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Chapter 7

# Critical Language Awareness: Opening Spaces for Educational Praxis in Turbulent Times of Transition and Crisis

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## 1. Introduction

In times of stability, it is relatively easy – or so it seems – to educate students for a 'known' future. My argument in this chapter is that we live in a time of multiple transitions (Rotmans, 2015), multiple crises (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Wahl, 2016; Sayer, 1994; Harvey, 2000; Jessop, 2012) and an unknown future. We are heading for an unknown future which, because of climate change, in its two extremes may either end in complete destruction or may be shaped by a shift towards a new sustainable balance: either a breakdown or a breakthrough (Wahl, 2016). Turbulent times tend to be fertile podia for a wide array of narratives that seek to make sense of the crisis, and which present imaginaries about the future. According to Jessop (2002), capitalism develops in a sequence of spatio-temporal fixes that each end in a crisis and then lead to competing narratives.

> "In times of crisis there is an intersection of diverse economic, political and sociocultural narratives that seek to give meaning to current problems by construing them in terms of past failures and future possibilities. Differential social forces in the private and public domains propose new visions, projects, programs and policies (...) As symptoms of crisis gather, however, a struggle for hegemony (or at least dominance) begins to establish new accumulation strategies, state projects or hegemonic projects. These economic and political conflicts concern not only the distribution of the costs of crisis-management but also the appropriate policies to escape from the crisis" (Jessop, 2002, p. 92-93).

Crucial for this chapter is the understanding that narratives of this kind – or the struggles for hegemony between such narratives – are not always transparent. Narratives tend to be selective and may involve ideological interests that tend to serve the interests of those in power. As a result, problems may be framed in a particular way so as to legitimise the envisioned solutions and

to exclude – or ignore – alternative solutions. Problems – or solutions – may be based on false knowledge (Wodak, 2009) and present a simplified perspective with false either/or dilemmas. Ideological interests becomes apparent when the struggle for hegemony emerges that pushes some narratives to the frontline, while excluding others. This happens, for example, when advocated narratives are presented as 'natural' or 'inevitable.' The dominant narrative becomes the 'new normality,' which may then form the basis for a new spatio-temporal fix that will become dominant for the next decades. This time around, the choice of direction is crucial in the sense that it may make the difference between the destruction of life on earth or the finding of a new balance. It is therefore important to develop a well-grounded understanding of these kind of narratives. This chapter claims that it is important for the educational community – and for society at large – to develop sufficient *critical language awareness* in order to be able to *both* critically analyse *and* evaluate existing narratives. In addition, it is important to be able to *articulate* our own narratives so as to be empowered to participate in this process of imagining and co-creating the future (Kress, 2000; Harvey, 2000).

My[1] concrete objectives for this chapter are as follows. First of all, I seek to create an awareness and a basic understanding of the crises and transitions in which we find ourselves, coupled with an understanding of the potential ideological nature of the many present-day narratives that are concerned with the design of a new future. I present some of the epistemological, ontological and moral choices and dilemmas contained in these narratives. I make a distinction between narratives that continue the Newtonian perspective, separating humans from the ecological system, and narratives that advocate a biological, interdependent vision. Following Naess (1989), the former are seen as expressing a 'shallow ecology,' while the latter are designated as examples of a 'deep ecology' (see also Capri & Luisi, 2014). I illustrate this distinction through a discussion of the opposite ways in which two mayors of Barcelona designed their metropolis as a SMART city, and the consequences of these opposite policies for the constitution of Barcelona and the agency of its citizens.

Secondly, I seek to open up a space for critical language awareness (CLA) (Fairclough, 1992; Rogers, 2008) in the school curriculum, and for some basic principles of critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Fairclough 1989, 1992, 1995, 2003, 2006; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Montesano Montessori, Schuman & De Lange, 2012; Montesano Montessori, Farrelly & Mulderrig, 2019) in the educational curriculum. I provide examples of how such new curriculum

1 See section 2 for details about my position as an author.

elements could enrich the subjects of language, citizenship and digital literacy in particular, and explain why they should effectively form a basis for all other subjects.

My third and final objective is to help emancipate the educational community of which I am a member, by explaining how both CDA and CLA provide us with agency – not only as professionals, but also as citizens. CDA, as a transdisciplinary research paradigm that investigates how language and discourse contribute to the preservation or transformation of power relations in social contexts, can help us understand that we are endowed with agency. In this way, CDA can help us see how we are also equipped with the capacity to investigate, give feedback on, support, negotiate or contest new narratives and policies. As a research paradigm, CDA can help us mediate between alternatives. CDA's more concrete application, CLA, provides us with the tools to analyse and evaluate existing narratives, and to articulate our own narratives. Especially when we combine CLA with participatory action research, it can become a powerful tool for participation in the public sphere, and for taking innovation beyond the micro-level (Montesano Montessori & Schuman, 2015).

As an emergent result of the writing process that yielded this chapter, I offer the suggestion that this type of reflective and reflexive perspective on education actually opens up the space of educational praxis. Praxis, in a Gramscian sense, implies a transformation process where theory, thought and practice come together. As a process it is given form by a reciprocal relationship between teachers and pupils, in which the desire to learn and to make sense of the reality in which life is led takes centre stage. Put differently, praxis is a space where philosophy and history come together (Gramsci, 1971). From an Aristotelian point of view, praxis entails a moral disposition to act in a true, wise and just way, on the basis of which goals and means are always open to review. Praxis is therefore the space – or perhaps rather the realm – of *phronesis* and thus the domain of practical wisdom (Kemmis & Smith, 2008).

This chapter is structured as follows. In section 2, I explain my author position. Section 3 gives a brief overview of the crises and transitions in which we currently find ourselves. Section 4 offers an introductory study of the present-day narratives that are concerned with the design of a new future, and provides an overview of the identified dilemmas and radical choices that we are facing. Section 5 presents a case study that centres on two competing perspectives on the design of Barcelona as a SMART (or smart) city. Sections 6 and 7 respectively describe CDA and CLA, and contain suggestions for the improvement of the educational curriculum. Section 8 suggests how CDA and CLA can help us to create a meaningful educational praxis. Section 9 presents the final conclusions.

## 2. My Position as an Author

This chapter is written from my perspective as a reflective educational professional. In that occupational role I count myself as an insider in the group for which I am primarily writing: students, teachers, and other professionals in the education sector.[2] As a chapter it is based on the research experience I accumulated analysing future-oriented narratives in social movements, social entrepreneurship and political parties over the past two decades (Montesano Montessori 2009, 2011, 2016b, 2019; Montesano Montessori & Morales López, 2015, 2019). During this period, I specialised in critical discourse analysis at Lancaster University (UK) (Montesano Montessori, 2009). Although CDA is a specialised field in linguistics, I felt that I was accumulating knowledge and insights that seemed so widely relevant, that, in my view, at least the basics of it should be part of a widespread public understanding. We should all have a basic understanding of the discursive nature of social – and even physical – reality.

Since discourses and social structures are mutually constitutive, CDA analyses the relations between discourse, ideology and power (see section 6 for details). In retrospect, the dual track of writing a thesis as a part-time PhD student at Lancaster University, while continuing to exercise my profession as a teacher trainer in a vocational college in Utrecht, significantly shaped my perspective not only on CDA, but also on my identity as a practitioner in various ways. Through my work as a practitioner, I developed a keen understanding and appreciation for the eminently practical character and potential applications of CDA. I saw these possibilities not only for CDA as a research methodology, but also for its use as an instrument to make sense of the world, and to become an engaged agent of that world. Particularly during the years while I worked as head of the Spanish department – being jammed between higher management and a rather eloquent 'work floor' – I personally observed and experienced the real-life ramifications of the theories on power that I was studying in Lancaster. This experience helped me to develop a sharpened understanding of CDA and of the theoretical fields in which it is embedded. At a later stage, when I conducted an action research project in Utrecht, these experiences enabled me to develop a methodology to put CDA

2 Writing this chapter was an uphill journey. I wish to acknowledge my colleagues and friends for their supportive suggestions: Catherine van Beuningen, Tom Bartlett, Michel Dingarten, Rob de Lange, George Lengkeek, Koen Wessels and – very particularly – Daniela Caterina. Any remaining weaknesses are the responsibility of the author.

to work in a combination with participatory action research (Montesano Montessori & Ponte, 2011; Montesano Montessori & Schuman, 2015).

This dual track of accumulating professional experience alongside specialised knowledge in CDA, also had an impact on my identity as a reflective professional. I developed an increased sense of responsibility to share the knowledge I was gaining with the educational community of which I was a member. Putting this in practice, I wrote a book to make the basic principles of CDA accessible to the Dutch public (Montesano Montessori, Schuman & De Lange, 2012). In the turbulent times we are living now, I feel that sense of responsibility again, which leads me to the writing of this chapter, from my perspective as a reflective professional and researcher. The material it contains is not derived from a fixed corpus of narratives or a meticulous analysis, as opposed to the approach taken in my previous work (references above). In building my argument, I brought together relevant theories, knowledge I acquired from earlier research projects, together with personal observations and reflections. In compiling my argument, I used authors that I am thoroughly familiar with (such as Jessop, Sayer, Harvey, Fairclough, Maturana and Gramsci), who I brought into dialogue with ecological theories based on systems thinking (Wahl, Capra & Luisi), which were new to me. The dialogue I created between familiar and relatively new theories, together with the inspiration I gained during a detailed reading of the other chapters in this volume, led to a rather organic – initially unintended – opening of another educational space: the space of educational praxis (see section 8).

## 3. Living in a World of Multiple Transitions and Crises

### *3.1. An Era of Multiple Transitions*

The British sociologist Anthony Giddens (2014) points out that we live in a time of transition. He defines our time as an era characterised by high risks and high opportunities, both at an unprecedented scale. Technology has led to processes of time-space distantiation and time-space compression, and provides us with access to enormous quantities of information, advanced transportation means and what not. However, this technological progression also carries risks, like the (too) rapidly changing environments due to accelerated migration patterns, the increased flux of viruses, the psychological stress of being overwhelmed with too much information, and the signs of an accelerating climate change. A highly serious risk is posed by the fact that nowadays we seem to have entered a post-truth era. One consequence of such an era is that facts are often dismissed as false when they are perhaps inconvenient. At the same time, false news – or alternative facts – are deliberately distrib-

uted through the social media. In such a societal climate, political struggles no longer centre on facts, but rather on false representations, emotions and beliefs. Hannah Arendt (1951) warned against such a societal constellation: when truth can no longer be distinguished from what is false or fake, the stage is opened to authoritarian rule.

Jan Rotmans, a professor of transition studies at the Erasmus University Rotterdam, describes that contemporary society (in which he refers to the Netherlands and other Western European countries) is going through a period of prolonged, decades-long socio-economic transition. This transition is threefold. First, a transition is taking place from a vertical, hierarchical, centralised society to a horizontal, decentralised, networked society. As a result, previously established institutions are gradually being replaced by decentralised communities, cooperatives and other physical and social networks.[3] Secondly, the domain of economy is undergoing a fundamental change, shaped by decentralisation and digitalisation processes. New technology facilitates decentralised production away from the traditional workplaces and factories. The new economy is smarter and cleaner than the traditional one. Thirdly, there is a shift in power structures. Power used to be top-down, but now increasingly emerges bottom-up. When multiple transitions such as these take place, generations find themselves in the rare situation of living through the change of an era, rather than witnessing a more stable era of change (Rotmans, 2015, pp. 11-20). Rotmans points out that – on a macro level – these transitions occur in a period of world-wide crisis.

### *3.2. An Era of Multiple Crises*

We live in times of massive and profound crises. Jessop (1990, 2002) has described capitalist development as a succession of different economic models, or spatio-temporal fixes, in which each particular economic model entails a specific social logic in a specific time and place. To give an example, Fordism and its nationalist approach which focused on the production of goods and the creation of the welfare state, was a stable economic model in the 1950s-1960s, but entered a crisis in the 1970s. In the decades that followed, we entered the era of the global, neoliberal free market economy, which is global – although also local – in scale, and which focuses on a financial economy and the production of knowledge and services. The transition

3 Gee (2000) describes distributed systems that are fragmented and networked within different entities. See Castells (1996) on the 'network' society. Harvey (2000) rethinks the future in terms of dialectical utopianism, shaped by a politics of collectivity and communality. See also: Birch & Cobb, 1981.

from Fordism to the neoliberal free market economy meant a shift from a welfare economy to a workfare economy, which aimed for an entrepreneurial citizen, while state power was supposed to facilitate the free market economy. While the free market system was expected to bring welfare and democracy around the world, it failed to live up to its promises. In 2008 it led to the biggest financial crisis since the 1930s. As an economic model, it has led to social and political crises due to untenable levels of inequality, poverty, social insecurity and illness. The neoliberal model has disrupted the political system and caused a general distrust of institutions among citizens, including the media, academia and science. It has accelerated climate change, which manifested itself through global warming, massive wildfires, droughts and rising sea levels. The systematic destruction of natural resources and the unlimited traffic of people and goods that neoliberalism entails has also been the cause of the pandemics of the 21st century: SARS, MERS, AIDS, and currently: the coronavirus that causes the COVID-19 disease (Capra & Luisi, 2014; Harvey, 2000; Sayer, 2014). The climate change also brings with it an existential crisis because it threatens the survival of life on planet earth, including human civilisation. Neoliberal logic modelled man as a rational, economic being: the *homo economicus*. It has created pressure to privatise the public sphere by seeking maximal efficiency through competition (Jessop 2002; Sayer, 2014). As an economic model, it has also imposed its business-oriented logic on traditionally non-profit public institutions, such as education and healthcare.

We addressed some of the consequences of this model in our previous volume (Bakker & Montesano Montessori, 2016). The free market economy has proven to be amoral. Previous frontiers between 'left' and 'right' were now blurred, which resulted in a political consensus (Montesano Montessori, 2016a). We suggested that this could well be regarded as a threat to the pluralist middle that Arendt has identified as the essential part of politics (Arendt, 1998; Zuurmond, 2016).

## 4. On the Crossroads Towards the Future: Ontological, Epistemological and Moral Dilemmas

In this section I present some of the ontological, epistemological and moral dilemmas that I have identified in the present-day narratives concerned with the design of a new future. As pointed out earlier, I will describe these from the perspective of a reflective professional. This section provides both the motivation and the legitimation for my emphasis on the need for critical language awareness, for its implementation in educational curricula, and for its distribution in wider society.

*4.1. Ontological Choices and Dilemmas*

The narratives circulating in society today can roughly be divided into two categories. On the one hand, there are the narratives that continue the tradition of Newtonian science, in which human beings are separated from nature, the mind from matter, and a linear cause-and-effect logic is maintained. As distinctly anthropocentric narratives, which adopt a world-as-machine metaphor, they express in the terminology of Naess (1989) a so-called 'shallow ecology' (see also Lengkeek, this volume). On the other hand, there are the narratives based on the discoveries of system thinking, which represent life as an interdependent, self-organising system. As narratives they exemplify a so-called 'deep ecology' (Capra & Luisi 2014, p. 33). An example of 'shallow ecology' are the current notions of *trans-humanity* in which science foresees the future possibility of supporting human beings physically and cognitively by technological means. A concrete example may be the control of illness through biotechnological interventions – such as the re-writing of human DNA – to improve human health and to extend physical and cognitive capacities (Bostrom, 2005, quoted from Molpeceres, 2017, p. 209). Narratives of this kind include imaginaries of post-humanity, a technological future in which the human mind gets fully separated from the body. The eventual result would be a post-human: a being that is part human and part machine, as the technologised successor of the organic homo sapiens (Graham, 2002). These imaginaries open the way to new identities, such as cyborg entities or *robo sapiens* (Molpeceres 2017, p. 209; Gee, 2000).

This particular field definitely generates new opportunities, but also unknown risks, because of the new power it brings, including the potential to alienate ourselves from our bodies (Kress, 2000, p. 157). These developments also entail further social risks, such as new forms of inequality, the domination of humans by self-thinking machines (including weapons), violation of human privacy and forms of bio-control (Foucault, 1995).

Deep ecological narratives tend to find their basis in the discoveries of the Santiago school of science (Maturana & Varela, 1989). This Chilean school paved the way to systems thinking, which marked a radical break with the Descartian and Newtonian paradigm. The biologists of the Santiago school discovered that life on earth is united in a system that consists of patterns, flows, cycles and self-organising organisms. This latter phenomenon is known as 'autopoiesis' (see also Lengkeek, this volume). This concept denotes the biological core phenomenon that cells and other living organisms organise and develop themselves in interaction with their environment. Living organisms act on, and reshape their environment and themselves in view of their survival. All this takes place within an – equally – self-regulating biosphere. Through

neurological research – and by drawing on the work of Bateson (1972) – Maturana and Varela furthermore recognised that the mind is a *process* rather than a thing, which is, moreover, fundamentally *embodied*, and thus directly connected with bodily experience. Human cognition, therefore, is constructed in continuous dialogue with biological, cultural and emotional experiences. Capra (1996) further developed this new paradigm into the metaphor of the 'web of life,' in which the human species is embedded. Harvey (2000), who bases himself on Capra (1996) and Birch and Cobb (1981), adopts this metaphor as the most promising narrative in the 'witches brew' of competing perspectives on the current ecological crisis. For him, the advantage of this metaphor is that it does not represent a linear perspective according to which we might reach the end of (human) life on the planet. In agreement with Wilson (1998), he suggests that we are facing "a series of environmental bottlenecks" which are mostly due to human intervention (Harvey, 2000, p. 221). Harvey proposes the following definition of the human species: "We are a species on earth like any other, endowed, like any other, with specific capacities and powers that are used to modify environments in ways that are conductive to our own sustenance and reproduction. (...) We are sensory beings in a metabolic relation to the world around us" (p. 207). Following Naess (1989) Harvey advocates a necessary transition from a narrow, ineffective, egotistical concept of 'self' to a broader conception of Self that exists in an internal relation with all other elements of the natural world (p. 224). Wahl (2016) in turn envisions – and contributes to – a shift towards a regenerative culture, by articulating a narrative of interbeing (p. 196) (see also Wessels, this volume).

The dilemma then is, which of the two versions – deep or narrow ecology – will become dominant?

### *4.2. Epistemological Choices and Dilemmas*

Present-day narratives that seek the remedy in a continuation of the current system, are also the narratives that affirm the possibility of unlimited growth and unrestricted exploitation of natural resources. These kinds of narratives see the effects of climate change, such as the melting of the ice caps for example, as new opportunities that are arising to gain access to supplementary resources. Deep ecologists, however, advocate ways to move from an 'objective' to an 'epistemic' science, concerned with the understanding of the essential characteristics and dynamics of living systems. In this type of ecology, validity is found through *intersubjectivity* between different scientists. Drawing on systems thinking, deep ecologists furthermore regard cognition as inseparable from the phenomenon of autopoiesis and from the environment in which it exists, and by which it is also shaped (Capra & Luisi, 2014).

Luhmann (1990) transposed the idea of physical autopoiesis into social autopoiesis, which gave rise to the idea of organisations as self-organising categories. This new way of looking opens the way to a different organisational structure, in which self-adaption and learning systems are central.

As pointed out above, the main dilemma is which system will become dominant in the nearby future: a system that continues to propagate a disembodied mechanic perspective, or a relatively new embodied autopoietic system? Polanyi (2009) has issued a warning that detached knowledge and technology may turn itself against humanity. Taking a deep ecological perspective, Capra and Luisi (2014) argue that we need to transcend the mechanistic view of organisations, economy and biotechnology if human civilisation is to survive. Today there is a need for the development of eco-literacy, so that learning from living systems becomes distributed in the various layers of society and we are able to align our production and consumption patterns with those of living systems (Capra, 1996).

From a deep ecological perspective, the conclusion is that epistemology and ontology can no longer be seen as separate. Living organisms are inherently cognitive and develop not only themselves, but also the environments that help them to survive, in a continuous self-organising autopoietic process. Harvey (2000) argues that today there is a need to *translate* and merge different languages (managerial, legal, philosophical, artistic, popular) in order to create a platform for a common understanding, which may give rise to new imaginaries. Without such a translation and merging process, authoritarianism and discursive violence might set the rules and restrictions (Harvey 2000, p. 215). Bringing this latter development to a halt is one of the main reasons why this chapter is written.

### *4.3. Moral Concerns*

The viewpoints outlined above raise a series of questions and future perspectives that are explicitly moral in nature. Harvey (2000) raises a fundamental moral question: now that human beings have acquired the ability to influence evolution, who do we want to be? How do we want to relate to and interact with other species? Do we choose to play a destructive role, or do we assume a responsibility towards the eco-system on which we depend? In the current situation, human beings need to become aware of their dialectic relationships with other species, and of their responsibility towards them (Harvey, 2000). Wahl (2016) envisions a new human stage in which we use our reflective consciousness to creatively support life processes in a regenerative culture. Some authors argue for the creation of a moral economy that supports social and biological life rather than exploiting it (Sayer, 2000, 2014; Rotmans, 2015).

The bioengineering involved in trans- and posthumanism raises many moral questions. How far do we want to go in the manipulation of birth and death? What about cloning? Do we morally have the right to continue and (re)shape human nature as we see fit?

An unreflective continuation of current technology will undoubtedly lead to disaster. As Bohm (1996) puts it: if ordinary technology has caused so much damage, then how much more damage can we expect from biotechnology?

The following section presents a case study to illustrate these dilemmas.

## 5. A Case Study: Barcelona as a SMART – or Smart – City

SMART cities normally involve six action areas: mobility, economy, living, environment, governance and citizens. In each SMART city project, digital data is continuously being collected to run these services. SMART cities can be put in place through public or private investments, or a combination of both. In all these cities, the question arises to whom this data belongs and what guarantees of privacy are being offered, if indeed any. While the objectives of SMART cities can easily be praised as a major technological achievement, such objectives also raise major questions. Such questions relate to the underlying perspectives, values and motivations, as well as tricky matters such as who provides the technology, which party 'owns' the data, and issues of privacy and power. The example of Barcelona can provide us with an illustration.

Xavier Trias, a centre-right politician who was mayor of Barcelona from July 2011 to 2015, sought to market Barcelona as 'Barcelona, SMART city' during his term of office. His goal was to make Barcelona into a leading city within the international network of SMART cities, on par with cities like Bologna, London and Genova. The purpose was to improve the quality of life of the citizens through the installation of a free WIFI network and virtual desks for Citizen's Advice Services (Trias, 2011). Trias' more far-reaching objectives were to reactivate the city's economy and improve employment rates. He situated the project in the long industrial tradition of Catalonia, presenting the SMART city plan as a continuation of the past. Ada Colau, on the other hand, a former activist and progressive politician who has been the mayor of Barcelona since 2015, has defended a very different position in regard to the city. According to Colau and her deputies, a smart (as opposed to SMART) city hinges on its citizens, on their way of life and activity, citizens whom she represents first and foremost as neighbours. Colau focuses on the collective intelligence and accumulated wisdom emerging from the day-to-day interactions and discussions between human beings who live in the same place, in

this case: Barcelona. These neighbours are the only parties with the collective ability to make Barcelona into a smart city (Molpeceres, 2017).

Colau's perspective points to the transition in power structures that is described by Rotmans (2015): a transition to horizontal, self-organising communities that stand in a dialogical relationship to the authorities, in this case the city mayor. Colau regards citizens first and foremost as neighbours, who have the ability to make sense of their environment and to (re-)create their environment in regard to (moral) practices, rules and regulations. In contrast, Trias' perspective hinges on the assumption that citizens are dependent on access to jobs and a digital infrastructure. Colau's narrative comes close to the deep ecology perspective described above, through her emphasis on self-organising, interrelated citizens who shape their own urban environment. Trias' perspective, on the other hand, seems to be a further development of the fragmented, disconnected, disembodied perspective of the shallow ecology tradition.

These opposite policies seem to run parallel with the discourses on lifelong learning in the EU. Previous EU leaders Edgar Faure and Jacques Delors had designed a form of scientific humanism that would prepare European citizens for the upcoming challenges of a globalised society. In contrast, the EU saw citizens as 'human capital' in which institutions should invest. This latter model implicitly defined social inclusion as employability (Montesano Montessori, 2016a).

Parallels of this kind demonstrate that the differences found between the policies of two mayors of Barcelona are recurring outlooks. What is at stake are competing perspectives on the primacy of either human beings (Colau; Faure and Delors) or of digital technology (Trias, the EU) in future-oriented policies. The problem is that technological solutions, which may seem efficient, are nevertheless not neutral, in the sense that they are incapable of implementing morality and involve serious risks. Moreover, once technological solutions obtain a dominant role, they are difficult to control.

Below, I will present the different ways in which CDA and CLA can help us to navigate our way between competing narratives, and help us articulate our voice in the choir.

## 6. Critical Discourse Analysis

In CDA, discourse is viewed as a social practice. As a transdisciplinary research paradigm, it provides us with the tools to analyse how discourses operate in a dialectical relationship with the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) that frame them (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). In this connection, a dis-

course[4] can be defined as a 'network of spoken and written texts within a specific social domain,' for instance the court system, education or the religious sphere. In this way, discourses are understood as being dialectically related to other social phenomena such as institutions, power relations, values and beliefs, material practices and social relations (Fairclough, 2003, 2006; Harvey, 1996). Discourses are partly framed by institutions, but on the other hand help to reconstruct or change these very institutions. In recent decades, for example, we have experienced how a managerial business discourse has been imposed on public institutions such as hospitals, schools and universities (see Biesta, 2011, pp. 59-70 for the effect of this managerial business discourse on education).

It is precisely this notion of a 'dialectic relation' between discourse and other elements of the social fabric that makes CDA such an interesting research paradigm for the purposes of this chapter. CDA provides us with tools and mechanisms to *investigate* existing discourses rather than taking them for granted. In this way, CDA sheds light on the phenomenon of how language represents, and also constitutes, social reality. Returning to the example of Barcelona city design: former mayor Xavier Trias, through his discourse, constitutes citizens as passive beings that are dependent on a digital infrastructure, while his successor Ada Colau, through her discourse, constitutes citizens as interdependent neighbours who are capable of shaping their urban environment. As such, CDA offers a systematic method to investigate narratives and discourses, to design alternatives, to make narratives and discourses work better for groups that do not benefit for them, etc. (see Morales López & Floyd (2017) on the constructive potential of discourse analysis).

To a certain extent, the notion of a discourse equips us with agency. More precisely, it equips us with the agency to engage in (critical) debates, design new futures, accommodate existing resources in different ways, and so on. At the same time, CDA provides us with a concise theory about discourse and power. Crucially, power operates behind discourses. The Secretary of Education, for example, has power over educational institutions. Power operates *in* discourses in the flow of conversations, namely in processes of turn-taking and debating. Moreover, discourses have constitutive power. If they are strong enough, they help constitute the reality they depict – as we have seen in the case study on city design in Barcelona. However, not all discourses are fully effective or fully accepted. In fact, discourses are likely to be sites of

4 In my previous work I suggested that discourses are more closely related to 'structure,' while narratives are more closely related to 'agency' and, indeed, are a tool for maintaining or changing the status quo (Montesano Montessori, 2009).

social struggle, fields where differences meet. Lastly, discourses are never fully closed (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985; Mouffe, 2003).

## 7. Critical Language Awareness

In a next step, we look at CLA. CLA is a practical application of CDA that was developed in the early 1990s, as a result of the effort to further develop language awareness (LA), a discipline that was developed in the UK in the 1980s. As a discipline, LA was designed to raise the knowledge level of the public about the value and nature of languages. This type of knowledge dissemination was considered necessary to raise the literacy levels achieved in school education, and to give the public more understanding of the value that can be found in the wealth of languages that are spoken in the increasingly multicultural Western societies. This insight was meant to counter racism and stimulate social harmony (Cots & Garrett, 2018). CLA was developed in the UK in the 1990s in addition to LA, in order to make citizens and professionals more knowledgeable about the relationship between language and power and, for instance, the *ideological* aspects of language. To return to our earlier example: the inconsistency between Xavier Trias' claim that his project was a continuation of Catalonia's industrial past and his actual goal of making Barcelona a SMART city within the network of SMART cities across Europe, might point to an ideological construction.

Part of the reason for designing CLA was the consideration that mere LA implicitly legitimises existing language practices by presenting them as 'simply the ways things are done.' CLA, on the other hand, provides us with tools to understand how, in texts[5], identities are constructed, differences are mediated, and for understanding what the underlying values of a text are. In this way, CLA can help shift the current emphasis on critical thinking – a 21st century skill that involves higher category thinking – to actual *critiquely [sic]* thinking: the ability to critically question existing systems of power (Gee, 2000, p. 62). For these very reasons, CLA was considered as a resource that democratic citizens were *entitled* to (Fairclough, 1992), and this chapter suggests that this is still the case today. Once the concept of a narrative is understood, *counter-narratives* may be produced. As a discipline, CLA stimulates the development of independent thinking and personal courage, a process that is linked to the 'unicity' that Gert Biesta advocates and perhaps the 'natality' that Hannah Arendt envisioned. In the following subsections, I will

5 The term 'text' may refer to written or oral texts, but also to other semiotic expressions such as films, drawings (such as cartoons), blogs, vlogs and so on.

provide suggestions as to how CLA can be integrated into – or used for the further development of – current curricula in the fields of civic education (or *Bildung*, see the chapters of Zuurmond and Wessels, this volume), languages and digital literacy.[6]

### *7.1. CLA in* Bildung

For classes that centre on *Bildung*, citizenship, or subjects such as world orientation[7], I suggest that teachers insert public narratives similar to those described in this chapter in their lesson plans, and make these into the topic of a discussion with their students. In launching such a discussion in the classroom, it is important to ensure that as many students as possible are involved. In connection with this, it is important to exploit the notion of diversity (see Wessels's case study in this volume as an example). Such a discussion would need to include a sense of *deliberative* communication, so as to encourage mutual interest in different points of view, a discussion about the pros and cons of different perspectives, and an investigation of underlying values and beliefs – while refraining from judgement. It may be helpful to bring forward majority and minority standpoints and to evaluate these with the students based on the arguments these standpoints present. In addition, the following questions provide a useful guideline: What do these ideas deliver for yourself, others and society at large? What are your underlying values and beliefs? Do these narratives really move in totally opposite directions? Can they co-exist? Can there be grounds for accepting positive elements from both narratives and for revising negative aspects of both? In a next phase, students could be invited to analyse their own arguments and values and beliefs, and to critically examine these with others in a mutual dialogue. The results can be discussed in class. When narratives and ideas about the future emerge in the discussion that become the object of consensus and shared enthusiasm, it would be worthwhile to turn these into a class project, so that students may experience how articulation can move from words to concrete designs, as a transformative practice. This idea fits very well with Wessels's notion of an

6 See Rogers (2008) for an introduction to CDA in education, and Wallace (2018) for further ideas.

7 Classes of this type may cover subjects such as history and geography. Think of classes focusing on urban planning, during which topics such as smart cities, new green zones, and problems and solutions related to climate change can be discussed. The chapters collected in this volume show that CLA is relevant for a wealth of perspectives and subjects, such as: *Bildung* (Zuurmond, Wessels), life orientation (Gustavsson, Van den Bergh), and the so-called 'hard sciences' (Lengkeek).

entangled relationship (this volume), and with the Gramscian notion of praxis that is described below.

### *7.2. CLA in Language Classes*

In order to evaluate existing narratives, a good programme for the analysis of arguments is essential.

CDA –as an underlying discipline – often uses the pragma-dialectic approach (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992). This approach includes a system to evaluate the validity of employed arguments and to identify fallacies. CDA, furthermore, has produced a different way of doing *practical* argument analysis, which strikes a balance between critical theory and deliberative theory. It is a method that takes goals, circumstances, values and means into account in its argumentative analysis (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012). Both systems are relevant for language classes: a practical exercise can be to analyse (implicit and explicit) arguments employed in advertisements, in cultural or political accounts, etc. Relevant questions to analyse texts from this perspective are: What is the topic of the text? How is this topic framed in the text? What is (are) the intended audience(s)? What alternative ways of writing about this topic are available or possible? What values are inserted in the text? Who or what is foregrounded / backgrounded or deleted? (Van Leeuwen, 1995). At a micro level, textual analysis can detect grammatical choices: the use of nominalisations (turning verbs into nouns, such as 'unemployment') or talking about statistics rather than real people and cases, thus excluding the 'living world': the men and women in society who are jobless.

### *7.3. Digital Literacy*

In classes that focus on digital literacy, students should be taught how to use social media and other technological apps properly. Social media have many advantages. They serve to be in touch with others. They are definitely a means for public discussion and, indeed, a huge platform for the dissemination and discussion of (counter-)narratives. Mindful of this, Kress (2000) stresses that social design – imaginaries for the future – should definitely be part of the contemporary curricula if we want to realise the promising, emancipatory potential of social media. A strong present-day example of a counter-narrative and what it can produce is the environmental activism of the Swedish teenager Gretha Tunberg, who inspires her generation to organise protests around the world and to push politicians to take action to counter climate change. However, social media also carry serious risks, in relation to privacy, misinformation, and unreliable sources. Therefore, students should receive instruction in the different ways that internet sources can be critically evalu-

ated and safely used. From a CLA point of view, digital literacy classes should also include awareness-raising about contemporary realities such as internet trolls and digital warfare (e.g., massive hacking, fake news, propaganda, complot theories), etc. Just as viruses and their itinerary can be traced back in detail through their RNA, trolls can be traced back through analysis of datasets and algorithms. While the former may be taught in the biology classes, the latter should be demonstrated in digital literacy classes. Topics such as social media, big data, algorithms, and their pros and their cons should be included in curricula and in discussions with students.

## 8. Towards an Educational Transformative Praxis and Participatory Inquiry

As individuals living in a time of multiple crises, we find ourselves entangled with the continuous reconfigurations of institutions and of ourselves as human agents. Our current social and ecological context is undergoing changes, and we need to make sense of these changes and find new ways to secure our long-term survival as a species – as all species must. As a transdisciplinary research paradigm, CDA is influenced by the philosophy of Antonio Gramsci (1971), who denies the Marxist idea that there would be a predetermined agent of change: the proletariat. Instead, Gramsci argues that innovative power can be wielded by all creative forces in a society, and especially by organic intellectuals and teachers. Organic intellectuals aspire to build a relationship with the communities or groups they work for, in order to improve the situation of the latter. Following this, organic intellectuals and their communities can then engage in *praxis*. Praxis, in a Gramscian sense, implies a process where thought, learning and transformation come together. Put differently, praxis is a space where philosophy and history come together (Gramsci, 1971, p. 349-350).

At this point, I would like to make a direct connection with the notion of an auto-poietic unit that is inherent to life. Living organisms are engaged in a continuous – partly cognitive – process to enact and improve their environment, in order to optimise their survival potential. The entangled, dialogic relationship of learning in which teachers and pupils interact, which allows them to learn with and from each other in a direct connection with their shared environment (see also Wessels, this volume), seems to me the best available structure we have for moving forward in uncertain and critical times. Gramsci furthermore stresses the importance of language as a carrier of culture and philosophy. In this connection, CDA and CLA qualify as good candidates to help make these transitions happen. As a research paradigm, CDA provides us with useful tools to analyse texts and discourses, in their relation with their

social context. Therefore, from a research perspective, CDA can help us take innovation beyond confined micro contexts (such as the classroom), expanding it to macro (policy) levels – a contemporary need that Biesta (2011) has identified. Put differently: although traditional forms of knowledge and education are still absolutely relevant, a need presents itself nowadays to develop an educational praxis that brings teachers and students together in the endeavour to jointly make sense of their current context, with the opportunities and challenges it brings. At the level of society at large, new organisational forms informed by a social autopoiesis, and inserted in a deep ecology, might prove helpful to move through the bottlenecks and challenges experienced today. Social autopoiesis can help create a breakthrough in the endeavour to move towards a more moral, sustainable and organic way of life, as compared to the ways of life that the mechanistic rationalist model of the past gave birth to. From an Aristotelian point of view, praxis entails a moral disposition informed by *phronesis* (Kemmis & Smith, 2008). This perspective on praxis as the space of practical wisdom would be an additional opportunity to give shape to an experimental, transformational school (see Wessels this volume), constituted by meaningful educational practices and mutual relations. This volume provides ample examples – so as to create organic, reflective and creative practice-oriented communities that can help develop the world and human society in harmony with the ecological system on which it depends.

## 9. Conclusions

This chapter maintains that we are living in a time of multiple crises and transitions. In this contribution, I have advocated the view that we should be honest about the turbulent times we live in, and strive to find ways to deal with this within our educational community. I have shared the resources with which I – as a reflective professional and researcher – am most familiar: CDA and CLA and related theories. With this chapter I set out to achieve three objectives. First, I sought to create an awareness and a basic understanding of the crises and transitions in which we find ourselves and of the related social narratives. I explained that these narratives – seen as expressing either a 'shallow' or a 'deep' ecology – represent ontological, epistemological and moral dilemmas. Deep ecology, especially 'systems thinking' based on the work of Bateson (1972) and Maturana and Varela (1989) draws attention to the cognitive nature of all biological life. Neurological research brings to light that cognition is embodied and develops itself through neurologic and bodily experience. The biological core phenomenon of self-organisation, named 'autopoiesis,' can in fact be transposed to social organisations, like schools for instance (Luhmann,

1990). The dilemma, however, is whether this powerful and promising narrative can prevail in the struggle with many other strong imaginaries for the future that express a shallow ecological perspective with its strong belief in technology and may constitute an ongoing threat to the survival of life on earth. This state of affairs leads to moral questions, which creates the need for deliberative practices and understandings in education.

My second objective was to present a transdisciplinary research paradigm, CDA, and its more concrete application, CLA, as relevant additions to contemporary school curricula. CLA provides us with the tools to analyse and evaluate existing narratives. I provided suggestions as to how CLA can be usefully integrated into current curricula in the fields of *Bildung*, languages and digital literacy, while stating that they are of crucial importance for all school subjects.

My third and final objective was to help emancipate the educational community, by explaining how CDA and CLA can provide us with agency as professionals. These disciplines provide us with means to analyse existing narratives and to articulate and disseminate supportive, alternative narratives or counter-narratives, and a methodology to put these into practice, at the very least in our immediate environment.

This chapter brought together theories of the social sciences (CDA, state theory, moral economy, social geography), as well as of biology and ecology. The resulting process of cross-fertilisation, together with the inspiration I drew from a detailed reading of the other chapters in this volume, led to the opening of the educational space of 'praxis' (Gramsci, 1971). Gramsci argues that organic intellectuals and teachers can play a transformational role when acting in partnership with the communities or groups they work for. It is in praxis that the unknown can be addressed in a joint procedure of inquiry and learning. This is a meaningful process, since it is a form of enactment: through it, theory, thought and action are put together with the inherent goal of an auto-poietic unit: improving one's environment so as to optimise one's survival potential.

The transitional, educational space advocated in this chapter, then, would help achieve the following transitions. It would guide the transition from an often rigid school system to an inquiring community of praxis, and the transformation of a prevalent subject (teacher) and object (student) relationship into a new entangled relationship, operating in the here and now. Furthermore, it would help with the transformation of a focus on rationality towards morality in the human disposition. Crucially, it would assist with the transformation of the dominant Newtonian exploitative mechanistic science into a new deep

ecology approach, that is in harmony with the ways biological and ecological systems function. Finally, it would guide the transformation of predictive school systems into schools that embody a creative, constitutive process of enacting, so as to build a platform to gradually shape an environment that will secure human survival and that of other living species, within the limits of the ecosystem.

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