

# Praxis in Motion:

Seminar Final Paper

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December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022

GSXS 405

First and foremost, this Praxis Seminar has been an invaluable experience for my university career and far beyond. Academically, this course has taught me a strong foundation for feminist and social change through praxis and practicum learning and personally has changed me and the way I process the world around me on a fundamental level. I'm certain as a 400-level course it is intended to be far more developed than a foundation, and instead similar to that of a string that begins to thread, or even fully tie together previously learned concepts. However, I am quite early in the progression of my Gender and Sexuality Studies Minor, perhaps a little too early to be taking the praxis seminar, being less than halfway through my ten courses. Being a Major in an entirely different department and having little more than just personal experiences carrying me into the course, I worried that I had been in over my head to enroll. Despite my initial fears of having worked backwards, as the semester progressed, each day I could tell the difference that these teachings have made in me. In taking multiple GSXS courses this semester, and in my personal life, I found myself making ties between everything I faced, and it became fully integrated. Although it is a senior course for the field of study, I'm glad to have challenged myself with it, for it will fuel each of my future courses, and beyond school entirely.

I have experienced through experiential learning, alignment experimentation and through my practicum what being part of the work is like, rather than a purely academic study of it. It provided me with a unique semester unlike any I have had before in terms of my integration into the coursework. My classmates have taught me a lot about different ways to think and grasp differing perspectives, I taught myself how to reflect personally, and my practicum allowed me to take steps of action towards change on campus. Having started the semester with *The Death of Why* was the perfect opening reading as it implements the importance of question asking.

Schlesinger shared the sentiment, *“Inquiry is more than asking simple questions that come with yes or no answers. It is a process of discovery, asking, re-asking, synthesizing, and evaluating until we can get close to something that approximates the truth”* (2009). The task of our weekly discussion questions put me on a track of questioning and evaluating course content and my own life, that would further into the semester become more prevalent than I would have anticipated. I was constantly thinking of how I could be asking better questions. It was not something I had previously considered working on, nor did I ever assume there would be areas to lack in such a subject. Having this focus within the course, the marriage between experience and question, I feel as though I have re-learned how to learn entirely.

### Social Change

I feel confident to claim that praxis is the guiding power to all social change—it is a generator for active pursuit and a stronghold for powerful thinking. Social change can be small and big. With the ways that my thinking has evolved over the course of this semester, I have been able to lead conversations among friends and family that I don’t think I would have had the self-assurance to do so before. I have broached ‘taboo’ or uncomfortable topics that went in positive directions and even brought insight to conversations more proudly. I view these as small rippling effects that reach out to those nearby me, that affect my social communities. An anecdotal example of this would be when a dear friend of mine had been struggling with open and aggressive conflict about their queer identity in an online space that they had once deemed ‘safe’. When they felt that was no longer true, it crushed them and led them to feel as though it was their fault for entering the space to begin with. Although the Braver Space Guidelines (U of

C, 2021) are implemented in many, if not all, GSXS courses, I think within the context of greater social change they are an incredible source for, well, guidance. I used them as such for my friend, the guidelines allowed me to comfort them and help them remove their self-blame. We went through the steps of praxis with the guidelines in mind and their headspace had changed entirely by the end of our conversation. If I can empower a loved one and help them navigate the impacts of transphobia within their own life, who's to say that it couldn't be mirrored on a larger scale?

In a time like 2022, trekking through controversy feels like a daily task with the sheer amount of internet exposure we have. Each day there is a new thing to be exposed to, and we haven't the tools ready to combat it on personal levels, no less societal levels. All of this is expressed to exemplary levels in *We Will Not Cancel Us* (Brown, 2020), just how stilted the praxis of social change has become. It's not surprising that in a state of constant overload that cancel-culture has become the result. Similar to what Brown had said: "We need to center and build relationships with one another and not keep tearing one another down publicly without trying to have direct conversations", I believe that the social change of the internet has to evolve in the same way as me aiding my friend—by starting inter-personally. We could never hope to take on the whole internet—the whole world—all at once. The community-building aspects of *Ten Thousand Roses* attest to this as well (Rebick, 2005). We must work together and share the load equally to keep moving, or else our efforts will be lost in the sea of constant new information. Such a community as the one built by our class holds the power formative to so much change, on Campus or otherwise. Acts like distracting anti-choice protestors and coming together to pursue a route for action is an incredible example of small social change attempts that

feed a greater whole. All it takes is a group of both diverse and like-minded people with a shared passion.

## Praxis

To delve deeper into all these previous topics, I must focus on praxis itself as the primary feature of the Seminar. As the course definition states (Kadi, 2022b), it reminds us to ask questions, of the ongoing process and its fundamental cycle. Praxis is ever-evolving within the societies and social systems it lives within. The growth of people is interconnected with the growth of our systems and how we approach them. There is never a finish line, only an ever-changing goal. The Praxis cycle embodies this sentiment entirely, and of all the reminders praxis gives us, the cycle shows us that we're always somewhere in one of the three steps (Kadi, 2022a). The cycle functions best in the order of reflection to theory to action, repeated. Sometimes the cycle can be thoughtfully and efficiently rearranged, but falling out of the cycle entirely can also lead to things like the aforementioned Cancel Culture of our current time, where action is at the precedence and the other facets are drowned out. Not always will each part be an equal third, but it's been a learning curve to remember to readjust when needed to ensure that no sections of the cycle are being abused. Since the lecture the concept was introduced (2022a), I continuously considered where I might be in the cycle, on scales big and small, and if I've been effectively following all three steps through.

I believe the way we have interacted with praxis in our classroom space alone has contributed immensely to my ability to work in group settings and especially in discussions. The creative and thought-provoking activities created by my classmates acted like an icebreaker in

my mind, which acclimatized me for the class ahead of me, but also to feel more comfortable in the spaces of others. And having discussions about the current events that popped up—a student leaving, again; the protests—dynamically shifted my initial mindset of a static classroom to that of a moving vehicle of thought that we were all passengers to. The way the thoughts of the cycle have seeped into other parts of my life has also positively impacted my other courses. I have been able to look back on social movements of the past and see how the cycle was at work, how it was utilized then and how it is utilized now. With our further lessons on intersectionality, I could see the way strategic action impacted our founding feminist movements and the ways they pursued praxis with those in mind (Kadi, 2022c). I admittedly have fallen victim to the common error of presuming intersectionality as a checklist, but I am certainly now in the reflection period of that praxis as my perspective of history shifts. Frequently, I have taken time this semester to consider the biases and assumptions that I held going into my GSXS Minor, and still work to combat. Of the four predominant elements of social change (Kadi, 2022d), I believe education is one I initially underestimated, for—like myself—we must continue to learn *and never stop*.

## Practicum

The practicum brought me clarity on what direct action can look like in ways that aren't traditional to the feminist movement. Although activism and social change have always been a passion of mine, it often becomes overwhelming. Taking direct action can often bring, too, the risk of danger. The fear of those risks has held me back before, and I'm sure many others. I was very intent on pursuing the practicum because despite it not contributing to the completion of my degree, it was an opportunity for guided direct action on a scale I hadn't previously attempted.

Ultimately with the topic of my practicum being washroom accessibility with Campus Architecture, the exposure I received was not quite as direct as others, but I hope no less impactful. Going into the physical spaces that we were concerned with, and being faced with visible evidence of the need to change was incredibly valuable to me. I feel that in social change the impacts tend towards more psychological, emotional, explicitly social, and essentially on a level that cannot be seen. In my life, I have seen social impacts in passing, walking downtown, or peers' lived experiences, but visiting the assigned washrooms with praxis as the focus leads to a trail of alternative thinking for myself.

The experience of witnessing social causes whilst enveloped in its environment provided an irrefutable resolution. I frequently think back to Witness to Truth from Ecofeminism, and the course itself, and I relate my practicum experience to the ability to exist *within* the cause for change. Kaalund's Piece provides examples of environmental activism through the issues embedded in entire communities (Kaalund, 2004), those which I feel can be reflected by the issue of accessibility on campus. With each new reading in our course and the memories of those in previous courses, the relevance to my practicum seemed to grow. My experience was fed by a symbiotic relationship of readings impacting the practicum and vice versa. I have a habit of playing devil's advocate or considering scenarios that could create excuses, and sometimes it creates a detriment to my activist thought. The practicum's symbiosis persuaded a continuous reflection that has positively led to more resolute thought that has grounded my own activism. The practicum we were assigned may not have challenged interpersonal skills but was nevertheless powerful for its ability to concentrate the subject matter so concretely for reflection.

## Personal Insights/Values

As before, I feel that throughout this semester my concept of learning has changed due to praxis, how I approach problems and other people. I saw my studies in praxis seep into other realms of my life, personally and socially. This course has had an incredibly personal impact on me for the way that I process the movement of life and my values. Based on activism and interpersonally, I realize that even if I cannot perform all the actions that I wish I could, putting intention forth into the actions I am capable of creates substantial change still. I've come to understand that it's possible to have an overwhelming number of causes in life, but there is room for them all if you pursue an amount of praxis within how you handle them. This semester has been one of serious growth and self-exploration at a seemingly expedited rate. When COVID isolation first began, I went on a long and gruelling journey of finding spirituality while trying to realign myself and survive the quarantine. Although I knew there was still much room to grow in that region of my life, I couldn't have anticipated just *how much*. Learning of my Celtic background and still considering my Metis identity, while having just found security in spirituality had felt overwhelming initially. Having studied Rosetta Tharp in GSXS 303, I remember reading Wald describe her as a singer and guitarist who “was always and forever looking to reinvent herself” (2008), and I dwelled on that thought. Rosetta never ‘reinvented’ herself to just be a poster woman, but because she was so passionate about her music and the world she wanted to evolve with it. I want to do the same—having a multifaceted identity doesn't mean recycling old parts—but reinventing myself as my world evolves. The article *Working at the Crossroads of Pleasure and Danger* talks about the feminist dichotomy of finding the facets of pleasure and danger in social change work being inverted (Fans, Plante, & McClelland, 2018). The ‘taboo’ topics indeed feel much more approachable than those of



self-reflection and deep thinking on personal relationships. It's why I still *hope* to reinvent myself in the way Rosetta does because it is certainly easier to talk about the rampaging world around us than make impactful choices of self.

It was over this semester that I began to accept and embrace my Metis identity. Things like blood quantum and my stereotypes of 'whiteness' made me feel as though I was fraudulent to take on the word as a truth. In a further chapter of our reading, *As We Have Always Done*, Simpson discusses a learning activity about unconsciously carrying harmful stereotypes of colonial beliefs. The chapter, 'Endlessly creating our Indigenous selves' describes the beautiful mindset change that occurs within the group as they release these untruths and reconnect with their real truths. *"We talk about how stereotypes are not just 'backwards thinking' but a system of social control. We talk about consent, accountability, self-determination, responsibility"* (2017). The thought experiment of this activity started very painfully, but it grew to be powerful, it allowed the students to be vulnerable and also take control of that vulnerability for themselves. The process of self-reflection is a difficult one, but far more so worthwhile. The learning activity was one of the many contributors over the last three months that have inspired me to attempt recreating myself. If repetitive, so be it: Praxis lives within everything, big or small, and is ever-evolving. I want the praxis of my own life to evolve just the same, and break down these barriers I form myself. I think that journey has finally begun.

## Conclusion

Praxis lives at the heart of social change, both as an active cause and as an inherent element of human society. It's something that never stops, intentionally or otherwise. It is a force

that runs in the background of the systems of society, but when deliberately utilized it holds the potential power to push forward global changes. As *Honouring Our Intellectual Ancestors* is titled, as the praxis cycle continues to evolve, “*We suggest that practicing humility includes seeing ourselves and our work as extensions of important relationships. We nurture these relationships when we allow ourselves to be constant students*” (Beltrán, & Mehrotra, 2015). We must strive to continue to learn and teach, to teach and learn. Some of our intellectual ancestors may have already passed, but they also still surround us every day—they’re our family, our professors, our peers—and they help shape our experiences. Social change begins with neighbours. The cycle that we practice is embedded within all facets of our lives, it’s just a matter of whether we intentionally utilize it. Whether it’s helping a friend, observing washrooms, or a journey of self-growth, the function of praxis is a valuable foundation.

I feel as though the course had replicated the cycle features within the different overall tasks within the content. Course discussions, questions, the alignment assignment and general participation acted as our reflection, as it was the section of the seminar that we provided open thought and built upon it; our daily experiential learning was our theory, in the way that we brought ideas to the table of how to utilize our reflection and try to predict in what ways they would be valuable to the class; and lastly, our practicums were the action of our cycle, where we got to pursue participation within the subject matter of our assignments and be exposed to experiment with what we had been learning. This class has been transformative for me as an academic, on a deeply internal level and all the space in between. Rather than just acting as an audience member in learning, I took on a truly active role within the classroom for one of the first times. It has been incredibly fulfilling to have challenged every possible facet of a course subject and to come from it feeling well-rounded and oh so incredibly different. Between the

material and especially my classmates, my perspectives on the world continue to grow and emerge. Each person I got the honour to work with has left a profound impact on my life, no matter how fleeting the moment, the creativity and intellect of them and my professor will forever stay with me.

Thank you so much, Joe, for such an incredible course.

### Citations

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