Education as praxis

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One response to the current educational landscape which is dominated by a "performative audit culture" (Comber & Nixon, 2011, p. 168) is to reconceptualise learning and teaching as forms of praxis. To do so, we argue, is to situate these practices as part of a social and educational approach to education writ large, rather than an instrumentalist and technicist approach to the institution of schooling. Learning and teaching as praxis, then, is concerned with the possibilities for education in an era of schooling. Kemmis, Wilkinson, Edwards-Groves, Hardy, Grootenboer and Bristol (2014) stated that education, "must always be conducted as praxis" (p. 28), and hence, in this paper, we introduce this symposium by providing a discussion of praxis.

Praxis is not a new term or idea, and it has been widely used over many years. We draw on two perspectives of praxis: (1) the classic philosophical writing of Aristotle; and, (2) the ideological understandings of Hegel and Marx. Aristotle noted three disposition-action couplings that have value and legitimacy in human practices: a theoretical, a technical and a practical perspective. The aim of the practical perspective is wise and prudent judgement and activity, with the disposition of phronesis (to act wisely, morally and justly) and the action of praxis (morally-informed action). In education, a focus on praxis specifically foregrounds the practical wisdom and activity of teaching and learning in classrooms - the site where all the aspirations and intentions of education meet learners.

Hegel and Marx had a related but marginally different conception of praxis, seeing it as 'history-making action'. Similar to Aristotle, they saw praxis as action oriented, but they stressed that the activity has ethical, social and political consequences for all those involved. Kemmis et al. (2014, p. 26) state: "... Marx and Engels articulated their historical materialism, arguing that social formations, ideas, theories and consciousness emerge from human and collective social praxis, and that social action (praxis) makes history".

Considering both of these perspectives of praxis, we understand educational praxis as moral and ethical pedagogical activity. Furthermore, this action will make and shape histories and its effectiveness can only be judged in the light of history. This perspective allows us to address the double purposes of education - for the benefit of individual students and the benefit of societies (Grootenboer, 2013), in an era of schooling.