, and how the trees and birds are reacting to the changes in atmosphere, temperature and climate. We make no judgement as to whether the chimney pot will stand the test of the day's storm or whether the sun will bring our flowers into bloom. No, we check our hand-held device or smartphone to see what the delivered forecast tells us. Apparently we cannot now know or learn these things from our own experience.

It is the digital horizon which for many sets the parameters of what can be experienced and how it can be consumed. And the emphasis is often on the notion of consumption since much of the product of digitalisation and its modes of communication are bought and sold in a rigged and restricted market. The producers of the products, if not the actual experiences of consumers, are a small self-elected group of mega-businesses, many located in California, who have managed to stake a successful claim to what is essentially a common form of wealth, i.e., the data and information generated by the 'commons', meaning the ordinary social interaction of people who are communicating with one-another. That such common and public space becomes the monopolised property of a private individual or company is worthy of note and comment in itself. That such companies can become wealthy beyond the dreams of avarice and far outweigh the aggregate stock market value of the largest production companies making for

example vehicles or extracting mineral wealth, is breath-taking. The question arises — what are the implications of this sea-change in technological capacities for progressive education? The question forces our attention towards what should be the basis of our critical thinking.

What Should Drive our Knowledge in the Digital Era?

The need for a social identity

For those of us interested in learning and teaching as one of the most valued of human enterprises, this question raises what can only be termed as existential challenges. The nature of our society has changed significantly without our true consent having been given. We have been slow to understand what has been happening and faced with the exciting new possibilities of the new communication technologies we have bought into the opportunities it seems to offer. We can now communicate instantaneously with any individual, anywhere, more-or-less, on the planet. We can now accumulate thousands of music tracks and videos on our hand-held devices; we can concurrently manage millions of financial transactions per minute or is it per second? we can access the libraries of the world from our desk-tops and use the accumulated knowledge of at least two thousand years' worth of scholarship. All of this and more — is available — yet we find a reality in which individuals spend much of their lives facing a screen, where the agenda is set by the screen and the scope and reach of action is determined by the screen. Those who access and purchase their experience on and through the screen may therefore lack true autonomy and personal freedom. Of course few people do this exclusively, nevertheless the contention is that the horizon of relevance, of knowledge, of experience and of immersion is shaped by the actual technological apparatus itself, as well as the content which is being delivered. The individual must give up her/his autonomy to a significant degree in order to participate in this mass-communication exercise. The true costs of this are as yet unexplored and our understanding of it is only at its beginning.

There is scientific evidence that too much screen time can induce anxiety, low self-esteem and can damage children's attempts to develop meaningful relationships with others. The long-term effects of screen dependency and the kinds of narcissistic engagement it encourages with notions of the self, remain to be investigated. There can be little doubt that, whilst developing screen identities, many individuals may be losing the capacity to successfully develop social and communal identities. Paradoxically the enhancement of an online identity may re-inforce a loss of belonging to the real community as people internalise this form of oppression and make it their own. The internet makes it possible to engage with the self as a full-time occupation whereas a social and 'real' engagement usually involves concessions to others and action within a social context of give and take. This is engagement with others and the issues that matter to all. This is engagement with the wider world and it is telling us something significant about our idea of what knowledge is about, especially when we appear to be losing it.

The loss of identity, the loss of belonging and the exclusion of many from a decent life referred to above has its counterpart in the way in which digital communications have helped create the possibility of engaging the self but without engaging the self in the wider issues. Mark Lilla (2017) has remarked that "… With the rise of identity consciousness, engagement in issue-based movements began to diminish somewhat and the conviction got rooted that the movements most meaningful to the self are, unsurprisingly, about the self". Over the past two decades or so, the notion of identity and the groups associated with it proliferated widely throughout academia and in the wider society. In broad sections of society it became a mark of 'authenticity' to search for the true sense of self and for some, such as the widely respected sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991; 1992), the self became an existential project that individuals worked on as part of their attempt to live a full life. Whilst some extremely positive aspects of this development can be identified, such as the enhanced prominence of women and some black and ethnic minority groups within academic disciplines, it has also distorted the analysis of current issues and of some historical ones. Most significantly, the undue deference given to ideas of difference and

identity has shown us that the key task is not to shape learning and the curriculum around the individual or the 'self ' but rather around our engagement with the wider world. Lilla, in a critique of aspects of modern liberalism suggests that academic trends give an "intellectual patina to the narcissism that almost everything else in our society encourages". It produces what he calls the "Facebook model of identity" through which individuals in their masses produce their own self as a homepage. It is the construction of a personal brand which can be linked and rated by others whenever one wishes. What it is not, is perhaps more important than what it actually is. It is not a basis for engagement, commitment, live social interaction, and the creation of common experience which itself is a well-spring for thought and action. These things are the basis for social and communal solidarity, for belonging and social consciousness, not the ephemeral and insubstantial, not to say mediated and manipulated constructs used in a personal website. Intellectual critique and politics can thus be about more than defining and affirming what one already is and may become and be about change through engagement, dialogue and action.

The need for critical dialogue not alliances of the silent

If the liberal pedagogy of the recent past, focused on personal identity cannot provide a substantial basis for engagement and change, what then can? If, for example, white, middle class males comprise and give expression to one form of knowledge (epistemology) and again as a simple example, black women generate another way of knowing, and if validity is given to both, then there may be little or no ground for impartial judgement based on dialogue and shared discourse. The knowledge acquired in one sphere simply becomes a 'category error' in the other sphere. Approved identities then shape discourse and opposed identities validate their own perspectives. Only those with an approved identity can speak on certain subjects; the rest must remain silent since they lack true and authentic identity. Social and political life becomes the capacity to create alliances of the silent in which the pretence is made that we (the identitarians of the varied types) share our opposition to the oppressors who inhabit a sometimes majoritarian, identity. The differences between identities are often suppressed within a supposedly 'liberal' notion of tolerance. We should tolerate religious differences, for example, we are told, and no single religion has a monopoly on the validity of faith. Such is the often spoken message of the political class as well as the leaders of religious groups. All religions are said to be ultimately about peace and the challenges posed by religion in western societies are often 'dissolved' within commonsensical ideas of — well there's good and bad in all of them (religions) and one cannot condemn one without condemning them all (if for example a relatively rare terrorist act has resulted in mass murder). It is a difficult position to argue but nevertheless it is a strong British tradition that the separation of church and state was important for freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and other human rights, including a defence against clerical intrusion into private and public life based on 'holy' texts (Murray, 2017: 136).

The generic question becomes, how is it possible to have a critical dialogue around potentially damaging and conflictual social and cultural diversity and how can it be sustained in societies which have struggled to integrate new people and cultures following mass migrations into their societies? (Caldwell, 2010; Collier, 2014). Furthermore we need to recognise that this can take place with people belonging to communities which have sometimes self-segregated from the mainstream culture in a world which is unstable and uncertain and where identity is challenged. It is, for example, arguably separatism and separate development of religiously motivated fundamentalism that attracts those who are predisposed to violence (Murray, 2017).

In such circumstances the challenge is to combat the polarisation of communities, to create a sense of inclusive identity within the nation state, to challenge fear, superstition and anger with rational and knowledge-based solutions and to look the problems directly in the face and be militantly in favour of democracy and freedom of speech and expression. Deeply conservative religious belief and its institutions present modern universities with a critical challenge. The response cannot be silence and acquiescence in the face of repressive social and religious values, practices and behaviour. Neither can we ignore the continuing threat of racism and

entrenched divisions in our social organisation and culture and history (Walvin 1973; Fryer, 1984; Olusoga, 2016).

Critical thinking must therefore raise and address such issues. Individual pathologies such as terrorism are expressions of much more widely held and diffused beliefs and values. We must not demonise whole communities and groups but we must not simply blame individual pathologies if we want to know the social and psychological causes of widespread and communal behaviour.

This means we must place at the centre of attention the things that are out there in our communities such as the mass movement of labour, refugee and asylum creation in the third world, and the poverty and displacement caused by war and poverty. It takes argument and sound analysis to disentangle such complex matters and lest we forget, these things are not just 'out there'; they are in our heads and in our classrooms, or should be. What is at issue is the kind of pedagogy and learning we need for the future. This means for many an education which will widen horizons and stretch our idea of relevance beyond the 'liberal pedagogy' focused on identity formation and its defence, which has served to undermine the idea of collective solidarity and incidentally has undermined the possibility of a 'scientific' and objective approach to the study of society. The idea of critical thinking takes on a deep resonance when put in this context. It represents a challenge for every university.

Critical Thinking: Content and Process

The idea of critical thinking is of course not new. The notion of critique has been central to certain types of social thinking for many generations, for example, and the idea that knowledge production and thinking itself was radical activity informed the 'critical theorists' of the Frankfurt School from the 1930s onwards through the disciplines of sociology, psychology, and critical literacy. Jurgen Habermas (1972) in particular sought to develop theories of knowledge which could be transformative in the social and intellectual struggles of post-world war two academic and political life. Herbert Marcuse (1964) sought to analyse and critique the psychological bases of mass behaviour within modern consumerist societies.

There are other 'schools' of critical thinking which take as their focus the need to 'improve' oneself as a person and sometimes as a scholar. The approach suggests that most of us are not all we could be and that we could be better if we practised what is called better thinking in everyday life (Elder & Elder, 2000: 40). There is no question that this practical and positivistic approach can yield benefits and that improvement in learning can come about as a result of adopting conscious learning habits such as not wasting time, defining a problem a day that must be solved, keeping an intellectual journal, dealing with one's ego issues, keeping in touch with one's emotions, and analysing group influences on one's life. All of these and other practical strategies may be used to improve performance. Yet critical thinking as we have outlined it may not be like the improvement in playing basketball or in performing ballet better and in which a commitment to learn and to improve performance would be productive and worthy. Critical thinking is about more than whether I have reached my goals and purposes. It is about the transformative experiences needed to re-shape and re-define thinking and learning itself. It is not simply a set of practices and procedures, though such practices may be necessary features of critical learning and development. Critical thinking, our argument runs, has a definable content. It is a type of thinking with concepts and objects of study which mark it out as more than a set of good practice procedures.

There is no doubt that critical thinking has a substantial 'hinterland' concerned with our understandings and conceptualisations of the mind, of human social consciousness, of theories of ideology and the structure and content of thought, reason and language. This level of abstraction is, however, not the focus of this paper. What is of concern here is how the notion of university engagement might require new forms of thinking and learning for its students and teachers if it is to literally have the knowledge needed for change to take place. We have argued

so far that ideas and practices involved in understanding and using notions of community, belonging and identity in contemporary society mean we have to explore difficult and 'wicked' contexts such as globalisation, identity formation and digital economic and social movements. Some of these key concerns are intrinsically difficult and they are often politically contentious. Religion, ethnicity, race, and migration are the stuff of actual and physical disagreement and discord the world over. They are literally the life and death issues. However, silence and ignorance can yield no solution, that seems certain.

The solution to our problem, we suggest, might require the use of three different but related approaches to learning: first, identification of a set of critical concepts and ideas which are objectively and cognitively relevant and coherent and address the crucial issues of the day which are 'out there in the world'; second, an emphasis on the processes of critical learning as part of personal commitment at the heart of intellectual enquiry; and third, a rational approach which is reflexively critical of its own origins and intentions and can be a rigorous guide to action.

Concepts and Processes for Critical Thinking: an Outline Sketch

Cognitive abilities are of course generic and intrinsic to university-level study. They are conventionally defined in terms of developmental and processual activities such as knowledge acquisition, comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Bloom's taxonomy is still quoted in this regard as is de Bono's notion of parallel styles of thinking which contrast factual, intuitive, logical, positivistic, and creative approaches to thinking (Khalaily, 2017). Child development studies rooted in the works of Piaget (1954; 1972), Vygotsky (1978), Bruner (1983) and Erikson (1993) suggest strongly that cognitive skills are developed best within a framework of understanding which places the child and adolescent learner at the centre of attention and focus on psycho-social processes, environments, culture, and 'frameworks' or 'scaffolds' which help the learning process. Cognitive development is conceptualised as socially constructed and taken to be an emergent and developmental property of the social-psychological and cultural experiences of the person. Successful cognitive development also requires the acquisition of a range of personal attributes and the successful internalisation of a sense of self and identity which might be termed personal responsibility or what Teare (2013) has called "personal viability". Learners also need to show 'metacognitive' capacities which describe the ways in which individuals and groups are able to develop knowledge of their own thinking and cognitive processes. In addition there are strong advocates of the need for emotional learning and intelligence (Gardner, 1983; Goleman, 1997) if individuals are to be rounded and more complete in their learning and behaviour.

The following indicative lists attempt to synthesise some of the many and varied tasks, activities and outcomes associated with critical learning and thinking. The lists are structured around two themes: processes which support learning for critical thinking and outcomes of critical thinking techniques.

Processes of Learning for Critical Thinking — Indicative Capacities

• Absorbing information

• Linguistic mediation

• Verbalising knowledge

• Vocabulary/knowledge development

• Questioning

• Self-guidance and control

- Time management

- Independent thinking

- Improved independence and autonomy

- Diversity of views

- Re-inforcement

Outcomes and actual critical thinking techniques

- Comparing and contrasting ideas

- Distinguishing similarities/differences

- Establishing/testing hypotheses

- Clarifying beliefs and conclusion

- In-depth studies of key themes

- Formulation of solutions

- Independent thinking/dialogue

- Personal/emotional responsibility

- Intellectual courage

- Verbalising knowledge

What we have outlined above is only an illustrative set of learning processes and activities which would enable a learner to grapple with the key issues of context, which are out there in the world and were alluded to in the first part of this paper. What we do not have is a list of specific and granular concepts, plucked as it were from the academic disciplines of higher learning and which can simply be applied in a learning environment. Unfortunately no single academic subject such as psychology, sociology, geography, cultural studies or philosophy will yield up for us a handy set of concepts to be applied to solving the problems we have outlined. Neither do the learning and pedagogic disciplines offer such a panacea. All of the disciplines in some form(s) are needed to understand the modern dilemmas and problems. No single subject nor a known and accepted combination offers a solution. However, the processes of critical thinking outlined above might in conjunction with methods of critical learning and research offer a way forward. Such methods of critical learning include the notion of learning through experience, action, interaction, and reflection. The steps in this process might include:

- Identifying real world problems, which will be empirical, complex, and contentious.

- Setting up learning groups or teams with different expertise and 'knowledges'.

- Initiating inquiry through curiosity, reflection, and openness.

- Insisting on action and outcomes relevant to problem solutions.

- Testing the knowledge with those it is intended to help or address.

- Personal commitment to learning and critical reflection on the status of knowledge about the objects of study.

These methods are themselves closely allied in practice to the acquisition of learning skills which can encompass questioning skills, problem solving abilities, research skills, and performance skills — all of which come within what we can call 'pedagogy'.

The type of learning which overtly acknowledges these features has long been called Lifelong Action Learning (Kearney & Todhunter, 2015) and it is focused on by its adherents as learning from and for action so that human potential can be unlocked (Zuber-Skerritt & Teare, 2013). Does all this represent a viable basis for critical thinking? Is it possible to identify a single set of concepts or constructs which characterise thinking which is 'critical' within the problematical definitions with which we began? The probable and truthful answer is – no! The granular and specific attributes of thinking in general and thinking in specific contexts are co-existent and concurrent with the processes necessary for successful learning. One cannot exist or even be successfully conceptualised without the other. They are mutually and epistemologically contingent and inter-dependent. The things that thinking addresses and the manner in which they are organised are too great and diverse to be collapsed and synthesised within a single category. Of course this is not to deny the immense value of clusters and thematised concepts which have helped our understanding of social life. To name but a very few: alienation and anomie, the existential self; self-consciousness; the horizon of relevance; achieving individuality; knowledge explosion; globalisation; the anthropocene age (Vince, 2016); blue collar revolt; de-industrialisation; robotisation; climate change; poverty of aspirations; value freedom and so on and so forth. These are of course only random examples of synoptic concepts or clustered ideas and not single concepts or ideas. Nevertheless they represent a formulation of sorts for critical thinking rooted in conceptual matters even when the distinctions between individual concepts and process of learning are elided. Without concepts there can be no critical thinking and the identification of the critical concepts remains a key task for those who believe learning and thinking should be for a social result.

Personal Commitment and Learning

The second approach to a critical curriculum suggests that acquiring knowledge of the world, including scientific discovery, is a 'personal' matter. This particular perspective is not concerned with the view that knowledge of the self or of one's own self is centre stage, however important that may be. Michael Polanyi, for example, thought that science relied a great deal on tacit knowledge and that knowing was active comprehension of the things known and that this required skill and engagement (Polanyi, 1974). Tacit knowledge played a critical role in the development of expertise as did the role of personal commitment. Immersion in a field of practice is required for scientific knowledge to be progressed. A sense of the self being 'situated' in a social context and environment and having a commitment to an external object or purpose in the world is therefore necessary for critical thinking as we have defined it here. This view would also take in the significance of work-based and 'professional' learning espoused by Michael Eraut (1994) and also of voluminous work on adult learning. We can cite for example the inspiring contributions of Paulo Freire (1972) Ira Shor (1980) and David Watson and Richard Taylor (1998) where the emphasis is on the emerging contexts of creative forms of knowledge and learning 'immersion' in problem solving within the wider sense of community and within universities themselves. Personal commitment and engagement presupposes that learners at any age or stage take some responsibility for their own learning, and this is an element of critical thinking which demands self-directed and self-critical activity. Self-directed learning is present when "… the learner is characterised by responsibility for and critical awareness of, his or her own learning processes and outcomes, a high level of autonomy in performing learning activities and solving problems associated with the learning task …" (Higgs, 1993: 122).

Learning tasks and problem solving are of course not restricted to the academy or the classroom. Daily life, the experience of communities challenged with issues, and the struggles to survive and prosper demonstrate the importance of values and community practices which are part of everyday life. These practices are pervasive and run deep for many people

enabling them to survive and overcome adversity. It is equally the case that dominant and collectivist traditions and values may be authoritarian, orthodox, and intolerant and they may in fact contribute to the problems rather than helping overcome them. The application of knowledge, scientific or otherwise is no guarantee that change will come about or that learning opportunities widely shared will bring about desired outcomes. The extension of mass-higher education in the West and in China can thus far hardly have said to have led to solutions to the big problems, wicked and otherwise, faced by the dominant liberal hyper-consumer forms of capitalism and which appear intent on wrecking the planetary environment, climate and ecology with its search for never-ending economic growth. The active involvement of learners however, in the learning process and in self-actualising their own capacities for what Teare has called "personal viability" (Teare, 2013) is surely a key to identifying the problems we experience and the likely route to solutions. Within this perspective critical thinking takes place within a personal and social context. This can be within a family most typically, within a community and a collective life of some sort involving others who share that culture and environment. The knowledge 'objects' for developing learning capacities are typically focused on the problems of daily life and existence, notably for many poor people, the struggle to feed, clothe and educate their families. Given the right circumstances and support, individuals can hope to acquire 'personal capital', that is to say, the skills and ideas necessary to prosper in an uncertain and perhaps hostile environment. This is not an expression of the hyper-individualisation which we can see in some aspects of western culture. It is an illustration of how aspects of self-directed learning and critical thinking can be involved in educational change which leads to an improved social result and even the development or enhancement of economic viability for poor people. Surely this is capable of informing our understanding of engagement in higher education and beyond.

Thinking within a critical curriculum therefore directs us to the idea of self-discovery; a valuing of personal discovery and learning how to solve problems. It suggests learners should be encouraged to experiment and to engage with others whilst being self-reliant. Mutual learning and respect for others is allied to tolerance for differences. These capacities and abilities and the values they carry with them can be thought of as helping the development of a viable sense of self, especially for children and young people who are vulnerable at key stages of their social and emotional development. This can be especially problematical where traditional and conservative cultures face the challenges of modernism (Shamshoum, 2015; Dwairy, 2006). Critical thinking engages with new forms of knowledge and is an encounter with a social environment which presupposes the development of a viable sense of self for each learner, by which we mean the learner should be as Alan Rogers has argued: "free in their own learning" (Rogers, 1986: 75). Critical thinking then confers a certain sort of power at an individual level; the individual becomes an epistemological subject and can define issues and problems which can be freely explored. This must leave space for the idea that expert knowledge can be challenged by knowledgeable subjects who may possess few formal qualifications. Critical thinking finds space and scope for life experience and existential dilemmas to enter the frame or horizon of learning. A learner with critical thinking skills will have the skills and the personal capacities to change their own situation in so far as such change is objectively possible. Where such possibilities exist, cognitive, social, emotional, and collaborative contexts will shape the nature and content of critical thinking. Where such possibilities do not in fact exist it is surely the task of educationalists to create them or help to bring them into existence.

Reflexive Criticality

Key to our understanding of critical thinking is a third discourse around critical thinking that problematises our existing knowledge and allows us to talk openly about the issues facing us. There are questions which test our humanity and our democratic rights and they may test the stability and relevance of our democratic institutions. Who belongs in a society, a community or a nation is a question with the potential for doing precisely this. Critical thinking will undoubtedly open up new possibilities whilst challenging at the same moment some of the sacralised beliefs

and shibboleths of our society, such as the market-driven dash for growth which fuels our economies or the privileged treatment of religious believers.

Having outlined the objective issues there is still the question of how we begin to develop a critical curriculum. Our answer surely has been about what kind of learning is needed and which skills are the critical ones. We have already argued that critical thinking is 'social knowledge' for action. It involves self-awareness and awareness of others. Cognitive knowledges are required plus skills to reclaim 'reality' and address the big issues. It is about environmental issues and challenges and is problem focused for transformations. At least some of the types of propositional knowledge, for example, some of the discipline bound and conventional subject-based approaches have to be transformed into knowledge for change and emancipation. This is the essence of critical thinking!

However, critical thinking must be reflexively critical — thus: "a critical theory is itself always part of the object–domain which it describes" (Guess, 1981: 55). This means it has to be "reflectively acceptable" (Guess, 1981: 56) — and thus it can give an account of its own context of origin and an explanation of its use or applicability by those who use it. The engagement of the leader-teacher(s) and learners can be explicitly managed and developed on these grounds. This means that if the transformation of learning that is required is to occur in real life situations and problems, then it would be rational for the learners and teachers to adopt critical thinking. As a reflexive intellectual act it is thus capable of defending and explaining itself, its origins and to some degree its meaning for those on whose behalf it claims to be knowledge.

Critical thinking thus has a special standing as a guide for action. The claim is — that users of critical thinking are able to shape their own interests and this can be emancipatory. Critical thinking is 'reflective' and gives a person a distinctive type of knowledge which is liberatory. It can never be dogma, however, since it is always subject to critique itself. We suggest then that critical thinking has to be about cognitive developments. However, it is also about 'reflective cognition' for learners which suggests that it is rational or would be rational (and beneficial) if such learning were to be encouraged and adopted.

One crucial aspect of critical thinking concerns the existence and challenges to authoritarianism and repressive aspects of a culture. The way that self-reflection works is to make people aware of what shapes their actions and thinking. Such awareness is a pathway for the individual to being a cognitive subject who can criticise his/her own beliefs. "Human agents don't merely have and acquire beliefs, they also have ways of criticising and evaluating their own beliefs" (Guess, 1981: 61). This is the start of becoming a person who is an 'epistemic subject', that is to say, a learner who is able to evaluate beliefs and values and act on the results of thinking (Seidman, 1998: 340). It is also a re-statement that reason and critical knowledge can make a difference and is still the means for social advancement and social progress. Communicative contact is the key. For teachers, the implications are that we use knowledge within our practice and we build pedagogy round it as an expression of our authentic criticality and critical thinking. We suggest that this is an authentic task for any university but especially for the Co-operative University.

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