

Editorial: Special Issue Collective Memory-Work

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It seems quite ironic to write an editorial for a special issue of *Other Education* on Collective Memory-Work at a time when all around the globe the imperative is: social distancing, be wary, the other is a danger and as the other to others you are a danger yourself.

The theoretical roots of Collective Memory-Work are found in a Marxist-Feminist context. It was developed by a group of women around Frigga Haug during the 1980s in Germany, mainly in Berlin and Hamburg, as a method of emancipatory learning and a method of research (see e.g., Haug, 1983, 1987, 1999, 2008). One may even say it renders the distinction between learning and research meaningless, at least it blurs boundaries.

Collective Memory-Work is so much the opposite of social distancing. From the very start of its development it was meant to be a means for learning through, and aimed at coming together and social aggregation. Learning in this context is always first and foremost un-learning, based on a critical reflection of experiences, opinions, and construction of meaning, done in conjunction with others.

Could there be a more appropriate time to look at collective learning than a time of such radical reduction of the social to a structure of securely separated cellular entities? In my head echoes Foucault's "first of the great operations of discipline (...) the constitution of '*tableaux vivants*,' which transform the confused, useless or dangerous multitudes into ordered multiplicities" (Foucault, 1995, p. 148). Maybe one of the most stunning observations over the last couple of weeks is the incredible ease with which cellular encapsulation has been able to be established. I won't attempt to explain it here, wrong place. But in the midst of it there is certainly space and time for thinking in all sorts of directions. Lucia Naser (2020) has written a nice piece about saving and/or changing life. Please check it out yourself, for it is worth reading in full. And in this vein, would there be a more appropriate time for re-considering everyday practices and their underlying social relations than the time of crisis?

It is predictable that the experiences during times of lock-down, restricted movement, social distancing will trigger reflection in people. Experiences require integration in an overall process of meaning-making. Experiences, the good, the bad and the ugly: cocooning of older

people enforced or voluntary, cabin fever in overpriced far too small accommodation, working from home, being laid off, school curricula delivered via the television, walks with children in forests instead of shopping frenzy, time for books, help available in neighbourhoods during self-isolation, help not available in hospitals due to underfunded health systems, suffering and grief, relief from the daily grind in job, school, university.

Against the background of unprecedented state intervention in so many countries around the globe, what elements will materialise as an outcome in the aftermath of the Corona crisis?

What will people learn from it?

Will their learning be restrictive, maybe even regressive, reverting back to concepts of society as a random assemblage of isolated individuals?

Or will it be expansive, questioning of old habits, geared towards *Aufhebung* of the old order in a newly defined greater social and global solidarity?

Crises are chances—there you go!

In this special issue of *Other Education* you will find a range of essays, contributions and reviews of books, all connected to Collective Memory-Work (CMW) and, more explicitly, its potential as a method of emancipatory learning, or education. Bringing together contributions by authors from the United States, Canada, Australia, Sweden, Finland, Ireland, Germany, Austria, South Africa crosses geographical boundaries in a manner that has not been applied yet in publications on CMW. Thus a bandwidth of discussion about adaptations of CMW becomes visible, reflecting its ongoing dissemination across continents, and disciplines.

The contributions in this issue are derived from discussions of educational topics, of self-directed or institutional learning. They should however be seen as closely related to a much broader development in which CMW becomes increasingly more interesting to people in a wide variety of fields. An extended attempt to bring practitioners, proponents and critics of CMW across disciplinary divisions into a dialogue with each other is the [Symposium Collective Memory-Work](#) that is planned for August 2021 at Maynooth University, Ireland. It is meant to offer a forum for exchange about experiences with CMW, methodological rationales in adapting CMW, visions for further improvements and fruitful applications, as well as critical scrutiny of CMW.

The [list of contributors](#) at the Symposium could easily be labelled interdisciplinary. Such a label would even have some currency in contemporary academic discourse. From the perspective of *Other Education* it makes sense to look beyond the restrictions that are inscribed in the label. Interdisciplinary still implies the disciplines as separated. We know too well that these separated disciplines can be established as a matter of specialisms with all the pompous piousness attached to self-acclaimed cathedrals of knowledge. Hence for anyone

involved in education, formal, academic, institutionally regulated, it is most certainly of great benefit to enter into discussion across disciplinary boundaries as well.

Collective Memory-Work is indebted to the idea that “it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated” and “the coincidence of the changing of circumstances and of human activity or self-change [*Selbstveränderung*] can be conceived and rationally understood only as revolutionary practice” (Marx, 1845). The essays assembled in our special issue can be read from within the confines of educational studies. But they can just as well be read as a platform for engagement with other fields, academic or not, in a bid for emancipatory learning. Not the least learning for the purpose of educating the educator, breaking down barriers between educator and educated, and emancipating education from its disciplinary bars. In doing the latter the *Other* in *Other Education* gains a most substantial meaning.



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