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## **Metamodern sensibilities: Toward a pedagogical framework for a wicked world**

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### **1.Introduction**

This paper suggests the need for a pedagogical re-orientation in UK higher education (HE) to prepare students better for a liminal, precarious, and complex world that affects work, civic and political life. This world has been termed *wicked*, a concept from systems theory and planning (Churchman 1967; Rittel and Webber 1973) which describe issues, such as poverty, food insecurity and climate change, that appear to defy collective solutions and agreement. As Grewatch, Kennedy, and Bansal (2021) argue systems takes a relational view of the living world focusing on interconnectedness, interaction, and adaption. According to Krawczynska-Zauchka (2020), the twenty first century is characterized by VUCA (volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity) to reflect an increasingly global system that is entangled, technologically driven, and fragmenting.

Such wickedness presents challenges for UK HE in its role as a strategic actor in what Barnett (2017a) suggests is a challenging complex societal ecosystem that requires graduates to be life-deep/life-wide learners, problem-solvers, and engaged citizens. We contend the sector needs to recognise that we are educating and preparing individuals to enter the unknown (Furr and Dyer 2014). We also suggest the concepts of wicked and VUCA are amplified by the neoliberal condition that privileges individualism, competition, and the market, that shackles UK HE. We contend the political economy of UK HE is characterised by marketisation, stratification, and performance metrics (Busch 2017; Schulze-Cleven et al. 2017), that mitigates against embedding pedagogical practices that contribute to supporting

graduates to thrive in the unknown, for example by adopting risk-averse; emotion-free; formulaic assessment to drive metrics.

Such pedagogic reductionism (Williamson, Bayne, and Shay 2020) is one of the potential problems caused by the datafication of HE. The sector itself has recognised the need to address how it operates in this chaotic, turbulent, and globalised environment (Korsakova 2019), yet seems stuck in a form of petrification in what Schwab (2016) calls the fourth industrial age. For Matthews, McLinden, and Greenway (2021) the pedagogical challenges presented by this new industrial age requires universities to re-orientate to become future-focused and better aligned to the expectations of students, employers, and wider society.

This need is evidenced in literature that forefronts the importance of postmodernist pedagogies (Ryan and Tilbury 2013) inspired by liberation pedagogy (Freire, 1970) and creative rationality (Forest and Faucheux 2009) that have at their core flexibility, agility, and iterative processes. Such pedagogy reflects a postmodern worldview where reality is seen as unstable and varied. However, HE is reluctant to embrace alternative teaching and learning styles, retaining a preference for modernist approaches that pivot towards banking pedagogies. These pedagogies are linked to certainty and transmission processes reflecting a modernist worldview where reality is shaped by stability. Yet despite extensive scholarship there are under-explored research areas; specifically, the application of metamodernism (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010) to explore pedagogical practice. Metamodernism brings together rationalist approaches of modernism, with the multi-faceted approaches of postmodernism and, we argue, can provide a way to reconcile competing demands on HE to unlock its petrified state.

This paper is conceptual and cross-disciplinary, drawing on existing theories, to provide multi-level insights (Gilson and Goldberg 2015). The paper contributes to knowledge in

three ways. First, it expands the domain of HE pedagogy by drawing on the conceptual lens of metamodernism to open fresh ways of understanding teaching and learning. Second, it argues a metamodern orientation allows an oscillation between pedagogical approaches that expose students to a transformative learning journey, whilst recognising the institutional reality of a neoliberal classroom. Third, it forefronts the notion of analytical and creative rationality in the form of a pedagogical framework that enables the HE classroom to respond to the challenges of the fourth industrial age.

## **2. A wicked world getting wickeder**

Wicked problems are a ‘complex cocktail of factors and conditions’ (Willis 2016, 307) that require on-going action and a commitment to search out solutions. These problems are complex with multiple stakeholder perspectives. Prior knowledge is inadequate, solution testing impossible, and there are no off-the-shelf remedies. Consequently, in work, civic, and political life, such wicked problems demand responsiveness, flexibility, and critical self-reflection. To illustrate, the environmental crisis demands reflection and change in working patterns, transport, and consumption in relation to self and identity. At a national and global level, we see increasing levels of inequality and insecurity and a fragmenting of political will to address these complex existential problems, which are both illustrated and exacerbated by the rise of nationalism (Bobo 2017). Paradoxically, there is a lack of respect and trust in democratic institutions and processes: conspiracy theories and the scapegoating of vulnerable groups is rife, fuelled by political leaders who manipulate fears to their own political ends (McNair 2018). These problems have amplified the move toward right-wing populism, religious fundamentalism, and racial division (Bobo 2017). These wicked problems are political issues but are frequently understood as personal tragedies (Mills 1959).

Workers find themselves in perpetual liminality, and precarity, continually re-inventing themselves to meet the challenges of a labour market based on numerical and functional flexibility (Standing 2014). For Ibarra and Obodaru (2016) liminality is the hallmark of a precarious and fluctuating work landscape. Professional fields are also affected, with Revell and Bryan (2018) adopting the phrase ‘liquid professionalism’ where agency and engagement with a body of knowledge is unstable. Careers are now viewed as kaleidoscopic (Mainiero and Sullivan 2005), rather than linear and planned. This reflects liquid modernity, characterised by random connections, unpredictability and change associated with the ‘unholy trinity’ of uncertainty, insecurity, and unsafety Bauman (2000, 181). Standing (2011) argues an emergent ‘Precariat’ are materially disadvantaged, emotionally, and psychologically rendered unable to participate in political and civic life. The OECD (2017) predicted mass workforce transitions with jobs destroyed in some areas, whilst others emerge that reflect the impact of technology and globalisation, or as Means (2021, 372) suggests, ‘automated uncertainties’.

To address these issues what is required is more than top-down solutions, but rather a shift in perspective, confidence, and ability within the greater population. The latent talents and engagement of employees, as well as those who are socially and economically disadvantaged must be mobilised – this is key to the transformation which would allow us to meet these existential crises. HE must play its part.

In 2014 Ramaley claimed HE was changing to meet the challenges of ‘wicked problems’: American universities and colleges, she argued, were reflecting on all aspects of their work, relationships with civic partners and students, changing the curriculum to meet complex, hard to manage problems:

These challenges require us to rethink what it means to be educated in today's world and to explore ways to provide a coherent and meaningful educational experience in the face of the turbulence, uncertainty, and fragmentation that characterize much of higher education today. We have faced times like this before, and our imagination, creativity, and commitment to the common good have helped us through. (Ramaley, 2014, 8)

Ramaley's optimism was misplaced. While she recognises the impact of neoliberalism on western societies, she did not extend her analysis to its impact on HE, and consequently did not recognise the barriers that hamper the development of solutions to wickeder problems.

In reflecting on the contemporary university, Barnett (2019), argues that institutions cannot be immune from charges of becoming politicised, and points out that universities have become so incorporated into the state and its audit apparatus that it has succumbed to the non-thinking 'trope of excellence' (Barnett 2019, 55). Universities are increasingly shaped by market-based competition as well as neoliberal expectations around audit, review, transparency, and accountability (Molesworth, Scullion, and Nixon 2011). Several inter-related political-organisational contexts contribute to this. First, the demand from employers prompts a focus on relevance and skills that can be applied, rather than a search for critical analysis and so-called theory. The market accords with this shaping of delivery and students seek, and universities compete to offer, 'employability' (Schulze-Cleven et al. 2017). This is not to say that there are always perfect matches between the two as the rapid growth of, for example, criminology as a subject area in a limited job market, testifies.

Often a university degree is reduced to a form of capital and assessment success renders students 'marketable', selling the university to future students. Furthermore, by employing a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), there is potential to link future tuition fees to

‘measurable’ teaching quality (Raaper 2019). The ‘modularisation’ of programmes into digestible chunks mitigates the integration of disciplines and expansive thinking. These curriculum constraints, accompanied by the impact on disciplines of students-as-consumers, are unhelpful (Bunce, Baird, and Jones 2017) furthering the petrification in HE.

Another obstacle is the perilous career trajectory of HE teachers and researchers, or as some have defined them, ‘managed academics’ who are under constant review and performance targets (John and Fanghanel 2015). Lecturers must teach, but their entry into the profession and their career development are increasingly dominated by research (e.g. in the UK through the Research Excellence Framework). The entry requirement of a PhD as a starting qualification and significant evidence of publications militates against those who are late entrants to academia or who seek to balance an academic career with other responsibilities. This typically excludes those who have previously been in paid or unpaid work and reduces the likelihood of their experiences and expertise being brought to the classroom.

Research and teaching are frequently viewed as being in opposition to one another (teaching as a break on research), yet good research draws upon good skills of pedagogy - asking the same questions of relevance, reliability, and impact (Graff 2003). The pressure to publish is a direct outcome of the neoliberal drive for measurable outputs. Barnett (2019) suggests, academic output grows exponentially each year, but this is not an accurate indicator of increased knowledge. Rather it is a response to institutional pressure to produce papers, making much of these outputs superficial and potentially impacting on academics’ ability to teach due to time constraints. Instead, Zipin et al. (2015) argue, teachers ought to be able to interact within robust teaching-and-research cultures. In an increasingly digital age, universities are becoming vehicles for organising and making accessible existing knowledge rather than producing fundamental revolutions in our knowledge frameworks (Barnett, 2017a). In effect, the career path for those lecturers interested in student-centric and

innovative pedagogy is not an optimal one. Indeed, such state pressures on universities and academics actively hamper the development of pedagogical solutions that can nurture the capabilities (or sort of sensibility) necessary to support those entering employment and engaging in civic and political life.

### **3. A wicked failure of pedagogy despite virtuous intentions**

There is recognition that pedagogical change is required in HE to address a complex world using flexible pedagogies (Ryan and Tilbury 2013), for example: empowering learners, embedding interdisciplinary approaches, being future focused, decolonising the curriculum, and utilizing the liberating power of alternative spaces and interactions for learning (including technology). This section provides an overview of some of the current thinking around pedagogical change. It is our contention that there is no lack of ambition and awareness of the need to change but because of the neoliberal barriers identified a sufficient re-orientation of HE pedagogy has not thus far been possible. A metamodernist framework suggested in section four allows some of these ambitions to be met.

#### *Alternative pedagogical perspectives*

Illustrative of the desire for pedagogical change and innovation includes the relevance placed on transformative capabilities ‘creating an educational focus beyond an emphasis solely on knowledge and understanding, towards agency and competence, using pedagogies guided by an engaged, ‘whole person’ and ‘transformative approaches to learning’ (Ryan and Tilbury 2013, 5). Wholeness we argue equates to embodied learning that reflects not just cognitive experiences, but bodily, sensory, discursive, and intersubjective ones (Hegna and Orbaek 2021) fully connecting mind and body. The neglected area of emotion in HE pedagogy is highlighted by Connelly and Joseph-Salisbury (2019) recognising that learners need to engage with the real world and the emotional responses such engagement can bring forth.

Emotions support deep learning and discomfiting feelings that can compel students to think differently (Boler and Zembylas 2003; Zembylas 2015) unlike *just-the-facts* pedagogy (Garrett 2017) that aims to suppress emotionality (Sutton and Wheatley 2003).

Bovill (2020) suggests we need to embrace relational pedagogical practices that place relationships, between teachers and students as well as between students themselves, as central to teaching and learning, emphasising these healthy connections lead to more effective learning (Gravett, Taylor, and Fairchild 2021). The notion of relational pedagogies aims to create meaningful engagement in the classroom by cultivating more compassionate student-staff relationships. Kinchin (2021) notes that these relationships are increasingly difficult to build within a neoliberal university which is uncaring, unhealthy, and characterised by the pressure of marketisation. Gravett, Taylor, and Fairchild (2021) propose a pedagogy of *mattering* which allows us to ‘consider the impacts of a broader range of actors upon learning and teaching and to tune into the objects, bodies and spaces that contribute the material mattering of learning and teaching as an in-situ practice of relationality’ (2021, 5) which would allow for more embodied learning experiences.

In its current neoliberal state, HE overlooks the importance of relationships, emotions, and embodiment within learning environments to the detriment of relations within the institution (Quinlan 2016).

#### *Constraints within the neoliberal classroom*

Within a neoliberal context, education has frequently become a linear and commercialised experience: to succeed students must be good at banking knowledge and reproducing it through transmission processes (Goodson 1998; Pope 2008): passing assessment does not necessarily require critical thinking and self-exploration, even though recent pedagogical

literature suggests that students who engage with these skills are better equipped for a liquid/fluid modern world (Blacker 2013; Goodson and Schostak 2021).

Naidoo and Williams (2015) indicate that the ‘good student’ in a neoliberal setting is no longer required to be engaged to the extent that they follow their own individual learning paths, potentially finding and creating knowledge unfamiliar even to their teachers. The ‘good student’ is one who ‘sticks to the contract’ (2015, 217) and does not question traditional pedagogical practices. It is hardly surprising that a *pedagogy-of-safety* emerges, in which university teachers and students limit their intellectual horizons to reach the mutually desired goal. For Feigenbaum (2007) in the neoliberal classroom, students rely on textbooks or commercial aids; constant measurement of outcomes is problematic as there is no space for the important impact of process. This has been driven by the political economy of HE through marketisation, performance metrics, and stratification (Schulze-Cleven et al. 2017) that relates to a post-massification of HE (Xing and Marwala 2017).

The classroom is an unpredictable place with students reacting to predetermined material in multiple different ways reflecting different learning approaches (Haggis 2003). Some engage fully whilst others pay little to no attention and transmission pedagogy contests that this is due to the inadequacies of the teacher. Blacker (2013) suggests we must cross the pedagogic boundaries that currently prevents two thirds of students from accessing an appropriate learning environment. Banking pedagogies can achieve only partial success due to the nature of classroom life (Atkinson 2015). For Goodson (1998), this leads to teachers accepting that some students will perform at higher levels, and this is then acted out in the classroom as a self-fulfilling prophesy. Alternative/Radical pedagogy contends that the individual process of learning should be the focus, rather than simple transmission of pre-set information. Each students’ own interests are vital in the conceptualisation of an alternative pedagogy. Learning

becomes less about mastering knowledge and more about actively reconstructing knowledge through experience and interaction.

### *Pedagogy and social justice*

Such flexible pedagogies challenge didactic models of education whereby knowledge is transferred from teacher (expert) to student (receiver) in line with instructor-led pedagogy (Currie and Knights 2003; Freire 1970). Underpinning alternative perspectives is the belief that HE has a role in social justice and can bring cultural and democratic benefit (Hockings, Cook, and Bowl 2010; Williams et al. 2010). Christensen, Johnson, and Horn (2010) urge educators to return to the purpose of pedagogy as transformational involving four aspirations: to maximise human potential; to facilitate a vibrant, participative democracy in which we have an informed electorate; to hone and develop the skills that will enable a prosperous and competitive economy; and finally, to encourage people to see things differently. Alternative/Radical pedagogies assert that HE sustains the oppressive ideologies and structures of modernity and gain their motivation from attempting to instil resistance in HE through empowering students to become critical thinkers who can act with personal agency to bring about change (Giroux 2013).

### *Pedagogy and transformation*

A common theme in addressing uncertainty, whilst embracing the need for flexible pedagogy and its transformative potential, is a move away from analytical rationality that is predicated on the application of techniques, theory, and knowledge, to creative rationality (Forest and Faucheux 2009). In creative rationality, a new relationship with knowledge is required to help individuals confront the unknown, unforeseen, and ambiguous. Individuals can no longer apply knowledge to obtain a known result but must be encouraged to mobilise knowledge in different ways, seek out new knowledge and be more adventurous and creative. Forest and Faucheux (2009) advocate a return to the Greek concept of the 'metis' that focuses on

searching things out as well as resourcefulness, sagacity, and adaptability (Detienne and Venant 1974).

In recent years there has been a dominance of analytical rationality embodying objectivity and detachment, logic and linear approaches, formal and scientific methodology. So, creative rationality is about open thought, making new connections and dealing with the unexpected that Detienne and Venant (1974) conceive as a pedagogy of adventure.

In this radical pedagogy individuals need to move beyond their comfort zone drawing on theories of cognitive development (see Piaget 1977) and cognitive dissonance (see Festinger 1957) with both concepts subject to both critics and defenders in terms of how it changes attitudes and stretches individual development. As such, Brown (2008) argues that ‘comfort zone thinking’ should not be used to underpin pedagogy, but rather as a metaphor for getting individuals to reflect on their own feelings of disequilibrium when confronting uncertainty. In this it connects to the importance of difficult knowledge and discomfiting emotions (Boler and Zembylas 2003; Zembylas 2015) in particular, when learning about social injustice.

#### *Pedagogical co-creation and power sharing*

More recent notions of flexible pedagogy have been articulated by Konst and Scheinin (2018) arguing that education should move from traditional knowledge-based to mosaic like competencies and approaches including self-evaluation. It is, they argue, impossible to predict what knowledge and skills will be necessary in the future, so the role of the teacher becomes one of coach, to support, encourage and guide helping individuals to embrace life-long learning, collaboration, and drawing on and in different expertise and experiences recognising to do this is a strength and not a weakness. The aim of pedagogy must be to develop adaptive expertise rather than merely skills in memory and recall (Konst and Scheinin 2018). Shifting the focus of universities from teaching to learning creates an

exciting space for ideas to flow and for an embracing of learning identities. Konst and Scheinin (2018) talk of innovation pedagogy that embodies ideas around flexible curriculum able to respond to changes in society and working life; a social and multidisciplinary learning environment; and collaborative learning and boundary spanning.

The critique set out here of the current system, combined with the concern for social justice as an outcome of engagement with HE, leads to consideration of the pedagogies of Freire. Freire (1970) advocates an engaged ‘problem solving’ education which draws on the knowledge and experience of those that seek to learn as opposed to the transmission and banking of knowledge:

Problem solving education which breaks with the vertical patterns characteristic of banking education, can fulfil its function as the practice of freedom only if it can overcome the above contradiction. Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist, and a new term emerges teacher-student with student-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. In this process arguments based on ‘authority’ are no longer valid. (Freire 1970, 80)

Co-creational pedagogy is central to the transformative teaching and inner confidence that emerges from self-knowledge and one which is vital in continually moving social and political contexts.

### *Pedagogy as process*

Pedagogical discussion continues to appraise approaches that embrace transformation to support learners as they tackle the unexpected and rapidly changing nature of work, political and civic life – a wicked world. These strategies embolden notions of self-awareness,

imagination, and identity as part of a continuous learning process that give primacy to emotion, embodiment, and experience in underpinning knowledge. In this it echoes approaches to education put forward by process philosophers (Evans 2005; Whitehead 1967/1929) that conceptualise reality as always on the move with individuals in a permanent state of ‘becoming’. Indeed, the concept of becoming is reinforced by Hanney (2018) suggesting a re-orientation of project-based learning away from simply doing to embracing extreme reflexivity focused on process rather than outputs. Taylor and Bovill (2018) assert that process philosophy is under-developed in HE scholarship and has much to offer those exploring pedagogy as it connects to concepts of instability and uncertainty and places emotion central to the learning experience.

#### *The ecological university*

The need to change has been amplified by Barnett (2017a) talking of the need for universities to be more connected through the creation of the ‘ecological university’; this is not just desirable, but it is inherently sustainable - rejecting metrics in favour of compassion, truth, unity, transcending discipline boundaries to construct a fairer society. Yet we argue too little of this alternative way of teaching and learning makes its way into the HE classroom contributing to a form of petrification across the sector because of the neoliberal condition in which it operates. Though as Barnett (2019) has suggested, there may be glimpses of the university becoming more civic, publicly engaged, and ecological. The pedagogic scholarship is reflecting these sentiments as we move toward a HE that challenge frontiers and introduces critical reflexivity to develop more rounded graduates who have skills to solve wicked problems. The HE sector can only respond to calls by bodies such as the World Economic Forum (2018) for a reorganisation of the skills ecosystem and learners needing an agile mindset by changing itself.

Some have proposed (see Goodson and Schostak 2021), that the COVID-19 pandemic is the perfect opportunity to test alternative forms of pedagogy which will broaden the spectrum of skills with which graduates leave HE. Increasingly, pedagogic scholarship is asking the question of how we might rethink education in the wake of this pandemic which offers opportunities for radical change (Peters et al. 2020). Universities have had to shift to online learning which has presented its own challenges for both teachers and students but creates an avenue for a future learning experience which may better engage students and give them the skills to adapt to a more complex world.

*A modelling of pedagogical theoretical approaches*

To challenge and move beyond petrification in HE and to establish a pathway that can establish pedagogies to tackle wickedness, we need to critically engage with contemporary approaches and understand the relationship between them. Drawing on the work of Barnett (2017b) we position pedagogical approaches between a modernist/postmodernist axis (juxtaposing stable and unstable environments) and a superficial/deep axis (juxtaposing) the depth of intended learning

Insert Figure 1 and caption here

‘Functional Banking’, reflects the majority of HE academic approaches to learning where information is transmitted, primarily by a tutor in a position of authority, to be recalled later through assessment. While functional banking has faced heavy criticism from Freirean theorists, we recognise that the transmission of foundational knowledge is essential for higher level learning. Formal lectures, delivering foundational knowledge, provides the basis of learning. This may deliver knowledge essential to future employment if that market was stable. This knowledge is expected to be recalled, often in exam situations and essays.

‘Radical Banking’, reflects the process of functional banking but seeks to challenge orthodoxy and provide alternative perspectives. Within the banking model hierarchical relationships continue to exist. Formal lectures delivering radical ideas such as Marxism and Feminism which superficially expose students to alternative views which challenge orthodoxy.

‘Functional Enquiry’, reflects active enquiry (sometimes beyond the physical boundaries of the university) but within the constraints of the neoliberal classroom. Orientating towards the stable and known without aiming to disrupt existing relations. External organisations providing a problem or challenge (live brief) and students expected to address them based on their existing university learning.

‘Radical Enquiry’, reflects active enquiry orientating towards the unstable and unknown with the purpose of deep transformative learning and critical reflection. Such an approach pivots towards embodied and emotional learning that is both deeply personal and collaborative. Student-centred learning which accepts risk, uncertainty, and potential failure as a valuable part of the learning journey. Assessments are personal and therefore both emotional and unique.

This framework presents the apparent options available from both a modernist and postmodernist approach: in this fixed representation it is static, and is reflective of dichotomy and polarity, suggestive of the mistaken view that banking methods are of no to little value. This is not the case as all forms of learning have a value in appropriate settings. For HE to action and animate this framework in a more holistic way, a fresh iteration is required that accommodates fluidity and adaptability for an unknown world within an ecological sensibility.

#### **4. Adventures through a wicked world – A metamodern pathway**

These pedagogical orientations point to an amplification of postmodernist transformation approaches in HE which recognise the need to support students better, we argue these often fail to get implemented fully within the HE classroom because of the neoliberal condition in which HE operates. That said, we recognise that modernist approaches can have a legitimate place in the classroom when factual knowledge needs to be transmitted and learned so that higher levels of application and experimentation can be developed in line with the original thinking of Bloom (1956) and revised by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001). We contend that by adopting a metamodern lens the modernist and postmodernist pedagogical tension can be navigated allowing HE to prepare students to confront a wicked world. It provides a pathway to responding to the call by graduate employers for more adaptable, focused, and aware employees who are currently viewed to be in scarce supply (CBI/Pearson 2019; Institute of Student Employers 2018).

As Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010) have defined it, metamodernism is a structure of feeling that has become the prevailing logic of western capitalist societies since the turn of the century. In the Internet age, Abramson (2015) states that postmodern thinking can no longer be suited to understand the uncertainty and liminality of metamodern life. Postmodernism is deeply rooted in Marxist philosophy and therefore concentrates on the conflict inherent within capitalism e.g., class struggle. To a postmodernist, everything is a zero-sum game with distance between a clearly defined winner and loser. As Abramson (2014) eloquently suggests:

Metamodernism seeks to collapse distances, especially the distance between things that seem to be opposites, to recreate a sense of wholeness that allows us to — in the lay sense — transcend our environment and move forward with the aim of creating positive change in our communities and the world (Abramson, 2014)

Metamodernism is not in a fight with modernism and postmodernism but is, with, and beyond both movements (Kilicoglu and Kilicoglu 2020). Metamodernism (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010) seeks to bring together rationalist approaches of modernism (underpinned by scientific thinking, functional approaches, and enthusiasm that leans towards stability that we argue gravitates towards banking approaches), with the multi-faceted styles of postmodernism (underpinned by critical thinking, challenge, and irony that leans towards instability reflecting ecological and courageous forms of pedagogy). Metamodernism oscillates between the two, drawing insight from both traditions allowing for a better understanding of the contemporary world sitting between ‘hope and melancholy, naivete and knowingness, empathy and apathy, unity and plurality, totality and fragmentation, purity and ambiguity’ (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2010, 5-6). This oscillation we argue, situates metamodernism within the ontological tradition of process philosophy recognising that reality is dynamic requiring reflexive approaches.

Neither is metamodernism a convergence of modernism and postmodernism, nor is it a balance between the two perspectives. It is not a compromise. Instead, each has relevance depending on the issue in hand, recognising how precarious and broken humanity is, but progresses with optimism (Abramson 2018). It is neither a philosophy nor a movement but a ‘sensitivity’ (Vermeulen and van den Akker 2015, 56) to respond to ecological complexity and entanglement reflecting emotional, socio-cultural, and technological influences. A metamodern sensitivity has faith in rationality (science and knowledge) but not without questioning and reflecting. A metamodernist deconstructs modernist approaches, learns from them, and reconstructs new possibilities by joining different and often contradictory positions (Abramson 2015).

In a wicked, liminal, and precarious world, individuals are often at the intersection of polarities and opposing forces needing to navigate contradiction and paradox (Piro 2018) in

both work and life. A metamodernist orientation points to navigating complexity through reflection: an ecological recognition of interdependencies and pragmatic problem-solving. This opens new ways to think about pedagogy and the neoliberal institutions in which teaching is situated, allowing for reconstruction of the HE classroom.

Drawing on the ten characteristics of metamodernism identified by Abramson (2015), we suggest a reconstructed form of pedagogy applicable to a wicked world. The section below provides an indication of how these interconnected characteristics can be brought into the classroom to nurture a metamodern sensibility, or disposition, to allow students to acquire knowledge, reconcile knowledge uncertainty, thrive in the unknown and complex, supporting them to cope with and tackle wicked problems and to operate in an uncertain world.

### ***Negotiation between modernism and postmodernism***

*Context:* Underpins metamodernism, a form of oscillation, that moves between the two.

*Application:* No one form of pedagogical approach is superior. At module and programme level students should be exposed to a variety of pedagogical approaches drawing from both traditions. Both are viable within their own constraints, but pedagogy is richer for using both. Assessments to use either modernism (standard essay, set case study or exam) or postmodernist approaches (reflective, self-sourced, collaborative, experimental) but no single approach dominates. Can be used in combination to deliver learning outcomes.

### ***Dialogue over dialectics***

*Context:* Dialectical thinking championed by postmodernism assumes opposing forces, no middle ground. Metamodernists recognise complexity, focusing on overlaps between different opinions that can lead to collective action.

*Application:* Introduce complexity: breakdown positions by getting students to articulate opposing views; explore overlaps and connection; learning outcomes to reflect appreciation of ‘other’ and ‘sagacity’ in finding solutions drawing on other disciplines, organisations, and collaborators. Assessments where the *process* of completing the assessment is as important as the final output.

### ***Paradox***

*Context:* Metamodernism embraces paradox including the universality associated with modernism versus the contingency of postmodernism; recognises various forms and levels of truth.

*Application:* Confront: individuals with their own paradoxes and biographies; conflicting truths within and between subjects; the certainty of HE-learning and uncertainty of life-long learning; balancing planning and improvisation; tension between knowing and not knowing. Assessments that identify and explore paradox through simulations involving negotiation, conflict, and time pressure.

### ***Juxtaposition***

*Context:* Relates to one thing being superimposed over another when it could be considered separate and arises when an individual feels detached.

*Application:* The juxtaposition of individuals holding multiple and often contradictory identities. From a teacher perspective - teacher-practitioner, teacher-researcher; teacher-student. From a student perspective – student-teacher, student-employee, student-past-self. Multiple identities to be normalised through sessions that welcome experiences, challenge, and critique one dimensional notions of self – for both teacher and student. Assessments reflect upon how individuals ‘become’. This enables focus on the world beyond the classroom through the lens of their chosen discipline.

### ***Collapse of distance***

*Context:* Metamodernists reflecting the digital age recognise we often feel surrounded by strangers, yet also close to people allowing us to create connections. Digital interaction also leads to false intimacy and confused self-identity.

*Application:* Embed digital literacy through critique and challenge of content veracity and ownership; students to evaluate their own digital experiences in relation to manipulation in the context of their subject areas; explore the global and political impact on individual self and discipline identity. Assessments to explore digital determinism, related power, and vested interests; digital analysis, critique, collaboration, and fact checking.

### ***Multiple subjectivities***

*Context:* Modernists orientate towards stable capabilities and identities, whilst postmodernists gravitate towards evolving identities to accommodate fluid contexts. Metamodernists argue individuals hold simultaneous identities that are always complex and provisional.

*Application:* The exploration of multiple realities, truths and ethical dilemmas shaped by how different identities perceive given situations. Assessment explores situations through different identity lenses that prompts ethical discussions.

### ***Collaboration***

*Context:* Metamodernism encourages dialogue over dialectics that in a world of complexity and opposing forces requires collaboration, rejecting absolutes, and embracing imperfection where appropriate.

*Application:* Embed collaborative approaches moving beyond traditional group work and live briefs (though these have value). True collaboration works across disciplines, partners with those outside of HE, addresses complexity and challenges comfort zones. Assessments move

beyond the university with uncertain outcomes requiring an ecological and networked understanding.

### ***Simultaneity and generative ambiguity***

*Context:* Although oscillation is a fundamental concept of metamodernism, there is a recognition that individuals often simultaneously hold different positions and identities and not just move between them.

*Application:* Teachers and students are simultaneously teaching and learning. Each carry multiple identities and roles that may or may not be in conflict. Assessments recognise students as learners and educators and this enables the teacher and student an insight into the challenge the other faces.

### ***Return to metanarratives***

*Context:* Metamodernists recognise the value of hope and optimism which are inherent within a metanarrative that suggests problems can be conceptualised and solutions found.

*Application:* Provide space to explore competing power differentials, inequalities and quantify local, national, and global patterns in the attempt to make sense out of chaos and complexity. To evaluate pathways to overcoming power inequalities. Support students' confidence to challenge the inevitability of the status quo. Assessments based on challenging inequalities within society and finding solutions which create positive change.

### ***Interdisciplinarity***

*Context:* Social, political, and environmental challenges are a result of complex forces which require nuanced understanding of a range of disciplines. It requires an openness which softens discipline boundaries and lessens competitiveness and silo thinking between disciplines and institutions.

*Application:* Students to understand the distinctiveness of their discipline and how other disciplines contribute to solving wicked problems. Assessments deliberately explore the boundaries and tensions between disciplines and demand conscious awareness of the application of a range of disciplinary concepts on a focused issue. Being open to ideas beyond a singular discipline.

Taken together, we argue these characteristics applied to the HE classroom will better equip students to develop the *sensibilities* to thrive and survive in an era of wickedness. Sensibilities are complex (Wickberg 2007), but they embed the importance of acute perception, responsiveness, or a disposition. In this, they are the foundational way individuals understand who they are (Schussler and Knarr 2013) and how they engage with the wider environment.

At the same time, metamodernism allows us to recognise the challenges in HE. Taken together, we suggest a re-conceived pedagogical framework that empowers teaching teams to oscillate between modernist and postmodernist pedagogical approaches to establish optimum module and programme structures.

Insert Figure 2 and caption here

We propose the original pedagogical orientation (Figure 1) requires the superimposition of metamodern characteristics, to ensure a balanced programme that nurtures three interwoven sensibilities necessary for the fourth industrial age: growth, humility, and resourcefulness.

**Growth** is an embodied and emotional experience which relates to embracing the belief that individuals are never fully formed; always becoming. This requires critical self-reflection, openness, curiosity, playfulness, ambition, courage, and the propensity to accept risk as potential opportunity.

**Humility** has an emotional orientation and relates to acknowledging the unknown, knowledge is never static and is always dynamic. The recognition that failure is an opportunity for learning and is inevitable as part of a social interaction where knowledge is to be investigated. A recognition that other perspectives have value and appreciate the emotional condition of others.

**Resourcefulness** relates to the acknowledgement of instability and uncertainty, navigating, and where necessary, utilising or mitigating it in a robust manner. Sagacity, the ability to improvise, to be discerning, sound in judgment, and farsighted. The ability to apply foundational knowledge in innovative ways, in many instances by creating new knowledge.

There is a need to embrace modernist and postmodern approaches to develop these graduate sensibilities. Teaching teams require a consciousness that prompts an open dialogue between themselves and students about the evolution of their programmes, and an exploration of this framework and what it provides in relation to the development of essential sensibilities.

The superimposition of metamodernism allows for pedagogical concepts such as process, mattering, adventure, and creative rationality to be implemented rather than merely theorised, as it allows oscillation with modernist banking methods to reduce the neoliberal fear of change. In this, metamodernism is part of an emerging body of scholarship that is seeking to challenge HE and what it offers is a theoretical position that responds to the traditional trajectory of modernity-focused related social theory.

It elevates co-creation within the classroom where ‘staff and students work collaboratively with one another to create components of curricula and/or pedagogical approaches’ (Bovill et al. 2016, 196) working together to challenge and mitigate wickedness. As suggested by Barrineau, Engström, and Schnaas (2019) students wish to become more deeply engaged with their learning suggesting barriers to change do not necessarily exist with the student body. It

was reported that students felt by being involved with decision-making it would enable them to see how they have an important role within the learning process.

## **6. Conclusion**

Returning to the aspirations of this paper, we have (a) expanded the domain of HE pedagogy by drawing on the conceptual lens of metamodernism to open fresh ways of understanding teaching and learning; and (b) presented a case for a metamodern orientation which allows an oscillation between pedagogical approaches that exposes students to a transformative learning journey, whilst recognising the institutional reality of a neoliberal classroom. Pedagogical approaches are to be utilised in conjunction with one another, banking models are not discarded.

In doing so, we forefront the notion of both analytical and creative rationality in the form of a pedagogical framework that enables the HE classroom to respond to the challenges of the fourth industrial age. We purposefully use the term sensibilities because it reflects the language used by Vermeulen and van den Akker (2010), encapsulating what can be achieved through engagement with this framework.

We have avoided previous pitfalls of demonising pedagogic positions, but rather make a virtue of polarity that together allow a comprehensive and applicable learning experience for the challenges of the contemporary age. We recommend the emergence of normality in the oscillation between different forms of pedagogy that enables a classroom repertory that facilitates the development of sensibilities to empower citizen graduates to challenge wickedness. Our approach returns to the spirit of the ‘pedagogue’, whose role was to coach and facilitate a young person’s development rather than act as expert teacher. This spirit captures the human reflexive experience of life focused education.

In respect of limitations, we acknowledge the context in which universities operate and that this may produce significant barriers to an actualisation of these ideas. We also accept the cultural shift needed to invoke these changes may unsettle both teachers and students, this involves risk, the unknown, emotional engagement, all of which is both demanding and dangerous. This paper seeks to stimulate debate about the relevance and effectiveness of standardised HE pedagogies in a precarious world challenged by the emergence and persistence of wicked problems and offers an alternative framework.

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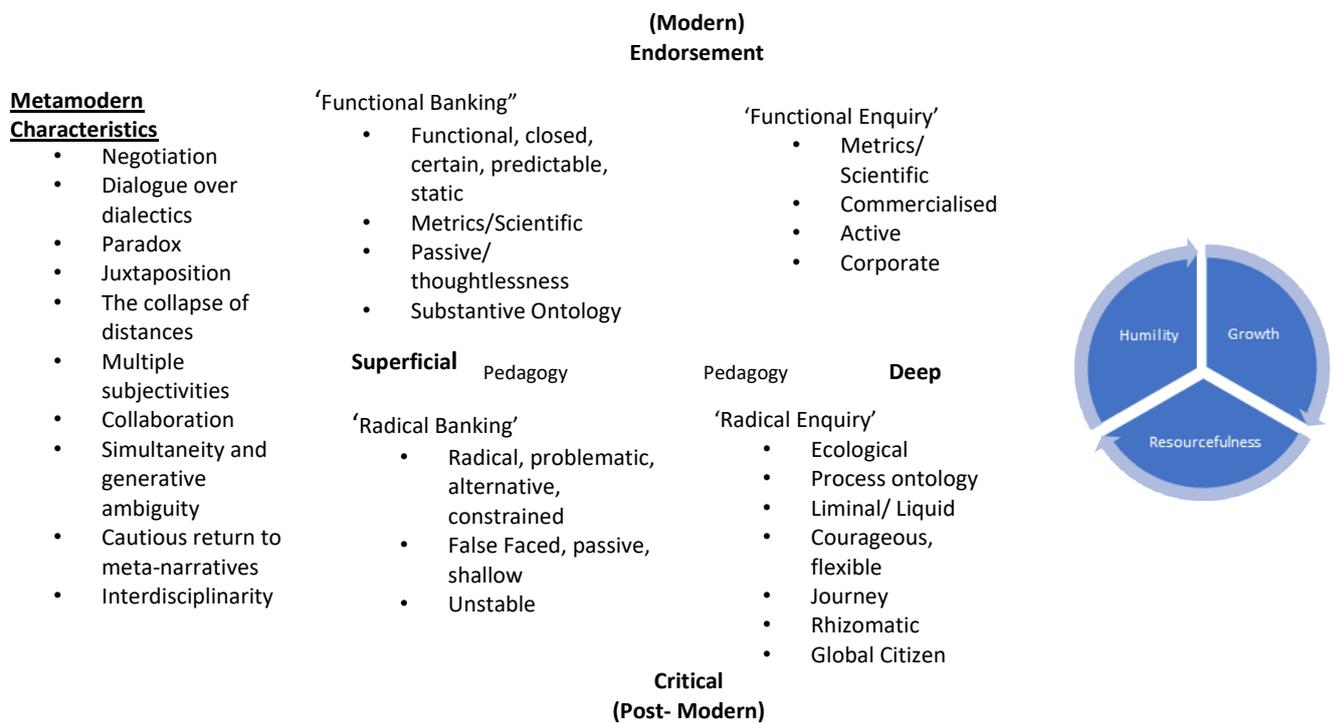


Figure 2: Adaption of Barnett (2017b) reflecting a framework of modernist and postmodernist pedagogical orientations through a lens of metamodernism