SHAPING THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Positive and Sustainable Frameworks for Navigating Constant Change

Edited by Lesley Wood & Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt

HUP HELSINKI UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Published by Helsinki University Press
www.hup.fi

First published 2024

Cover design: Ville Karppanen
Cover photo: Istock / IRA_EVVA
Typesetting of print and digital versions: Jukka Lauhalahti

ISBN (Paperback): 978-952-369-109-4
ISBN (PDF): 978-952-369-110-0
ISBN (EPUB): 978-952-369-111-7

https://doi.org/10.33134/HUP-25

The full text of this book has been peer reviewed to ensure high academic standards. For full review policies, see http://www.hup.fi/

VERTAISARVIOITU
KOLLEGIALT GRANSKAD
PEER-REVIEWED
www.tsv.fi/tunnus

Suggested citation:
Wood, L. & Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2024). *Shaping the future of higher education: Positive and sustainable networks for navigating constant change*. Helsinki University Press. https://doi.org/10.33134/HUP-25.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

AASHE	Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AL	Action Learning
ALAR	Action Learning and Action Research
AR	Action Research
ARC	Australian Research Council
AusAID	Australian Overseas Aid Programme
CAB	Climate Action Beacon
CBPR	Community-Based Participatory Research
CBR	Community-Based Research
CBT	Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy
CEVAW	Centre Of Excellence for the Elimination of Violence Against Women
CHR	Corporate Humanistic Responsibility
CHT	Certified Hypnotherapist
CJO	Climate Justice Observatory
D. HON	Honorary Doctorate
DVB	Disrupting Violence Beacon
ECOSOC	United Nations Economic and Social Council
FARC	Colombian Revolutionary Forces
GULL	Global University for Lifelong Learning
GUNi	Global University Network for Innovation
HE	Higher Education
HEPI	Higher Education Policy Institute
HR	Human Resource(s)
IAP	Investigación Acción Participativa

ICAE	International Council for Adult Education
IDS	Institute of Development Studies
IEG	International Expert Group
IFRDB	Inclusive Futures: Reimagining Disability Beacon
IK	Indigenous Knowledge
IKS	Indigenous Knowledge Systems
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IPR	Intellectual Property Rights
K4C	Knowledge for Change
MSP	Mental Space Psychology
MTP	Mentor Training Programme
NCCPE	National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement
NCSEHE	National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education
OD	Organisational Development
PALAR	Participatory Action Learning and Action Research
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PEP	Pedagogy, Education, and Praxis
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
PIP	Preamble—Ideas—Postscript
PRIA	Participatory Research in Asia
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
RIB	Research Initiatives Bangladesh
SAMHSA	Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
SCU	Southern Cross University
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SPRINZ	The Sports Performance Research Institute New Zealand
SR	Social Responsibility
STARS	Sustainability Tracking Assessment and Rating System
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics
TEDI	Tertiary Education Institute

TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UQ	University of Queensland
USA	United States of America
USAF	Universities South Africa
WCHE	World Conference on Higher Education
WHEC	World Higher Education Conference

About the Contributors

Mary Brydon-Miller, PhD, is Professor in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Louisville in the United States of America (USA) and is currently serving as Extraordinary Professor at North-West University in South Africa. She is a participatory action researcher who conducts work in school, community, and organisational settings. She is the editor, with David Coghlan, of the *SAGE Encyclopedia of action research* (2014). Her most recent book with Sarah Banks is *Ethics in participatory research for health and social well-being: Cases and commentaries* (2019). She recently completed a Fulbright Research Fellowship at the University of Technology, Sydney, where her work focused on the area of Climate Change Education. She is also leading an international climate change education project with colleagues from Australia, Austria, the Philippines, and South Africa, and recently hosted a Spencer Foundation funded planning conference to further develop this initiative.

Danny Burns, PhD, is a research professor specialising in participatory research and action research at the Institute of Development Studies at the University of Sussex. Danny has written extensively on participatory research and action research. Two of his books—*Systemic action research* (2007) and *Navigating complexity in international development* (2005), the latter co-authored with Stuart Worsley—focused on action research as a transformative change strategy. He is co-editor of the two-volume *Sage handbook of participatory research and inquiry*, published in 2021. Danny currently directs a number of large-scale participatory research

programmes including 'CLARISSA', which focuses on worst forms of child labour in Nepal and Bangladesh, and '*Vestibule de la Paix*', which focuses on bottom-up conflict transformation in Mali.

Florence Coertzen is a lecturer in the Department of Afrikaans for Education at the North-West University. With over a decade of teaching experience, she has a remarkable track record in educating students from the Intermediate to Senior Phase. Florence holds a Master's degree in Humanities, and is currently pursuing her PhD in curriculum studies in the field of education. When not busy inspiring the next generation, Florence is a loving wife and devoted mother of two boys.

Carolyn Evans, Professor, Vice Chancellor, and President of Griffith University, graduated with degrees in Arts and Law from the University of Melbourne and a doctorate from the University of Oxford where she studied as a Rhodes Scholar. Carolyn taught law at Oxford and Melbourne universities. Prior to commencing at Griffith University, Carolyn held the positions of Dean of Law and Deputy Vice Chancellor (Graduate and International) at the University of Melbourne. Carolyn works in the areas of law and religion and human rights and was awarded a Fulbright Senior Scholarship in 2010 to work on comparative religious freedom. In 2019, Carolyn was elected as a Fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, and became a member of the organisation Chief Executive Women. She was Chair of the Innovative Research Universities in 2021–2022 and is President of the Australian Higher Education Industrial Association. She is also a board member of Open Universities Australia. Her latest book (with Professor Adrienne Stone) is *Open minds: Academic freedom and freedom of speech in Australia* (2021).

Davydd Greenwood, Goldwin Smith Professor of Anthropology Emeritus, Director of the Einaudi Centre for International Studies (1983–1995), and Director, Institute for European Studies (2000–2008) at Cornell University, served as President of the Association

of International Education Administrators in 1993–1994. A Corresponding Member of the Spanish Royal Academy of Moral and Political Sciences (1996), he has published 10 books and scores of articles on the anthropology of Spain, universities, and action research for democratic organisational change, including Morten Levin and Davydd Greenwood, *Creating a new public university and reviving democracy: An action research approach* (2016).

Budd Hall, Professor Emeritus at the University of Victoria and the University of Toronto, Canada, is a Co-Chair of the UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. He has been engaged with ideas of knowledge curation, learning, and transformative action for over 50 years. He is the author or editor of over 500 publications. He is a grandfather of three grandsons and is also a poet.

Elma Marais is an Associate Professor in Language Education at the Faculty of Education, North-West University, South Africa. Her main research focus is on the integration of technology in education, language education, and teaching practice. She has published both nationally and internationally and supervises postgraduate students, particularly with studies using participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) methodology.

Rochelle Marais-Botha obtained her Bachelor of Arts degree (Afrikaans/Psychology) at North-West University where she also obtained her honours degree (with distinction) in 2008 and completed a Postgraduate Certificate in Higher Education (with distinction) in 2010. In 2013 she obtained her Master of Arts degree and was appointed as a lecturer at North-West University. She obtained her PhD degree in 2021. She is currently a lecturer at the Faculty of Education's School of Language Education (Subject Group Afrikaans).

Sibongile Muthwa is the Vice Chancellor of Nelson Mandela University, South Africa, and former Chairperson of Universities

South Africa (USAf). Professor Muthwa has a distinguished career, both in South Africa and internationally, working in both development and public sector institutions and academia. Between 2010 and 2017, she was the Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Institutional Support at Nelson Mandela University. Before joining Mandela University, she served as Director-General of the Eastern Cape Provincial Government (2004 and 2010) and the Director of the Fort Hare Institute of Government. She is deeply committed to gender justice, social inclusion, and active democratic participation. Accordingly, she serves on several boards and advisory structures and publishes scholarly work in these thematic areas.

Doris Santos holds a Bachelor of Education specialising in Modern Languages from Pontificia Universidad Javeriana, a Master in Linguistics from the Universidad Nacional de Colombia, and a PhD from Charles Sturt University, Australia. During the last 30 years she has taught teacher education courses and conducted participatory action research and critical educational research projects aimed at creating/re-signifying communicative spaces in several universities to promote/support academics' praxis on teaching, curriculum development, and community engagement. As a lead researcher of the cross-institutional research group Discourse Studies in Colombia, she has supported different types of projects to explore with various Indigenous communities how to make education more inclusive in Colombia. Also, as a researcher of the Pedagogy, Education, and Praxis (PEP) network, she has been cross-nationally studying sustainable educational change. Since 2016 she has led several community engagement initiatives to support the peacebuilding process in Colombia.

Rod Waddington, PhD, CHT, is an independent scholar, researcher, consultant, trainer, coach, and mentor. He specialises in Mental Health Psychology, Neurosemantics, and Dialogic Organisation Development (OD), and was formerly an academic and Acting Rector in a teacher training college, as well as a Human Resource manager in a multi-campus HE college in South

Africa. Prior to moving to the United Kingdom, Rod assisted in a rehabilitation centre for drug and alcohol addiction for four years and ran his own hypnotherapy clinic. He has presented academic papers and authored and co-edited several international publications. Currently, he engages in peer support with a mental health organisation, runs workshops, trains mental health programmes in colleges and community settings, and runs a mental health consultancy in England. His present action research interest lies in uncovering and mapping the structure of experience in self-recovery from addiction in vulnerable communities using Mental Space Psychology. His website can be accessed at http://www.the-therapycouchinternational.com.

Lesley Wood is an experienced action researcher of international repute. She has developed and conducted action research training for professional, organisational, and community development in different contexts. She is the founder Director of the research entity Community-Based Educational Research, at North-West University, and has been awarded several national and international funds for her projects. She is a National Research Foundation rated researcher. In 2014, she was awarded an Honorary Doctorate by Moravian University in the US for her work in action research. She was inducted into the Academy of Science South Africa and the international Academy of Community-Engaged Scholarship in 2021. She has published over 100 articles, book chapters, and books, and has supervised many doctoral students. Her latest books include *Participatory action learning and action research: Theory, process and practice* (2020), *Action learning and action research: Genres and approaches* (2019), edited with Prof Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, and *Community-based research with vulnerable populations: Ethical, inclusive and sustainable frameworks for knowledge generation* (2022).

Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt is an Adjunct Professor at Griffith University, Australia; Pro Chancellor, Global University for Lifelong Learning (GULL), USA; Extraordinary Professor at North-West

University, South Africa; and Honorary Citizen of the University of Innsbruck (Austria). She has four doctoral degrees: two PhDs in Australia (from the University of Queensland in Comparative Literature & Translation Science and from Deakin University in Higher Education), a Doctor of Letters (DLitt) in Management Education (IMCA, UK), and an Honorary Doctorate (D. Hon) in Professional Studies (GULL, USA). Ortrun has published widely and has received several national and internationally funded grants for her projects, and has held various honorary research and teaching appointments at international institutions at various times. Her career highlights are (1) her *Festschrift*, titled *Lifelong action learning and action research: A tribute to the life and pioneering work of Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt*, edited by Kearney and Todhunter (2015), and (2) the award in 2018 of Officer in the General Division of the Order of Australia (AO), in recognition for 'Distinguished service to tertiary education in the field of action research and learning as an academic, author and mentor, and to professional bodies'.

About This Book and Research Justification

Shaping the future of higher education: Positive and sustainable frameworks for navigating constant change is a collection of original conceptual papers, based on the years of experience of each author in their respective roles in higher education (HE). The final chapter analyses these contributions to construct a positive and sustainable framework for navigating change. The contributors are internationally renowned researchers in HE who practise innovative approaches to teaching, research, community engagement, and leadership.

To standardise the chapters, each author was asked to follow a specific structure. After the first, introductory chapter, each chapter (2–9) opens with a **p**reamble setting out the author's experience in HE and theoretical background. This is followed by their **i**deas on how to shape HE to enable positive and sustainable change. Each chapter then closes with a **p**ostscript that summarises these responses. This innovative and creative way of generating and presenting knowledge makes the book's content accessible to people from all walks of life, not only those in academia. As editors, we bookend these chapters with, respectively, a detailed introductory piece explaining the core concepts and arguments of the book, and a conclusion that constructively weaves together our analysis of each chapter to develop a theoretical framework and practical strategy for taking action to operationalise a positive and sustainable future for HE.

Each chapter, based on arguments drawn from the authors' own bodies of experience, scholarship, and peer-reviewed literature, contributes to original knowledge in the field of HE about how to deal with constant change from the various perspectives of leadership, research, community engagement, and teaching and learning. Thus, the knowledge cultivated through this book will be useful to academics, management, and leadership in HE, to policymakers and others who influence HE decision-making, and to all who are interested in understanding how HE has come to its present state and what action can be taken to best prepare HE so that humankind can understand and collectively meet shared needs of present and future. Since the authors are from Africa, Australia, the United Kingdom, North America, and South America, this book is internationally significant for this target market.

As intending editors, we sent a call to potential contributors within our network of participatory and community-engaged scholars. We initially reviewed each contribution received to ensure it complied with high academic standards and fitted with the theme of the book. All chapters, including the two we wrote as co-editors, were also double-blind and independently peer reviewed, and where recommended they were returned to authors to rework before further editing. On submission of the draft manuscript, the publishers put it through a plagiarism detection software package. The whole anonymised manuscript was then independently reviewed by two external reviewers and further changes were made by the chapter authors to respond to their comments.

We wish to sincerely thank the authors who contributed to this book, as well as Prof Sibongile Muthwa who wrote the foreword. We very much appreciate the work of this book's anonymous reviewers appointed by the publishers, and the independent reviewers we approached whose comments and insights were instrumental in improving individual chapters: Prof Maura Adshead, Prof Robert Balfour, Prof David Coghlan, Prof Rosemary Cromarty, Dr Bruce Damons, Prof Luisa de Sousa, Dr Bob Dick, Dr Maeva Gauthier, Dr Sam Kahts-Kramer, Prof Kotie Kaiser, Prof Mariette Koen, Dr Niel Kramm, Dr Mary McAteer, Dr Irene

Muller, Prof Richard Teare, Prof Andrea Vargiu, and Dr Karen Venter. We are also deeply grateful to Maureen Todhunter for her exceptional language editing and critical reading of each chapter and to Katie Dvorak for her design of Figure 10.1. Finally, we thank the Helsinki University Press team and Gráinne Treanor for their meticulous and efficient assistance to realise this publication.

Lesley Wood and Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt
Editors

Foreword

This volume lends its voice to the global clarion call to people from all walks and intellectual persuasions who are interested in higher education (HE). It calls on us not just to reflect on and call out the increasingly unstable state of HE, but to take positive remedial action, as each chapter identifies and explains. In the present context of increasing instability, marginalities, and exclusion, this volume proposes pathways and strategies that may facilitate a more socially just, inclusive, relevant, and sustainable HE for all.

At its deepest level, the book is about the urgent need for meaningful transformative change in HE. Such meaningful transformation requires new ways of thinking, perceiving, and doing. As such, this book is both of and for its time. It bridges the complex philosophical explanations of our current HE context, discussing a broad spectrum of social issues in HE and offering inspired and visionary (yet pragmatic) conceptualisations of corrective actions to preserve the stated intention of HE as a public good. Particularly significant are the moral and ethical imperatives that are presented implicitly or explicitly in the various chapters, which cohere and interlink the individual contributions. These imperatives highlight our shared need to strive for more inclusive and socially just societies. They also shine light on the manner in which reimagined HE might contribute to and shape these goals.

The contributions in this volume reject the more traditional, elitist, and classist characteristics and understandings of HE, and clearly acknowledge the need for relevant, fair access to quality education for the future. Overall, the authors acknowledge that

this may likely entail quite profound ideological shifts from prevailing neoliberal market-dominant principles to decolonising and democratising knowledge, and developing more socially embedded and engaged models that much more strongly support the notion of HE as a social good that places people above profit. Chapters suggest that what may be needed to achieve this is deliberately overthrowing the exclusionary 'expert' authoritative mindset that remains so deeply entrenched, to make way for a broader global community of voices to shape new and more inclusive HE conversations and pathways.

Perhaps the greatest strength and value of this volume is that the 10 chapters traverse a broad spectrum of HE functioning, from its role as a fundamental change agent for good, to assertions seeking ethical repair and healing, new beginnings, tackling climate change, the duty of care in regard to mental health, the urgent imperative to decolonise knowledge and secure genuine academic freedoms, and, critically important, artificial intelligence (AI) and its increasingly influential role in the HE environment. Having laid these foundations, the chapters then offer frameworks for positive and feasible change.

This important contribution to the body of knowledge on HE would not have been possible without the commitment and experience of the contributing authors and editors, Lesley Wood and Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, both of whom are considered to be international leaders and experts in the fields of action research. In the words of the editors themselves, their aim with the book is:

> that the knowledge generated through this book will contribute to possible structures and processes that enable greater relevance, inclusivity, and flexibility in HE. To that end, we use our analysis of knowledge, ideas, and other contributions presented across the following eight chapters to design a framework to shape a HE system that is inclusive and student-centred, that promotes knowledge democracy, and that is responsive to and relevant for dealing with pressing social issues as they arise. (Chapter 1, p. 17)

I feel sure that this thought-provoking and well-informed volume will make an influential contribution to literature on transformative change in HE. Let us hope that it also inspires and informs the remedial action needed to reorient HE towards meeting the pressing needs of the 21st century, remedial action that these chapters usefully identify, explain, and urge us to collectively, mindfully pursue.

Sibongile Muthwa
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CHAPTER 1

The Why, What, and How of Actioning Change in Higher Education

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Abstract

This chapter introduces the book. It provides the rationale, with evidence of *why* it is necessary to change current philosophy and practices in higher education (HE) to make it more inclusive, flexible, and responsive to both external and internal change drivers. It discusses the core idea of this book that individuals and groups of people working in HE are best placed to initiate and bring about positive and sustainable change in their own practices. We provide a global perspective on ideas of *what* constitutes responsive, sustainable action for change in HE, using the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of UNESCO as a starting point and

How to cite this book chapter:
Wood, L. & Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2024). The why, what, and how of actioning change in higher education. In L. Wood & O. Zuber-Skerritt (Eds.), *Shaping the future of higher education: Positive and sustainable frameworks for navigating constant change* (pp. 1–23). Helsinki University Press. https://doi.org/10.33134-HUP-25-1.

moral imperative for moving towards positive change. We explain our philosophical assumptions, understanding, and perspective as a baseline for thinking about *how* to action change. Finally, we outline the book to guide the reader through this volume.

Introduction

This book is about shaping higher education (HE) to make it more responsive to the needs created by the constant change and flux that characterise our world today. This chapter introduces readers to the volume. It explains the purpose, and what motivated us as editors to bring together our concerns, experiences, and suggestions with those of colleagues who are also highly experienced in and concerned about this level of education, to offer some helpful guidance for the future. Because this chapter provides the groundwork for the following chapters, here we discuss the ideas that have inspired, informed, and challenged our thinking for and through this book. We also consider relevant contributions from some of the core writings about HE, and from some useful recent works.

At the outset, we need to clarify that we recognise the diversity of institutions that offer HE within the wider dichotomies of public/private, contact/distance, comprehensive/specialised, newly founded/established, and within various contexts such as urban/rural, emerging economy/developed economy. That is why we choose the term 'higher education' rather than 'the university', since in HE there are various models and contexts. Primarily we focus on the comprehensive public university offering a variety of qualifications in a range of disciplines, so the knowledge we generate through this project may not be applicable to all the categories of HE. Our base argument is that for HE to remain relevant and sustainable, the key role players, especially those responsible for teaching, research, community engagement, and leadership, need to be able to constantly reflect—alone and with others—on their values, paradigms, and subsequent practice to identify and pursue ways to effectively navigate change towards positive and socially just outcomes. Yet simply thinking about the need to

change is not enough. Clearly it is decisive and timely action that gives life to ideas and turns rhetoric into reality. That's why we propose a transformative paradigm, underpinned by action learning and action leadership, as key for achieving positive change. We explain the paradigm later in this chapter. First, we discuss our thinking about how HE can respond most effectively to current and future scenarios, stemming from our concerns with current trends in HE.

A global perspective on the 'ideal' higher education system

In preparation for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Higher Education Conference (WHEC) 2022, the global organisation commissioned several reports. One, "Pathways to Higher Education 2050 and Beyond" (UNESCO, 2021), collected the views of a global public on possible futures of HE and how it can contribute to attaining the sustainable development goals (SDGs) of UNESCO. These goals are ideals to guide the policy and actions of governments worldwide, in a global partnership, to end poverty, protect the planet, and bring about peace and prosperity for all by 2030 (United Nations, 2023). Although such ideals are unlikely to be in place by 2030, if ever, governments making a public commitment to realising these ideals is a powerful way to shape and influence global policy. Since the 17 goals are integrated, with action in one affecting all the others, any progress must take into account social, economic, and environmental sustainability. HE has a diverse focus across disciplines, positioning it well to contribute towards attaining the SDGs. We argue that such contributions should not be optional but should serve as the purpose and moral imperative of HE research, engagement, and learning. The UNESCO study presented four main findings.

Finding #1: *HE should be inclusive and financially and epistemologically accessible for students from all levels of society.*
In general, HE is an expensive undertaking, so those with low-income backgrounds are often excluded. And even if these people can access scholarships or free education, they are commonly subject to social and epistemological exclusion (Morrow, 2009), meaning that their previous educational and life experiences have not prepared them to assimilate into the mostly middle-class culture of HE that contributes to the risk of failure. This is especially the case in countries that are socially, racially, economically, and linguistically diverse. Indigenous knowledge (IK) has long been ignored and/or excluded in education, although in recent years some efforts have been made to include Indigenous thinking in school curricula by innovative educators collaborating with Indigenous elders (e.g. the Goondeen Institute in Australia (https://www.goondeen.com.au/). However, Western philosophies and theories still dominate curricula in HE. Decolonising and democratising knowledge is therefore paramount to make HE more inclusive and epistemologically accessible, as Budd Hall (Chapter 8) and Doris Santos (Chapter 5) argue in this volume.

Over the past few decades, universities have been made more like business corporations than institutions for the public good, particularly as a consequence of lower levels of public funding. Student fees have been raised accordingly (Raghuram et al., 2020). In Chapter 3, Davydd Greenwood explains how capitalism leads to increasing social inequalities and encourages people to destroy the planet, yet HE institutions have effectively been forced to embrace capitalism as their modus operandi as they struggle to survive in the face of continuing funding cuts. The neoliberal culture that decision makers in HE needed to adopt and cultivate in the face of these developments has produced some deeply concerning outcomes.

One of these, little known or acknowledged even inside HE institutions let alone among general publics at large, is the ever closer relationships some HE institutions are forming with private and public bodies associated with the military industrial complex.

Research, cultivating graduate students for staff recruitment, and other activities for military purposes, tie the institutions not just to governments using production and sales of military equipment for income, but also to huge profit-making by private military corporations. These linkages tie the associated HE institutions closer to the pursuit, conduct, and legitimising of war, and establish precedent for their counterparts in HE to do likewise for the financial windfalls such military links can yield (Giroux, 2010; Olivier, 2022).

The quality of HE is now evaluated by national and international watchdogs through predetermined criteria and rankings that intensify competition among and within institutions. For academic staff, this means their performance is assessed largely on the basis of quantity—of teaching hours, publications produced, and so forth—at times with minimal regard for the quality of their work. For students, it means the decisions made within HE institutions can work against the interests of inclusion and affordability, as admission policies tend to favour top achievers who help to raise the university profile in the ranking systems but who tend to come from the more affluent and powerful echelons of society. HE institutions have become—indeed, they've been drawn into—the so-called knowledge economy, needing to function as profitable businesses with a commodity to trade, rather than providing HE as a fundamental human right (Amsler & Bolsmann, 2012).

Here we are talking about a profound ideological shift in dominant political understandings, particularly from the 1980s. In many countries the ever deeper reach of neoliberalism—strengthening and expanding the role of markets into all areas of life, while minimising the role of governments and forcing individual responsibility and competition across society—has embedded its moral and practical consequences upon most aspects of life for so many people (Connell, 2019). For HE institutions, this is strongly evident in reduced government funding and the consequent privatising and marketising of education as a commodity, in the empowerment of private corporations over the 'knowledge' that researchers 'produce' through corporate funding, and in the

empowerment of students as consumers of education 'products' rather, or more, than as learners seeking to enrich their minds as well as their income-earning potential. It is evident in the competition rather than collaboration among staff and students oriented towards the individual or self above the collective or shared interest, as indeed are individual universities pursuing their own survival or elevation in the rankings list rather, or more, than the educational enrichment of the people at large. Connell (2019) challenges us to rethink the fundamentals of what universities do. Drawing on the examples offered by pioneering universities and educational reformers around the world, she outlines a practical vision for how our universities can become both more engaging and more productive places, driven by pursuit of social good for all rather than maximising profit, and helping to build fairer societies.

Razak and Moten (2023) call for universities to be 'WISER', an acronym for wholesome, inclusive, sustainable, equitable, and resilient, in contrast to the current neoliberal, market-oriented "reputation obsessed, dehumanising system" (p. 119). The shift to hybrid teaching that combines face-to-face with online learning means less human interaction among colleagues and students. And although hybrid teaching can increase student inclusion, it also carries a risk of dehumanising the teaching/learning experience, as Razak and Moten (2023) observe. Preliminary research indicates concerns about the negative impact of reduced interaction among students and between students and staff, and in staff collaboration in relation to learning and teaching (Kalmar et al., 2022). Recent academic and public press has also highlighted growing levels of dissatisfaction and disillusion among those working or studying in HE institutions (Ewing, 2021; Laske, 2022; Lee et al., 2021).

The need to move overnight to online education and administration via digital platforms increased the workload of all and imposed social isolation that alienated many. It swiftly widened the digital divide, excluding students who could not access the necessary electronic devices or afford the data and other

requirements to connect to their courses. As the restrictions of COVID-19 recede, HE retains a hybrid approach to conducting its responsibilities of teaching, research, and community engagement. In this light we argue that, unless a conscious effort is made to offset social isolation and increased workload, this shift could have negative spinoffs, despite the many positive opportunities for inclusion it offers. Mental health problems among students and staff seem to be on the rise globally (Hari, 2022), although relatively little research has yet been conducted on the causes of this. An important question that this UNESCO finding raises is how to initiate change to make HE more accessible, inclusive, and equitable, taking into consideration its systemic complexities and the opportunities continually opening up through technological advancements. This is a question explored in a recent special issue of *On the Horizon* (Atkinson, 2023) and is particularly considered by Danny Burns in Chapter 6 of this book.

Finding #2: *The curriculum should be student-centred and value-based to best prepare graduates for modern life.* Fung (2023) argues for a paradigm shift in curriculum design, moving from the idea of rigidly constructed academic programmes towards modular pathways that support a movement towards lifelong learning. This would enable students to remain flexible and upskill themselves as the need arises. Valdés-Cotera (2023) also explains how the changing world of work (e.g. remote working, contracts versus permanent employment, multiple careers) requires HE to prepare students to be lifelong learners, able to reinvent themselves when necessary. This need also means that HE will have to adapt teaching approaches to cater for older students who have family and work responsibilities that make it difficult to attend an institution in person (Fung, 2023).

Technology is developing at an almost unbelievable rate, with the technological advancement accomplished in the year 2000 achieved every 30 seconds now (García-Peñalvo, 2023). So the attributes and competencies that today's graduates need to successfully navigate their lives are more complex than in previous

generations. The curriculum has to encourage the development of adaptive, transversal skills or skills that cut across specific tasks, sometimes referred to as 'soft' skills. Poszytek (2022) identifies five categories: (1) ability to keep up with digital and technical advances; (2) competence in working in and leading teams; (3) entre/intrapreneurial skills; (4) cognitive skills such as complex problem-solving, creativity, critical thinking, and adaptability; and (5) ability to appreciate diverse points of view, operate within diverse cultures and interdisciplinary teams, and be open to learning and change. However, this type of skills and knowledge development needs to be embedded within a strong, humanitarian, and ethical value system that promotes equality, fairness, and the flourishing of humankind and the planet. So how can we adapt curricula in HE to ensure teaching remains relevant to the times, upholds appreciation of the common interest, and draws on the positives of change, while reducing possible negative impact?

Finding #3: *Teaching and research should offer diverse ways to learn and represent knowledge and should acknowledge the powerful sources of knowledge already residing within the community.* Muthwa (2022, np), speaking in a South African context but with global relevance, calls for profound transformation, in that "universities must shed their dominant character and orientation that is trapped in a modern/colonial imaginary, to truly transform and become more responsive to their context". Hall and Tandon (2021) echo the call for decolonisation of HE and explain that complex issues—such as the climate crisis, global conflict, the rebirth of nationalism, and deepening inequalities, accelerated in many ways by the COVID-19 pandemic—present us with both challenges and opportunities. The uncertainty we live with can help in the development of a newly imagined world if HE engages with community to co-generate knowledge to solve pressing social issues. Requiring graduates to engage in service-learning is one way to enable them to learn how to contribute in a meaningful way to the creation of a more peaceful, equitable society.

Indigenous and local knowledges should be embraced as valid, and indeed essential, for finding relevant and sustainable solutions for complex problems. The democratisation of knowledge acknowledges the existence of multiple knowledges in the form of "organic, spiritual, land-based systems, frameworks arising from our social movements" (Hall & Tandon, 2021, p. 7). It also recognises the validity of various forms of knowledge, such as art-based representations, in addition to text-based. In this way knowledge democracy is the basis for ethical and values-based action towards fairer and more just societies (Hall & Tandon, 2021, p. 8), as several contributors to this book contend. Another important question, then, is how those who can now shape HE may overthrow the 'expert' authoritative mindset that has so long sustained HE, so that all who participate in HE can learn and benefit from engaging with local knowledge and values.

Finding #4: *The university should make meaningful contributions towards solving complex problems such as the planet's eco crisis.* In the opening speech of the WHEC, whose theme was "Reinventing Higher Education for a Sustainable Future", the Director General of UNESCO, Audrey Azouley (2022), stressed that HE should exist for the public good, and to be able to do so it must be able to respond and adapt to constant change in the world. Carolyn Evans builds on this in Chapter 2 of this book. A strong, social justice-oriented HE system is vital for generating knowledge to help the world cope with the complex problems facing us today, like climate change, as Mary Brydon-Miller discusses in Chapter 4.

UNESCO (2021) argues that the aim of HE is to produce locally useful and globally relevant knowledge, through transdisciplinary and community partnerships. The university of the future must therefore contribute to improving the quality of life for all by enabling people to learn how to thrive, despite—or more constructively, alongside—constant social change, the threat of planetary destruction, and the ever-advancing use of technology in social, work, and other spheres. It must therefore be attuned to the needs of society and work with relevant role players to co-create

knowledge for change, but as Muthwa (2022, np) argued, "… to be able to 'hear' these articulations in their authenticity requires deep institutional transformation within the university and its academy". Such transformation would lead to "praxis [which] interrogates and seeks to disrupt that which is taken for granted". How such profound change can be actioned is a central question of this book.

A recent innovation that stands to totally transform HE is the use of artificial intelligence (AI) via open-source applications such as ChatGPT. Like all innovations, it can have both positive and negative impacts. Given this application's newness to the general public internationally (around November 2022) and the lack of empirical data about its impact, we decided to test ChatGPT by asking: "What are the positive and negative impacts of AI on Higher Education?" Within three seconds we received the response we present in summary in Table 1.1.

The conclusion reached by ChatGPT resonates with the argument we are presenting in this chapter. It is that the future of HE will be determined by how those involved in leading, delivering, and receiving HE respond to change and innovation. This is discussed further in Chapter 9's exploration of AI in HE. And as Danny Burns points out in Chapter 6, we also need to be acutely aware of the potential dangers of relying too heavily on AI, and we need to critically evaluate the information it presents. The need for flexibility, transversal, critical skills, and lifelong learning has never been so great.

The findings discussed above provide insight into some of the factors affecting the HE sector globally. Although it's not a comprehensive view of the complexities facing HE, we take this valuable knowledge as a starting point to help stakeholders within HE to rethink how they can remain relevant in times of uncertainty and volatility, when so much change is fast-paced, constant, and unpredictable. As Bolles (2023, np) argues, "exponential change is the new abnormal. We need to see work and learning with new eyes", implying that positive change in HE has to start with

Table 1.1: ChatGPT's take on the impact of AI on higher education.

	Positive impact	**Potential negative impact**
Personalised learning	Use of individual student data to understand their learning patterns, strengths and weaknesses. This can help educators tailor their teaching methods and provide targeted feedback to help students learn more effectively.	If AI is used in the university admissions process or in other areas of decision-making, it could potentially perpetuate biases and discrimination that already exist in society. This could be a significant ethical concern that universities will need to address.
Increased efficiency	AI can help automate many repetitive tasks, such as grading, scheduling, and student support, allowing educators to focus on more critical tasks such as teaching and research. This can help increase overall efficiency and productivity within HE institutions.	One of the most significant concerns is that AI could automate many of the tasks currently performed by university staff, including administrative tasks, grading papers, and even teaching. This could lead to job displacement and potentially impact the job security of many university employees.
Reduced costs	AI can help reduce the cost of education by automating administrative tasks such as grading, scheduling and student support. This can help free up resources that can be used for other educational purposes.	
Enhanced research	AI can be used to analyse vast amounts of data and improve research capabilities in various fields. AI can help researchers find patterns and relationships in data that would be impossible to find manually, helping to accelerate the pace of research.	AI algorithms often rely on large datasets to make predictions and decisions. If universities are collecting large amounts of data about their students, staff, or alumni, there could be privacy concerns about how this data is being collected, stored and used.
Improved accessibility	AI can help make education more accessible by providing tools for people with disabilities and creating automated systems for grading, assignments and other tasks. This can help reduce the workload for educators and increase accessibility for students.	There is a risk that AI could widen the educational inequality gap, as universities with more resources may be able to invest more heavily in AI technology and gain a competitive advantage over those with fewer resources. This could lead to a concentration of power and resources in the hands of a few elite universities.

individuals in its different sectors. He concludes that transversal, flexible skills are vital for coping with constant change, but are not enough to ensure positive responses or outcomes. The next section explains how we conceptualise change.

Our understanding of positive change in HE

To promote flourishing in this 'new normal', we have to develop mindsets that embrace change as opportunity for improvement and that actively pursue lifelong learning. Those with opportunity and capacity need to enhance in HE (1) its relevance and suitability (to avoid the mismatch of skills between graduates and the needs of workplace and society); (2) affordability (to open up access to learning); and (3) flexibility (to embrace and deal constructively with change as an institution). We must be comfortable with increasing automation and technological innovations, and ensure their use promotes the well-being of people and the planet. We are capable of such mindful practice if and when we reflect critically and engage productively with others to bring about positive change in our own work and in the systems we are a part of. Here we recognise and conceptualise positive change as that which promotes democracy, pursuit of the common interest, care, social justice, fairness, open communication, critical thinking, accountability, and responsibility, and which develops the capabilities of people to make decisions and take action to benefit their lives and the lives of others.

To understand change, we have to understand what prompts it—to ask how and why things have changed. Change drivers are critical factors that force or influence change in a particular sector (in this case HE). They include external factors (e.g. government policy, economic influences, inter/national pandemics, technological innovations, and socio-cultural influences) and internal factors (e.g. increased demand for HE, changing ideas about the importance of HE, and motivation/satisfaction of employees), all of which impact negatively or positively (or both) on the quality, affordability, inclusivity, and accessibility of HE. External drivers

are imposed on the sector and force a reaction, whereas internal drivers can be manipulated to some degree by the sector itself (Mdletye et al., 2014). Since change can impact negatively, positively, or both ways on the sector, it's only by engaging with the change critically, reflectively, and collaboratively that we can identify which responses are most likely to work towards outcomes that promote the flourishing of HE and those who participate in it, as well as the wider communities it serves.

The core argument of this book is therefore that simply rethinking and theorising about *what* could or should be changed within HE is not enough. We also need to generate ideas about *how* such change can be actioned. What small steps can people take individually and collectively within their respective spheres of influence to (re)shape HE—to bring it closer to the ideals iterated by the global public as outlined in the UNESCO research we've discussed above? The questions we've posed in this section and others like them lay the ground for this book's contributors to offer their responses about what constitutes positive, sustainable frameworks for navigating constant change in HE, drawing from reflections on their own extensive experiences and learning. Before moving on to discuss the aim and purpose of this book, we turn here to explain the paradigm and philosophical assumptions that inform our thinking about the future of HE.

The paradigmatic assumptions underpinning our argument

Higher education systems and the institutions they comprise appear to be in crisis in many countries around the globe. Yes, many still contribute some impressive outcomes through teaching and research. But their capacity to help develop new generations of graduates with the ability to understand and respond effectively to the complexity of 21st-century living, with the capacity to think critically about the common interest unchained by dominant understandings about maximising economic profit for the few, appears to be a common concern—inside and outside HE

systems. The philosophy or understandings by which these systems function, and their purposes and capacities, are in a state of flux in many instances.

A core concern for us is loss of freedom in HE. As discussion below of our paradigm Action Learning and Action Research (ALAR) reveals, our understanding of learning, teaching, and researching in HE is rooted in the concept of freedom. This is freedom to think, believe, speak, write, teach, learn, question, explore, challenge, and create knowledge—as individuals and/or as groups of people—in ways that support or are consistent with the common good. So why does this multitude of concerns about HE interest us? And why did it inspire—perhaps compel!—us to embark on this project?

Both of us (Lesley and Ortrun) consider ourselves to be lifelong learners, and our work has centred on promoting research that brings about personal, professional, institutional, and community transformation. We are interested in helping others and ourselves to understand why and how to learn and to use that learning to bring about positive and sustainable change within our respective spheres of influence. We do this through teaching, mentoring, supervision, research, publishing, community engagement, and international networking, to advance participatory and emancipatory paradigms that engender social justice outcomes (Wood, 2020; Zuber-Skerritt & Wood, 2019).

The present book attests to our lasting passion for HE, and our desire to give back, drawing from the great harvest of learning we have been so fortunate to receive and help cultivate over the last 50+ years. We recognise the value of HE and lifelong learning for all who have the opportunity, since benefits are not just personal but flow out into community at local, national, and international levels.

As scholars, our practices have always been interlinked with our understandings of and through teaching, learning, research, and ultimately community development. As action learning and action research practitioners, we weave learning through reflection on practice into further conceptual development, and again

into further practice and conceptual development in continuous cycles. And significantly for this book, what we do, what we learn from what we do, and why we do so, are always with an eye to the future of HE. Consequences/possibilities for the future are always part of our doing/learning in the present.

On the basis of our teaching and research experience in HE and community engagement/development, we propose that the most effective way of achieving constant, transformational, and sustainable change is not the usual top-down approach by experts and leaders in organisations and governments. Rather, it's a bottom-up approach to improving practice by the people at the coalface of knowledge creation and acquisition through research, teaching, and learning. These are the people engaged in knowledge work actively rather, or more, than just passively, reactively, or theoretically; they experience the problems and inefficiencies at their workplace and/or in their communities and are best placed to identify possible ways of improvement/change by *action learning*. Reg Revans, the recognised founder of action learning, explained that action is the basis for learning and that no real learning takes place unless and until action is taken. It is not enough to just create policy or offer recommendations—action is the basis for all learning (Pedler & Abbott, 2013). Action learning is not about learning facts or reproducing the ideas of others. It is about questioning, critiquing, dialogue, and reflection. This approach to learning brings about change on personal and professional levels.

Richard Teare (in Zuber-Skerritt, 2009) explains this:

> Action learning occurs when people learn from each other, create their own resources, identify their own problems and form their own solutions. This process works all the world over, in any culture, language and tradition. The action learning process is so enriching that every learner is able to identify personal and life transforming outcomes. These commonly include enhanced self-confidence, self-belief, renewal, enthusiasm for learning, a new sense of direction and purpose for career and life – along with new skills, insights and the sense of being equipped for the future. (p. 181)

The praxeology of action learning, i.e. how action learning is used to study human action and reaction, is therefore similar to transformative learning (Mezirow, 2018) in that both these theories of learning seek to transform "problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, perspectives on meaning, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change" (Mezirow, 2003, p. 58). Transformative learning is underpinned by a transformative paradigm (Mertens, 2019), which, grounded in principles of cultural respect, reciprocity, and inclusion, aims to bring about transformative action using any methodologies that provide the data needed to inform decisions for action. Although our work is grounded in participatory forms of action learning and action research, we are open to any methodological approaches that acknowledge the multiple versions of reality and prize the generation of knowledge through reflexive dialogue in authentic relationship with others.

When people work in such a way, they become action leaders, able to take initiative and bring about change to improve their practice, irrespective of their position in the hierarchy of HE. Zuber-Skerritt (2011, on the back cover of her book on *Action leadership*) has explained action leadership as:

> … a creative, innovative, collaborative and self-developed way to lead. It eschews the hierarchical structure usually associated with leadership and is based instead on the democratic values of freedom, equality, inclusion and self-realization. It takes responsibility for, not control over, people through networking and orchestrating human energy towards a holistic outcome that benefits the common interest.

We propose that in this time of unprecedented change, there is an urgent need to cultivate action leadership, and action leaders, to improve how HE can engage constructively with both internal and external stakeholders. In so doing, action leadership can enable those with will and ability to help us all to collectively address

the continuous challenges facing society. Indeed, it's this belief that motivated us to develop the current book.

Aim of the book

As editors of this volume, we both have considerable experience as researchers and teachers in HE, operating from a participatory and transformative paradigm. We strive to create knowledge to enable those involved in HE—researchers, teachers, students, management and leadership, and people who provide support services—to reflect on and improve their practices, to move from thinking and talking about change in HE to actioning it. As the research cited in the opening sections urges, HE needs to operate from an increasingly sophisticated learner-centred approach, responsive to public need, and grounded in innovative, collaborative, systemic, critical, and creative thinking. It must foster lifelong learning and research, finding ways to constantly improve knowledge creation and using such knowledge to respond as effectively as possible to pressing social issues.

We argue that those at the heart of HE, those who do the daily work of learning, teaching, research, community engagement, and leadership, are the people best placed to initiate innovative and constructive action to respond most effectively to the structural and systemic challenges confronting society. Our aim is that the knowledge generated through this book will contribute to possible structures and processes that enable greater relevance, inclusivity, and flexibility in HE. To that end, we use our analysis of knowledge, ideas, and other contributions presented across the following eight chapters to design a framework to shape a HE system that is inclusive and student-centred, that promotes knowledge democracy, and that is responsive to and relevant for dealing with pressing social issues as they arise. We now outline the structure of the book.

Structure of the book

This book presents a selection of ideas from internationally renowned researchers in HE who practise innovative approaches to teaching, research, community engagement, and leadership. It uses the PIP (Preamble—Ideas—Postscript) model, which we have revised from its original form that entailed interviews, as we discuss below. As an edited collection, this volume includes two chapters written by the editors; the first (this Chapter 1) introduces the book and its thesis, and the last (Chapter 10) reflects on the content provided by contributors, from which we develop a conclusion that constructively weaves together the knowledge from each chapter. In that final chapter we develop a conceptual framework for taking action to operationalise a positive and sustainable future for HE. The eight chapters in between are written by internationally renowned experts in HE from developing and developed countries, experts whom we chose because they share with us a transformative, critical, and participatory paradigm grounded in values of care, democracy, and social justice.

The original model of PIP (Preamble—Interview—Postscript) was designed and published in Zuber-Skerritt (2009). We adapted it for this book to expand the freedom of the authors to think broadly and deeply about what they wanted to convey, so they could generate new ideas independently rather than being restricted by the interview questions we would ask as editors. That's why in this project PIP is an acronym for Preamble—Ideas—Postscript. We provided authors with key questions to stimulate their ideas and guide their approaches to, and structuring of, their chapters. These questions also helped to generate coherence across the volume, particularly by yielding what are effectively golden threads that usefully weave the chapters together and link them into the editors' opening and closing chapters. We note here, however, that in the spirit of this volume, whilst we asked authors to consider responding to the questions we offered, the authors were free to adapt the questions as they felt most appropriate for their chapter. These were the guiding questions.

PIP questions

Preamble (setting out the theoretical background and context of the authors' ideas and discussion)

- What role do you play in higher education (HE)? Please give a short overview of your experience in HE.
- What paradigm/world view do you ascribe to? What theories have influenced you?

Ideas (responses to the questions posed)

- What is your major concern in relation to how HE is (not) responding to our changing world? Why do you think it is a concern?
- What do you think needs to change in HE and how, to make it more inclusive and responsive to changing socio-cultural/economic/technological/political/environmental scenarios (i.e. in relation to your particular role, argument, ideas, and suggestions)?
- How can this change be actioned by those within the HE system? In relation to your specific role, please give some ideas about what you/others within your sphere of influence can do to bring about the change you envision—drawing on your experience and past/current research.

Postscript (suggestions for actioning the ideas)

- What would then be the actions you suggest people in your role or those you influence/lead would need to take to learn how to cope with and positively welcome 'constant change through innovative, collaborative, systemic, critical, and creative thinking and action'?
- Any closing thoughts?

Consistent with our urge for inclusivity, this innovative and creative way of contributing to and presenting knowledge through the Preamble—Ideas—Postscript model makes the content accessible to people from all walks of life, not only those in academia. And to

enhance accessibility, we have tried to keep our writing clear and straightforward and have asked the same of the invited authors. We therefore believe this book will be of interest—and great benefit—to all who are involved in and concerned about, and/or who actively promote, effective HE practices. This includes leaders, researchers, teachers, policymakers, and those associated with funding. Importantly, it also includes the general public, who are not only end users of HE systems, but also largely funders (through the public purse) and ideally beneficiaries through the thriving culture, economy, and polity that quality HE is instrumental in cultivating and sustaining.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have explicated our argument for *why* HE has to change and *what* types of change need to happen, and we have provided our theoretical and paradigmatic justification for *how* those active within the HE environment are in the best position to realise such change. The *leitmotif* of the book is that theorising and reflecting on what change is needed is pointless unless it also provides clear pathways and generates personal and/or collective will to action that change. Using research associated with UNESCO's 2022 World Higher Education Conference as a starting point for our argument, we have expanded on these research findings and hinted at how the following chapters address these findings. Finally, we have indicated our own philosophical standpoints and how these led us to conceptualise and realise this current volume. The following eight chapters continue our opening argument and deepen it by adding rich perspectives from leading global scholars in HE.

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CHAPTER 2

Shaping Society for Tomorrow

The Role of Higher Education in Bringing About Positive Change

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Abstract

While universities must be responsive to the complex times in which we live and to the increasing demands of governments and others, they also need to work towards a future beyond the next electoral or economic cycle. This requires a deep understanding of their core mission and values. This chapter argues that we need to recognise the benefits of diversity, and to consider higher education (HE) as an ecosystem rather than trying to force all universities into similar patterns. It discusses the importance of universities being permeable and looking outward to create positive social and environmental impact. This chapter uses Griffith University's Research Beacons as a key example of how inter- and transdisciplinary collaboration can directly address community needs to create a better future for all.

How to cite this book chapter:
Evans, C. (2024). Shaping society for tomorrow: The role of higher education in bringing about positive change. In L. Wood & O. Zuber-Skerritt (Eds.), *Shaping the future of higher education: Positive and sustainable frameworks for navigating constant change* (pp. 25–44). Helsinki University Press. https://doi.org/10.33134-HUP-25-2.

Preamble

In 2019, I became the Vice Chancellor and President of Griffith University, a comprehensive research university based in South-east Queensland, Australia. Prior to that, I had worked for most of my career at the University of Melbourne, starting in the Law School as a casual academic staff member and finishing as a Deputy Vice Chancellor. After finishing my undergraduate degrees at Melbourne University and spending a short time working in a commercial law firm, I went on to complete my doctorate and commence my teaching career at Oxford.

Why did I decide to apply to Griffith for this role? I admired Griffith's ongoing commitment to a wide range of disciplines, including areas such as the creative and visual arts and Asian studies, which had come under pressure in many other universities. Tackling some of the most important issues of our time requires people working across traditional boundaries. Griffith not only had a wide range of disciplines but was founded as a university committed to interdisciplinarity, a culture that has persisted into its fifth decade. It was also clear that Griffith had a proud tradition of creating pathways to higher education (HE) for a wide variety of students, from academically high-achieving school-leavers to those who required more support to enable them to fulfil their academic potential. This commitment to equity resonated with my values.

As Vice Chancellor, I have considerable power within the university to drive change, yet because of the diffuse and complex structures and cultures inherent in the academy, far more engagement, consultation, and co-creation of initiatives are required than would occur in most other work environments. Most of my time as Vice Chancellor at Griffith has been during the 'COVID period', including the height of the crisis in 2020–2021 when universities were required to respond with both speed and empathy to some of the most challenging circumstances the HE sector has faced in recent decades.

Higher education then and now

It can be tempting when considering the state of HE to become focused on the negatives of the current times, with academic writers sometimes creating a nostalgic past where universities were better in almost all respects. Unsurprisingly, given our training in critical thinking, the temptation is to jump immediately to what is wrong without consideration of the real changes and gains for the good.

This has implications for the hard work of effecting real and lasting positive change. If the core narrative is one of an endless downward slide towards worsening educational outcomes and workplace conditions, many people will be left feeling disempowered and discouraged. If the hard work and effort put in by countless people in the previous decades have led only to a worse state of affairs, all but a hardy and committed few might believe that further efforts to improve the system are pointless. Such a narrative also disrespects and dismisses the work of those who fought hard for, and brought about, real and important change.

It is, therefore, worth pausing to consider some of the changes that have taken place in the sector over the last 50 years that have transformed HE into a far more inclusive, diverse, and equitable system. Considering my current location, and much of my experience over the past decade, I take Australia as an illustrative example. But acknowledging the scope of this book, it is useful to note that similar trends can be seen in many countries.

In 1971, Australia had 13 universities that educated 134,201 students (1 per cent of the nation's total population and 9 per cent of the 20–24-year-old cohort) and employed 7,368 teaching and research staff (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 1971). Fifty years later in 2021, Australian universities educated close to 1.5 million students (6 per cent of the total population) and employed close to 130,000 staff across 42 universities (ABS, 2021). Effectively, over just a few decades, Australia moved from an elite HE system towards a mass HE system.

Those with access to this education also changed dramatically. In 1970, women were certainly present both in the student bodies and at the faculty level. But they were a minority. Women made up 29 per cent of the student body and just over 13 per cent of academic staff, and that was a substantial improvement on prior decades (Jones & Castle, 1983, p. 19). It was not until 1960 that pioneering geologist Dorothy Hill became the first female professor at an Australian university. While women have not reached parity with men at the professorial level, they now make up approximately 30 per cent of professors, with most universities having plans to increase this percentage over time (Universities Australia, 2019, p. 4).

Even more starkly, the history of Australia's universities with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders has been one of exclusion, racism, and discrimination until comparatively recent times. The first recorded Aboriginal graduate of an Australian university was Margaret Williams-Weir from the University of Melbourne in 1959. But Aboriginal students entered HE in any numbers only from the 1980s. Even now, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in universities lags behind population parity (2 per cent compared with 3.2 per cent), but that is a significant improvement over previous decades. We are also seeing increasing numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff at universities, including in leadership roles and at the professorial level (Universities Australia, 2022).

Education at Australian universities has become far more accessible to a much more diverse range of students now than it was two generations ago. In 2008 Denise Bradley wrote a seminal report on HE for the Australian government in which she proposed the ambitious target of 40 per cent of Australians aged 25–34 years attaining at least a bachelor-level qualification, and students from lower socio-economic backgrounds composing 20 per cent of undergraduate enrolments (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008). The first of these targets has now been achieved, with educational attainment moving from 29 per cent to 43.5 per cent of 25–34-year-olds since the

Bradley review. While the equity target has not yet been met, with low socio-economic background students making up only 17 per cent of the undergraduate population, this share still represents an increase of 2 per cent since the 2008 release of the Bradley Report (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2008). The current government has launched a new review (or 'Accord' process), with one stated aim being to increase participation in HE among the most disadvantaged groups (Australian Universities Accord Panel, 2023).

This significant increase in participation over the past 15 years was supported, in part, by new universities based in locations that were previously not served—in regional and rural communities, fast-growing outer suburbs, and economically disadvantaged urban areas. These institutions have acted as important social and economic anchors in their local communities, growing high-quality employment and educational aspiration for local people.

These changes widened participation for people previously excluded from HE opportunities. At no other point in Australian history could someone like me—a woman whose father left formal education at the age of 15 and who grew up in the outer suburbs—have realistically aspired to be a Vice Chancellor at a major university.

These positive outcomes have created their own challenges. Universities have grown considerably in size—Australia is now home to large universities with the average educating approximately 35,000 students. As we approach the 50th anniversary of Griffith University, we have been interviewing staff and students from the early years who remember a campus with only a few hundred students and several dozen staff, where everyone knew everyone else in their courses and the Vice Chancellor could have lunch in a common room with a substantial portion of the student population. Those smaller, more intimate environments allowed for less formal structures for management and a more personalised culture where it was easier for individual staff members to have their voices heard. Some of the concerns raised about the operations of modern universities recall those times with an

understandable fondness, but it should also be kept in mind that the quality of this experience for the few was based on the exclusion of the many.

Ideas for a thriving higher education ecosystem

The demands on today's universities and university leaders are many and complex. Views on the purpose of universities are diverse, with some seeing them primarily as a production line of skilled workers to meet the demands of a rapidly changing world, while others argue that universities should focus on offering a genuine academic education that is not centred around employment. There are those who mourn the demise of elite and exclusive education, and those who despair at inadequate gains in inclusivity. Researchers are expected to be capable of producing high-quality and highly cited publications, but also be able to translate their research into real-world impact and preferably commercialise it in a way that creates revenue for universities and employment for the wider population. Students demand both engaging face-to-face classes and the capacity to switch seamlessly (whenever they wish) to online education. Governments create ever more mandates impacting the sector, mostly unfunded, including supporting government priorities and policy objectives, building local communities, protecting the country from foreign interference, ensuring cyber security, creating economic benefit, and working closely with employers to meet their needs.

Such demands cannot be easily dismissed, particularly as the social and political licence of universities depends on being responsive, at least to a certain degree, to key stakeholders including governments, employers, and local communities. Those who are dismissive of these groups run the danger of seeing the sector deepen its reputation for arrogance and being out of touch.

Yet universities also cannot afford to be buffeted by every changing social fad and government thought bubble. Universities are long-lived institutions that need to work to a future beyond the next electoral or economic cycle. Universities need to have

a deep and long-term understanding of their core mission and values to guide them through complex decisions, competing priorities, and the likelihood of increased crises caused by social and environmental upheaval.

There is a temptation to say that the core missions of all universities must be the same—that all universities should embrace the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), for example, or all focus on increasing access to education or improving international research rankings. It may be more productive, however, to think in terms of university ecosystems across a country or region. A diversity of missions, different areas of focus, and encouragement to innovate are likely to lead to a HE sector that is more resilient over time and that provides more comprehensive support to the communities of which they are part. However wonderful any individual theorist or Vice Chancellor considers their version of a university utopia, trying to turn this into the model for all universities is likely to be counterproductive in the long term. As in nature, monocultures are rarely robust.

This is not to propose an unregulated anarchy of highly autonomous institutions. Governments that provide substantial funding to universities can reasonably set minimum expectations on behalf of the broader public. However, we must urge both policymakers and academics who work in the field to consider how we might support and encourage diversity and innovation in both mission and action. In Australia, for example, this might include a far lighter-touch regulatory regime and funding that is more flexible, as the current regulatory and funding schemes tend to force all universities into similar mandates and areas of focus.

Creating sufficient autonomy and allowing greater diversity also allows universities to be more responsive to the needs of the communities of which they are part. Take, for example, funding for increasing the inclusion of under-represented groups in universities. At present, the government funding model assumes that all universities should focus on the same groups (which are fairly narrowly conceived and may not be the best representation of educational disadvantage) (National Centre for Student Equity in

Higher Education (NCSEHE), 2023). For example, a substantial portion of the funding that goes to each university is based on the recruitment of students from regional and rural backgrounds. This creates incentives for wealthier metropolitan universities to attract rural and regional students away from their local universities, and, as a result, makes it less likely that on graduation these students will return to those regions to contribute to an educated workforce necessary for longer-term community survival. While it is absolutely appropriate for governments to expect universities to spend public money on educating students from equity groups, a different funding scheme might allow universities to focus on the needs of their local communities. At Griffith, for example, our campuses are based in a region with a very large population from the Māori and Pasifika communities, and we are looking at a deep programme of engagement with those communities to raise aspirations and capacity for university study. For other universities, it might be more sensible to focus attention on local communities from refugee backgrounds or working parents or industries that are likely to be impacted by digital or environmental change.

Finding a true north: Griffith as a values-led organisation

Recognising that diversity of missions leads to a stronger ecosystem places an onus on universities to think deeply about their particular mission, rather than just accept conventional wisdom or government policy. It is now on trend for many brands, corporations, influential individuals, and universities to espouse values in vision and mission statements. Turning these statements into a reality, as opposed to a marketing strategy, requires both a cultural commitment and a willingness to integrate values-based thinking throughout the university, including in making hard decisions.

At Griffith, we have a strong commitment to being a values-led university. These values include three foundational commitments: working towards just relations with First People, protecting our environment, and promoting social justice, particularly through

the adoption of the SDGs. Our university strategy leads with this commitment to values, and we try to ensure that it permeates as many aspects of our actions as possible.

While often overlooked in academic writing, a university's strategy can be a key tool for promoting and ensuring the implementation of values. By placing values at the heart of the Griffith strategy, named *Creating a Future for All*, we also created an expectation that every School and administrative area across the university would develop their own plans that contribute to achieving some of the key aims within different pillars of the overall strategy. Each discipline and administrative area has embraced this opportunity in ways that those in central divisions did not anticipate—our Film School, for example, has worked with our Indigenous portfolio and local traditional owners to create high-quality Welcome to Country videos; our facilities team has cooperated with our colleagues in Sciences to incorporate environmentally beneficial pilot research into our campuses; and our philanthropic team has prioritised funding for socially and environmentally transformative projects. We have adopted branding that encourages students to come to Griffith if they not only want to 'make it' but want to 'make it matter'.

Creating measurable outcomes is another important way of holding institutions to account and sending a message to the whole university community about key aims. Key performance indicators and metrics are often not much beloved by academics, including those who wish to produce progressive change. Yet properly used, they help to ensure that time and funding are not wasted on well-meaning but ultimately unproductive ways of creating change. By including in our university key performance indicators a focus on degree completion by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, specific targets for carbon emission reductions, a commitment to increasing the retention of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, and funding to improve accessibility to our campuses for people with a disability, we created mechanisms that held us to account for success. Such targets also generally ensure funding and time can be focused on a concrete

number of outcomes that will make a step change rather than spread so thinly across many good causes that they end up making little real difference.

The importance of taking a values-led approach needs constant reiteration, not only rhetorically (setting a 'tone from the top') but also in actions, or it will end up being treated with deserved cynicism. If a university is truly ambitious about living its values and sets itself high standards, it is almost inevitable that it will fall short from time to time or disappoint people who hoped for more in a shorter time frame. Aligning strategic objectives to a core mission keeps the long view in sight but also calls for realism in that you can't always do everything at once. But this is not to suggest that universities pursue comfortable mediocrity to ensure that they are never found wanting. In the words of Michelangelo, "the greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark" (Biography Online, n.d.).

Whether or not your university has a real commitment to values shows up in the way in which decisions—large and small—are made. At Griffith, our executive-level discussions, from procurement policies to making decisions on research spending, to the design of new buildings, are all brought back to our values. Given the lack of government financial support during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, we had to make some very difficult decisions, which included reducing staff numbers. That decision was not taken lightly, and we recognised that it would have a negative impact on many staff. It was, however, necessary for the longer-term sustainability of the university. Having made that difficult decision, we wanted to ensure that we implemented it with as much commitment as possible to our values under the prevailing circumstances. That included protecting a small number of areas from any cuts, including our Indigenous portfolio; communicating clearly, honestly, and with empathy; and assisting those people whose roles were in danger of being lost. The only area to have its funding increased was the student hardship fund, with members of the senior executive each contributing 10 per cent

of their salary that year towards the fund to support students in need. Having the true north of our strategy and a commitment to values both helped to make the hard decisions that needed to be made and informed the manner in which they were implemented.

Creating impact by making divisions permeable

Any university that wants to be prepared for the challenges of the coming decades, and preserve the integrity and value of HE during times in which institutions are increasingly distrusted, cannot focus its main attention on internal matters but must be focused on impact for the broader community. When Griffith says it is a values-led institution, for example, we certainly mean that we want to ensure that our own behaviour, student and staff composition, and curricula reflect those values. Yet even more importantly, we want to ensure that through our education, research, and community engagement, we make a positive difference more broadly. Our strategy is *Creating a Future for All*—not just for those who work or study at our university.

Universities have a unique capacity to tackle some of the pressing and complex challenges that our world faces. Even the largest global corporates are unlikely to have the diversity of disciplinary backgrounds and areas of speciality that a comprehensive university has. Governments cover very wide territories but do not have the same scope for independent and divergent thinking that is provided by academic freedom. Few other entities have the annual injection of vitality, enthusiasm, and new thinking that is provided each year by the incoming student body in our institutions.

For universities to be successful in using these advantages to create positive change, it is important that any divisions and silos that are created in large organisations remain permeable. Some universities have spent considerable time on organisational structure and restructure to help achieve this end, and that may be a helpful tactic in some cases. It is, however, almost inevitable that there will need to be some boundaries and sub-units to make

people feel a sense of belonging and to allow for more efficient management in any organisation the size of modern universities. I would suggest that rather than focus too much on organisational structure, it is better to focus on a culture of permeability and mechanisms that encourage people to work across the existing boundaries to achieve real impact.

Griffith's Research Beacons are one example of how we have worked on university-wide permeability. Research Beacons are interdisciplinary networks of researchers from across the university focused on outcomes-based research tackling major real-world problems in deep partnership with those external to the university. While funding is provided for a small leadership team, most members of the Beacon stay in their existing Schools or research centres but come together to work on particular research projects, grant applications, educational opportunities, or community outreach. The three current Beacons reflect our values as well as our desire to make a positive difference in the broader world; they are Climate Action; Inclusive Futures: Reimagining Disability; and Disrupting Violence. The university created the scheme and provided substantial funding for it, creating guidelines that required potential Beacons to show a genuine breadth of disciplinary engagement, strong external links, capacity to undertake high-quality and impactful research, and plans to engage students. While the university created the guidelines, the Beacons themselves were created bottom up, with staff encouraged to connect with like-minded colleagues across the university and beyond.

This approach led to a strong field of applications. While not all could be successful, proposals were supported in applying for other funding schemes or they progressed at a smaller scale with the potential to develop into a Beacon over time. The bottom-up approach meant that many staff working in similar areas from different disciplinary perspectives were connected, creating a stronger internal ecosystem of impact-focused, inter-, and trans-disciplinary research. While the Beacons are still relatively new,

they are already showing success in making a positive impact on community needs.

Griffith's Climate Action Beacon (CAB), which comprises a research platform, a community of practice, and an education programme, established 18 projects across the university and beyond in its first two years of operation. Included in these research outputs was the launch of the Climate Justice Observatory (CJO), a Queensland-based online resource that was named by the World Economic Forum as a 'top innovator' in contributing to climate justice. The CJO helps citizens monitor climate issues, map local problems, and crowdsource potential solutions for adaptation challenges. Another example of a CAB project with significant social and environmental impact is the development of an app for remote Indigenous residents to help with the sustainable and efficient management of water and energy. The app, developed in partnership with Indigenous Technologies, is named *'iKNow, WE know'*, acknowledging the coming together of traditional cultural understandings around water and energy practices with climate practitioners and academics. The app provides remote communities with real-time feedback on usage, repair, training, and tracking, and with community noticeboards and water stories from Elders.

The Disrupting Violence Beacon (DVB) focuses on understanding violence as it interacts with inequality, trauma, and racism, innovatively translating knowledge into prevention and intervention, and helping to build public institutions that do not further entrench violence. In the Beacon's first year of operation, researchers have collaborated with the Queensland State Government on projects related to recommendations from the Women's Safety and Justice Taskforce and the National Plan to End Violence Against Women. In a project funded by the Queensland Department of Justice and Attorney General, DVB researchers partnered with Telstra (Australia's leading telecommunications provider) to develop the *Be There* app that empowers bystanders and domestic violence workers to support suspected survivors of domestic and family violence. The DVB has also been involved in the creation

of cross-university interdisciplinary knowledge hubs, including a $35 million dollar Australian Research Council (ARC) Centre of Excellence for the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEVAW) led by Monash University in Melbourne, with the aim of countering the social drivers and norms that cause violence against women.

Contributing to Griffith's core value of creating healthier lives for all, the Inclusive Futures: Reimagining Disability Beacon (IFRDB), established in 2022, is a research alliance that works to solve the most pressing challenges for people living with a disability. With co-creation at the heart of the Beacon, Inclusive Futures is driven by people with a disability alongside academics, industry, government, not-for-profits, and health practitioners. The Beacon aims to deliver bold, life-changing innovations that advance recovery, participation, and inclusion for people with a disability, focusing on innovative place-based solutions where people live, work, and play. 'Engaging outsiders in sport' is one example of a co-creation project that will have a lasting impact on participation in sports, from the community to the elite level. In the lead-up to the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the project works to catalyse positive change and higher inclusion benchmarking as part of the 2032 legacy.

Working with partners

Working with partners outside the university has been as important to the success of Beacons as working across disciplinary boundaries within. The idea of universities as ivory towers has never been accurate, and today more than ever it is clear that universities need to work in partnership with external parties to foster social change. Sometimes the term 'industry partners' is used as shorthand for these collaborations, but this can be misleading, as such partnerships are usually wider and deeper than just with industry. Griffith, for example, has strong collaborations with hospitals, schools, creative and performing arts institutions, government departments and agencies, international agencies, and

not-for-profits, in addition to organisations that might usually be considered industry such as pharmaceutical companies, banks, and engineering and professional service firms.

Properly managed, these partnerships can lead to:

- richer educational experiences;
- better informed curriculum and research priorities;
- supporting research that otherwise could not be undertaken;
- scalability of research outcomes; and
- keeping universities connected with the needs of their local communities, which underpins their social licence.

There are many ways in which partnerships entered into by the university can enhance student experiences. Work and clinical placements are one obvious example, and it is particularly important to remember that students who are first-in-family or from disadvantaged backgrounds do not have the same social capital that allows more privileged students to move between education and the workforce. Creating opportunities to learn more about employment prospects, experience the workplace, and develop capabilities that might be valuable to future employers, and to establish networks that might lead to employment, is valuable for all students, but it is especially valuable for those whose family and social networks may not provide the same opportunities. While a reductionist view of university education simply as a form of training for the workforce should be resisted, the views of some who are dismissive of universities having any role in connecting to the workforce can ignore the least socially connected members of the student body.

Likewise, while research should not be turned into a fee-for-service for industry or a production line on the way to commercial outcomes, there is much significant research that simply could not be done without external partnerships. The *Transforming Corrections, Transforming Lives* research programme within the Disrupting Violence Beacon (DVB) at Griffith is just one example of the way in which these partnerships can be a powerful way to achieve progressive social ends. The programme aims to disrupt the cycle

of disadvantage for imprisoned mothers and their children. The ambitious multi-year research programme would not have been possible without a substantial philanthropic partnership with the Paul Ramsay Foundation and research partnerships with the corrections services, other relevant government agencies, mothers in prison, and organisations supporting former prisoners. Given that the project aims to demonstrate the widespread positive impacts of a new approach to supporting mothers in prison, it would have been impossible to conduct this research solely within the bounds of the university. The programme has already led to changes in guidelines for the creation of new prisons to take greater account of the needs of the children of those who are imprisoned and the role of prisoners as parents.

Postscript: Preparing for a more volatile and uncertain future

Many institutions and individuals around the world are still recovering from the impact of COVID-19, and HE is no exception. It would be pleasant to imagine that, after all the extraordinary disruption of the past few years, we might have an opportunity to consolidate, reflect, and take a break from constant change and disruption.

Unfortunately, the realities of the external environments in which we operate make that impossible. Whether it be the threats and opportunities presented by ever expanding artificial intelligence (AI) or geopolitical instability presaging the re-emergence of global polarisation, universities will need to learn to continually adapt. Change is now a constant, and universities will need to be prepared to deal with this reality, but there are fundamentals that should continue to guide us and help us to navigate through uncertain terrain.

Governments that desire ever greater control of the minutiae of university operations, as well as central university administrators that try to orchestrate every element of university life, will need to step back. Greater autonomy will lead to more errors, but will also

allow greater innovation, creativity, and responsiveness to changing circumstances. Faculty may also need to recognise that the very lengthy and consultative processes that have been seen as the exemplar of university governance may not be well suited to the complex challenges now facing universities and the reduced time frames for responding to those challenges.

Despite all this, there is reason to be optimistic. It is precisely the type of education and research that universities provide which will be needed to equip people with the understanding and skills required to assist humanity to emerge from the complex challenges of our time. Universities have become far more inclusive in their staff and student bodies, and there is good reason to think that this expansion will continue. Our world will benefit from unleashing the collective intelligence of those who in previous generations would not have had the opportunity to make a contribution to solving the great research problems of the time or to take on leadership roles that require a university education. While there is much room for improvement and self-reflection, universities will play a critical part in creating a brighter future for all through living out values, reducing silos, and nurturing external partnerships. Because change requires action, and action requires leadership in making tough decisions and taking the right risks, this chapter concludes with a series of practical actions to be considered across different levels of university leadership.

Practical suggestions for consideration, discussion—and action

1. Strategic engagement with those working on HE policy should be encouraged, with a focus on facilitating dialogue around institution-specific capabilities, community, and mission. By engaging with key stakeholders and providing critical thought leadership within a rapidly evolving sector, universities can become active co-contributors in setting appropriate quality standards and identifying social needs. In an increasingly

volatile and unpredictable world, it is all the more important to foster constructive external dialogue that will enable policymakers to better support diversity and innovation rather than mandate a single path.

2. People at every level in universities who seek to promote particular ideas and cultures within universities need to be thoughtful about the levers that can drive change. While many academics are sceptical of the rise of what they see as managerialism, some of those tools can be helpful and effective in driving change. A willingness to engage with processes to develop university strategies, key performance indicators (both institutional and for key individuals), budgets, and operational plans can create opportunities that effectively support progressive agendas.
3. Real commitment to values in a university context (for example, through implementing the SDGs) requires working across traditional university boundaries and silos—be those disciplinary, between teaching and research, or between academic and professional staff.
4. Universities should not become focused only on internal change but should also remain open to, and pursue, the ways in which internal change leads to wider social, economic, cultural, and environmental impact. Achieving this requires partnering outside the university in a way that respects the capacity and talents of those within and outside the university. In particular, universities need to ensure that they are good neighbours—responsive to the needs of their local communities for education and research, and active in promoting social thriving in the communities they belong to.
5. The pace of change continues to accelerate, and this is likely to continue. Even if universities wished to stand still, digital disruption, climate change disasters, macro-economic volatility, and geo-political instability mean they will be forced to respond to events with agility and innovation. This may require central administrators to let go of some centralising tendencies to allow for greater flexibility and responsiveness at

the School or discipline level. It may also require academics to show some flexibility about the traditional ways of carrying out university business, including extensive consultation around change, inflexible role definitions for academic staff, and sharp academic/professional divisions.

Questions for discussion

1. How might universities articulate and implement their unique vision and mission in a way that differentiates them from other HE providers?
2. How can universities use their convening power to bring together academia, government, industry, and community to solve community problems?
3. What additional responses might be needed to those discussed in this chapter to ensure that universities are well positioned to respond to rapid change?

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CHAPTER 3

The Failure of Public Higher Education Reform in North America and Western Europe

The Need for a New Beginning

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Abstract

A consistent set of criticisms of the organisation, dynamics, and failings of public higher education (HE) has been articulated since the early 1990s. Most are on target and point to a system in freefall—expensive, ineffective, and unsatisfactory for students, faculty, many staff members, and the relevant communities they serve. Despite this, the situation in HE in North America and Europe has only worsened as neoliberal management continues to intensify management by the numbers, control of student and faculty speech, administrative bloat, and increases in tuition costs. The consequent decline in public and employer support and the

How to cite this book chapter:
Greenwood, D. (2024). The failure of public higher education reform in North America and Western Europe: The need for a new beginning. In L. Wood & O. Zuber-Skerritt (Eds.), *Shaping the future of higher education: Positive and sustainable frameworks for navigating constant change* (pp. 45–69). Helsinki University Press. https://doi.org/10.33134-HUP-25-3.

approaching significant decline in birth rates, and consequently in the number of college-age students in Western industrialised countries, have not moved the powerholders in these institutions to reform the institutions in fundamental ways. I argue that piecemeal public university reforms no longer hold any promise. Only a fundamental re-creation of public HE will change the situation. This re-creation must be based on open systems dynamics, transdisciplinarity, and a focus on sustainability for the stakeholders (the faculty and students, the surrounding communities, and the larger planetary ecology). The chapter closes with an examination of what such public institutions might be like.

Preamble

Through 44 years of efforts within an academic department, I have learned that attempts to tweak the existing structure of both public and private higher education (HE) in positive and dynamic directions do not work. My academic experience ranges beyond teaching and research to include participation in and then leadership of four interdisciplinary, university-wide programmes (including 18 years as an interdisciplinary centre and programme director), serving as head of a national taskforce to authorise legislation on foreign language and area studies in HE, and a term as President of the Association of International Educators. Between 1970 and about 1985, I experienced the period of unprecedented growth and expansion of innovative, transdisciplinary, and community-oriented academic engagement in universities and colleges. However, developments from about 1985 on, during the Reagan administration, signalled the start of the neoliberal assault on higher education—in other words, institutionalising the neoliberal view of education as job training rather than as personal and citizen development. This included cutbacks in public funding for education and the appearance of the so-called 'audit culture' that requires employees to be accountable by quantifying what they do during their paid work hours, supposedly to maximise the value of employees' work (labelled 'productivity') to their employer. The

substance and quality of academic performance is excluded from this assessment (Strathern, 2000).

This assault has gained momentum ever since. The gains made between 1945 and 1985 in HE in terms of relevant research, social inclusion, support for creativity, and a general lack of censorship have all been reversed. At present, we see United States public universities subjected to individual state mandates against teaching about race, slavery, genocide, gender differences, and anything else that offends straight white supremacists. The problem of authoritarian control and censorship is no longer limited to countries ruled by dictators, as it now directly affects supposedly democratic countries. Under these conditions, I argue that what is required is nothing less than a fundamental re-creation of public education (primary, secondary, and higher) and their socio-political mission at each level.

Building on decades of experience with industrial democracy and worker-owned cooperatives, I argue for a fundamental structural redesign of public HE, following the principles of socio-technical systems design and active political participation by all categories of stakeholders (faculty, staff, administrators, students, and community members). This will not solve the larger political problem of extreme right-wing domination of the political arena and the reciprocally strident authoritarian, supposedly left-wing responses. But it is, at least, a proposal for how to seek a better way forward. Conforming to the current conditions and trying to reform them is not an option—not for universities, for society, or for the planetary ecosystem. In this chapter, I focus only on HE.

The chapter begins with an introduction to the concepts of closed and open systems and learning organisations. Following this is an examination of the multiple ways universities do not show the central features of these systems. Using the distinction between Tayloristic (closed) organisational structures and matrix (open) organisational structures and processes, I characterise universities in their current form in Western industrialised countries as hierarchical, siloed, and authoritarian systems operating in environments that actually require open, collaborative matrix

systems if they are to survive and fulfil their societal missions. I close the chapter by portraying what an open system matrix organisation university would be like, a model that cannot be brought into being by reforming current universities and instead requires re-creating universities as open systems from the bottom up. I begin by clarifying the general concepts and ideas that underpin this analysis—open and closed systems, organisational behaviour, and learning organisations.

Closed and open systems and learning organisations

A key distinction in systems theory and in the study of organisational dynamics is between closed and open systems. Closed systems address challenges from their environment and from within by intensifying or decreasing activities within. For example, if an organisation is producing a higher number of defective parts than it should, managers double down on the workers and pressure them to do better, rather than inquiring why and how the defective parts are being produced and altering the system of production.

Open systems, like all living systems, respond to the need to maintain a liveable equilibrium. They take in forces coming from the environment, reorganise their internal processes to develop sustainable equilibria, and alter their boundaries and how they work as necessary. For example, an organisation producing a higher number of defective parts than is acceptable will check the inputs coming from the environment, examine the manufacturing processes and equipment to pinpoint the places where the problems are being created, seek information and suggestions from everyone involved, and then design or redesign altered processes or adjustments to the machinery to produce better outcomes.

The human dynamics of closed and open systems are therefore radically different. Closed systems are authoritarian and defensive, while open systems are more tolerant of change and are more inquiry-oriented in learning how to accomplish the changes they

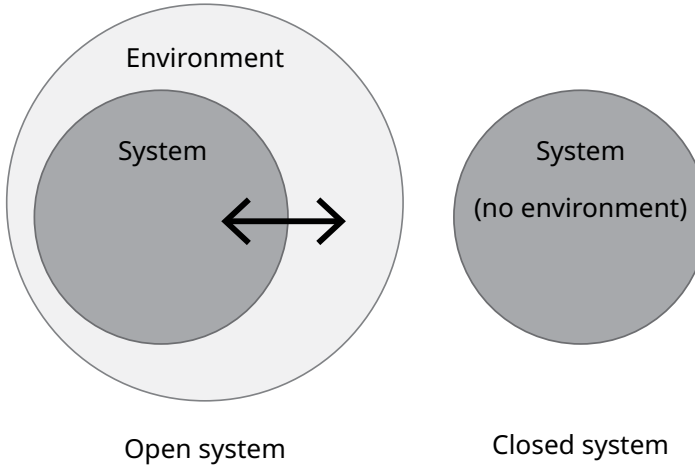

Figure 3.1: Open and closed systems.
Source: Modified from https://opensystemsperspective.weebly.com/comparison.html.

need to do better. Figure 3.1 illustrates the relationship of these two systems—within (open system) and without (closed system)—to the environment. Learning organisations are necessarily open systems.

Although universities are dedicated to learning and teaching, they are not therefore 'learning organisations'. The concept 'learning organisation' derives from a long genealogy of general systems theory, action science, and action research (Kleiner, 2008). A learning organisation:

- provides continuous learning opportunities,
- uses learning to reach their goals,
- links individual performance with organisational performance,
- fosters inquiry and dialogue, making it safe for people to share openly and take risks,
- embraces creative tension as a source of energy and renewal, and
- is continuously aware of, and interacts with, its environment (Kerka, 1995).

Those in contemporary universities and colleges would likely testify that their experiences in such institutions do not match these characteristics of learning organisations. Despite the presence of highly educated and often motivated professors and students and at least some administrative staff who believe that the mission of the institutions centres on learning and teaching, most respondents to questions about their university/college experience would surely say no. Universities are discipline-bound, siloed, increasingly hierarchical organisational systems under authoritarian management. Hierarchy and internal competition using audit culture numbers is the principal dynamic within units, between units, and among universities themselves. This argument hardly requires development, as it is so often repeated that it is well known.[1]

Despite their differences, all these analyses have in common a critique of HE institutions as Tayloristic organisations. Taylorism, named after F. W. Taylor and popularised in his book *The principles of scientific management* (Taylor, 1911), is not a learning organisation system. It is just the opposite. The Tayloristic system and its components are designed by efficiency experts and managers, and tasks and resources are allocated to 'workers' whose actions are defined in advance and whose performance is judged by their superiors. The lower-level workers are reduced to being working hands, while design, decision-making, discipline, and compensation are decided by the managers at the apex of the organisation and now by the investors in stock corporations that often have nothing to do with education.

Universities are organised in disciplinary departmental silos with their own internal hierarchies reaching down from full, associate, and assistant professors, then lecturers, teaching assistants, research assistants, secretaries, etc. Each silo reports upward to a Dean (or similarly named head), who oversees the distribution of resources among the silos, provoking and gaining power from the competition among them. The Dean reports upwards to what is now an army of vice-provosts, provosts, vice-presidents, treasurers, bursars, human resource departments, buildings and

properties departments, security and police, etc. These titles may vary by country and by institution. At the pinnacle, far from the teaching and research processes, is the President (or Vice Chancellor or Rector, depending on the country). Power, money, space, and other support are sent downwards from the pinnacle, which is far removed from the actual sites of value production in the institutions. All these activities by academic staff are summed up numerically according to the number of publications they have produced, the journals they publish in and the prestige ranking of journals for these publications, the amount of research grants awarded to them, etc., without any substantive connection to and therefore evaluation of what is taught, what is researched, and what is published (unless it produces a high-income patent, a public relations coup, or disaster for the institution). In other words, quality of academic performance and contributions are not really in this picture; evaluation is almost all about numbers.

While this Tayloristic departmental structure dates back to the 19th century, the advent of Thatcherism/Reaganism put the neoliberalism of Milton Friedman and his colleagues at the University of Chicago, known as the 'Chicago Boys', into the central place as an organisational and political technology. Now numerical evaluation, disciplinary ranking, and institutional ranking trump all other aspects of university life. It has made a huge amount of money for banks and other investors, as the cost of these Tayloristic systems has ballooned and driven tuition fees up so far that few families can send their children to universities without taking on high-interest bank loans. These measures discourage not just potential students without financial access. They also discourage academic collaboration and long-term research projects and have lowered the funding available for theoretical scientific research in favour of funding for applied research with supposedly immediate economic benefits.

This critique has been put forward in both the general literature on organisational structures and behaviour by Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (Argyris & Schön, 1996) and for universities as organisations by Gibbons, Nowotny, and Peters (Gibbons et al.,

1994; Nowotny et al., 2001). For example, Gibbons, Nowotny, and Peters use the language of Mode 1 research and Mode 2 research. Mode 1 research is produced within academic institutions independent of the external context and is dictated by the dynamics of the various disciplinary fields. Mode 2 is research carried out in the context of application, outside of the university, in partnership with external stakeholders, and focused on the transdisciplinary problems important to those external stakeholders. What these framings make clear is that no Tayloristic university organisation can operate in a Mode 2 way. Tayloristic organisations change only by intensifying or de-intensifying what they are already doing without changing their structures and dynamics. They are fragile, dependent on stable and permissive external environments, and relatively impervious to learning.

It should be obvious why being a learning organisation is a basic requirement for universities to survive as a key institution in democratic societies. The environment in which universities exist has become globalised, turbulent, and increasingly competitive and unstable. Closed-system responses to these challenges still dominate the world of HE. Put simply, they will not work over the long run.

The organisational structure and dynamics of learning organisations

Learning organisations are complex both to structure and to operate because they require the capability to assess the changing requirements of their environments. They also need to be able to organise and reorganise the resources at their disposal to adapt to these changes and innovate by anticipating paths of future change that may enhance the survivability of their organisation. For a more detailed view of these concepts and their deployment, see Ravn et al. (2023).

All learning organisations rely on collaboration, participation, sharing knowledge and experience, relatively flat organisational structures (i.e. matrix organisational structures), and intentional

continuous gathering of information and exploring adaptive possibilities in the external environment. To operate in this way requires two kinds of participation. One is *political participation*, where hierarchy is replaced by processes of negotiation in which all the organisational members have a say, well-managed decision processes are developed, and key organisational decisions are made by a cross-section of the members who all have relevant knowledge to contribute. Command-and-control systems are replaced by facilitative management and leadership by example.

To be effective in practical terms, the organisations also have to be efficient, dynamic producers of their products and/or services. This requires the second kind of participation. which is called *socio-technical participation*. Here all the members of the organisation play a role in designing, maintaining, and improving the relationship between the technologies and processes the organisation depends on and therefore the welfare of the stakeholders in the organisation. This welfare includes living wages, healthcare, and respect for employee experience and suggestions. In such organisations, socio-technical deliberations in the face of new problems to solve, or to create innovative process improvements, become central problem-solving approaches. Using more fully the knowledge, experience, ideas, and motivation of the members of the organisation puts more human intelligence at the service of the organisation's overall ability to adapt to the relevant environments. To succeed over the long-term, learning organisations need to be effective in managing and reconciling the demands of both political and socio-technical participation processes. Managers are coordinators, orchestrators, and supporters, not 'bosses'. Equipped with understanding of the concepts and distinctions above, we can now turn to analysing the current crises of universities.

The current crisis

In the United States of America (USA), maintaining and intensifying the Fordist–Taylorist structures and processes in colleges

and universities has not only created unliveable workplaces, but has also resulted in closing down or at least significantly reducing the social mobility of working and lower middle-class people through HE. It has created falling enrolments in HE, massive increases in senior administrative ranks and therefore salary costs, out-of-control infrastructure costs, casualisation of 75 per cent of the faculty, and attacks on professorial tenure. Disturbingly, we have come to experience state-by-state political control over what can be said, published, and taught by faculty in public universities and colleges. Unsurprisingly, despite the neoliberal justification that the audit culture and the 'new public management' are the only path to economic rationality in HE, a clear result in the USA is removal of the need for a HE degree from many corporate and public job announcements. Employers have found that university graduates no longer are necessarily more valuable employees (see for instance, the articles available in the links listed in the footnote).[2] If this employer movement becomes a groundswell, combined with the declining birth rates that the USA and Europe are facing, and decreasing numbers of students from South and East Asia who previously made up for this demographic decline, the days of many universities and colleges are numbered. A radical reorganisation of public universities alone will not solve these problems, but it is a necessary component in any attempt to do so. I argue that the current model is broken beyond repair.

The complex history of HE is not easy to summarise. In the USA, for example, there are over 4,000 HE institutions, including private universities, public universities, private colleges, public colleges, religious colleges, technical schools, community colleges, and a variety of for-profit HE organisations. Summarising these institutions has become easier in the last few decades as institutional differences have been overwhelmed by the neoliberal tidal wave and the imposition of the 'audit culture' on research and teaching and on the national and international ranking of institutions (Strathern, 2000). The 'new public management' (Behn, 2001) is basically management by the numbers, premised on not trusting that those being evaluated and ranked will do their jobs

well unless they are held to account. The premise is that without the accountability imposed on employees by audit culture, they would not do their work well and would waste resources. Here we see the contradiction between on the one hand the orthodoxy of neoliberalism, with the idea that all economic decisions should be based on rational choice and that doing so will produce ideal and harmonious outcomes, and on the other hand the enormously heavy hand of coercion by the numbers to 'force' rational choice. It is the hallmark of a pseudoscientific ideology.

These practices have been in effect long enough for their consequences to be well known. Education is converted into siloed vocational training. Students are converted into customers who supposedly are 'always right'. Faculty are converted into fee-for-service providers rather than teachers and researchers. Curricula are modified according to student demand, leading to, among other consequences, a radical disinvestment in the humanities and social sciences. Curricula are also modified to conform to neoliberal ideologies of radical individualism and blindness to history, class, race–ethnicity, and gender. This tends to produce a highly individuated, passive, consumerist worker who will 'fit in' to existing corporate power structures.

This transformation is now taking place, at least in the USA, in the midst of a concerted ideological attack on universities as supposed hotbeds of left-wingers who are oppressors of poor, defenceless 'pseudoconservatives'. While this trope has been seen before in the history of HE, in the USA it has now been pushed far beyond a trope to legislation against teaching about race–ethnicity, gender, climate change, and social history. The State of Florida governor, Ron DeSantis, is leading this movement. He sought to bolster his run for president of the United States with his dramatic performances in prohibiting the use of state funds to teach about race, diversity, and gender at the public universities in his state. He has also defined state university faculty and administrators as public employees, and claimed that as a state governor he therefore has the right to censor what they say and write.[3] Recently he has begun an attack on professorial tenure, even though the share

of tenured positions in USA universities has been slashed to below 25 per cent of total professorial positions as compared with 80 per cent at the end of the 1960s,[4] while the number of academics on term and part-time contracts has been increased dramatically. The Florida governor is not alone, as this effort has been joined by governors in other states, and this movement is spreading quickly.

These so-called reforms were in fact accomplished with surprising ease, because of the pathologies of HE organisations. Such institutions were already intensely siloed and hierarchical by the end of the 19th century, and the long period of sustained growth after World War II not only did not correct these counterproductive organisational habits but intensified them. Particularly after the 1960s, departments and disciplines were made into mini cartels run by senior faculty in an academic and professional world of their own. Colleges competed with other colleges for resources, space, and ranking. Increasingly, faculty offloaded administrative tasks to professional administrators to liberate themselves to teach and research without 'wasting time' on institutional processes. This trend has developed to the point where universities can now compete with international investment banks for being among the most Tayloristic institutions on the planet. My long-term employer, Cornell University, used to publish online its organisational charts, but now reveals them only unit by unit. When the charts were published online a decade ago, they ran to about 30 pages of boxes. Tellingly, the lowest boxes on the charts included only the deans of colleges. The faculty and students were absent entirely.

Leading-edge, world-class manufacturing and service organisations largely have abandoned such Tayloristic structures as impediments to efficiency, as they are costly, static, and demoralising. These organisations have moved towards flattening organisational hierarchies, promoting teamwork and collaborative problem-solving, and treating management as coordination rather than 'bossing'. This approach is not evident in university organisation, particularly in larger institutions. Indeed, university hierarchy has been intensified particularly through staffing at

upper levels, with increases in administrative staffing made at the cost of decreases in academic staffing.

In the USA, the number of administrative staff has been boosted massively, with some calculations putting the increase in spending on administration per student as high as 61 per cent between 1993 and 2007.[5] Many of these administrative staff are high-end appointees who are paid significant salaries, dramatically increasing the overall costs of running a university, while not necessarily investing increased resources in educating students. During the same time, faculty numbers were increased only between 5 and 10 per cent, and much of that increase was in the poorly paid contract and part-time faculty.[6]

These shifts in staff ranks speak to the reinforcing of university hierarchy in the hands of administrative/managerial staff at the expense of academic staff. Humanities and social science departments have been disbanded or consolidated. Buildings and properties budgets have been increased dramatically, including support for recreational facilities. In parallel, student housing and dining have been made an ancillary business opportunity, particularly for private service providers.

This 'administrative bloat' not only entrenches the existing Tayloristic features of these institutions, but also increases their cost of 'doing business', and so by extension, what they charge students as tuition fees. For the past 20 years in the USA, increases in tuition and room and board costs to students have routinely been double the rate of inflation. This has created a student debt crisis that burdens young graduates with a level of debt that slows their creation of a family and/or purchase of a home, or actually pushes them into bankruptcy. It also influences their career choices, inclining them to pursue careers that seem to produce high incomes quickly. Increasingly, working and lower middle-class families question the value of this investment in HE.

Two additional issues further complicate this picture. One is the significant decline in the size of the future student population in many countries, as was already evident a couple of decades ago. In the USA the decline has been made up for by a strategy of

increasing the presence of international students, initially mostly from India and China, but now from anywhere they are willing to come from, if they have capacity to pay. Years ago, I heard enrolment recruiters cynically refer to these students as 'filler'. Now the powerful combination of COVID, destabilisation of the global order by Russia, China, and other authoritarian states, and the ever more severe impacts of climate change have disrupted these flows of students and created increasing problems of recruitment. Recruitment difficulties are deepened while more nations, and institutions within them, are competing to attract international students, and more high-level students, such as in China, are choosing to pursue HE in their home country. When this is combined with an obsession to rank institutions by their 'selectivity' scores—the most 'selective' institutions being the most highly ranked—it creates impossible organisational contradictions for an already overpriced and lethargic Tayloristic system.

The second issue is increasing evidence that private sector employers of university graduates are dissatisfied with the training these graduates received at university. More and more business leaders complain that the students are not well trained in their fields, are not good problem-solvers, do not work well in multidisciplinary team contexts, and are not good at learning how to learn. Whether these perceptions are well founded matters less than the trend they have inspired in many business environments to eliminate the requirement for a HE credential in job announcements.

On the research side, current structures steer academics into chasing research funds that will cover overhead costs and in relevant academic fields will produce patents that enhance university coffers. These arrangements promote short-term research projects and undercut basic research. This stunts what is ultimately the source of significant applied research outcomes. It sets up among academic researchers the perceived need for entrepreneurship to keep a research shop open. That causes most senior faculty to leave their labs to more junior staff and convert themselves into managers, which is another cause of burnout among senior fac-

ulty. This structure for awarding research grants and evaluating/rewarding the projects they fund has made the scientific, social, practical, and ethical importance of research projects secondary to the amount of research and patent money that researchers bring in. In a HE climate that is already unproductive or even stifling for them, the social sciences and the humanities are also at a distinct disadvantage in research. Much less research money is made available to them, and often the research findings of social scientists and humanists upset powerful outsiders. All of these forces add up to a 'perfect storm' in which a great many HE institutions will fall by the wayside.

It is well known that decisions made at distance from the locus of value production (in this case, teaching, research, and community engagement) are generally badly designed. Often, they are counterproductive, poorly implemented, and deepen rather than resolve problems. The current administrative response is to double down on what created the problem in the first place, which usually makes the problem worse. Tayloristic managers are not just ignorant of the facts, which organisational distance creates. They are also unaware that their command-and-control staff structures and use of numbers as a substitute for substantive knowledge of the issues create a situation in which their staff find it difficult to give the managers feedback they do not want to hear. These staff members effectively serve at the pleasure of their superiors, who are better paid, are invested with institutional authority, and are often on a career path leading to what they recognise as ever better institutions, foundation presidencies, and government appointments. Having explained the problems with the current status of HE, I now move on to present some ideas for a better future.

Ideas: Higher education as sustainable, dynamic, and learning organisations

The work on socio-technical systems design, collaborative learning and action, and political participation offers lessons that

almost all HE institutions have not learned (see Wright & Greenwood, 2017). Details of socio-technical systems design would take us beyond the remit of this chapter, but certain basics are key to our discussion. To begin, this perspective treats the factory or service organisation as a collaborative learning arena in which all members are stakeholders and valued participants. The organisation's aim is to gather the different experiences, expertise, ideas, and motivations of its members to identify and analyse problems, fashion and implement solutions, evaluate their effectiveness, and then continue the cycle as circumstances change. This is what a learning organisation does. A long list of case studies shows how much more effective, efficient, and morale boosting this approach is over other approaches such as the likes of Taylorism (Gustavsen & Hunnius, 1981; Kleiner, 2008; Trahair, 2015; Trist, 1981; Whyte, 1991).

While socio-technical systems design is instrumentally oriented, it has important political-moral dimensions. Successful socio-technical systems cannot work in an organisational structure that treats power as authority exercised down from the apex. Rather, all the stakeholders are understood to be political actors. Power relations have to be negotiated in concert with the decisions being made in the learning community that have an instrumental focus. This combination of teamwork and collaboration creates organisations in which all members have a say about both their role and the activities and goals of the organisation. These organisations built on socio-technical systems design generally have low salary differentials between the lowest- and highest-paid members. The money that these organisations do not spend on high salaries for managers is available to the organisation for its own investment and development. As well as their political and moral virtues, these organisations are capable of being flexibly adaptive to the changes and challenges created by the environments in which they operate. A detailed presentation of the structures and dynamics of socio-technical systems design organisations can be found in a recent special issue of the *International Journal of*

Action Research (Ravn et al., 2023). So, what would universities that are learning organisations be like?

From my point of view, universities are educational institutions that teach new generations a combination of the skills, information, social values, and ways to learn how to learn throughout life as a contributing member of society. Since we cannot do what we do not know, there is a direct relationship between teaching and learning. Students learn the results of research and how to undertake research and get research results themselves.

Universities exist to serve the common good through research and teaching, and through direct engagement in analysing and providing support for solutions to societal problems. This takes place in real environments that are dynamic, conflictive, and often intensely problematic. Issues like planetary ecological collapse, massive socio-economic inequality within and between countries, race–ethnic oppression, gender prejudice, and expansive authoritarianisms and cultural supremacist movements must be addressed. These issues do not come in neat disciplinary packages to be doled out to each mini cartel by a boss and then magically added up to create comprehensive understanding of these complex, interacting problems and provide workable solutions.

The structure of these problems requires that teaching and research are combined, and that sustained transdisciplinary teamwork accumulates, synthesises, and expands understanding of the problems so that solutions can be envisioned. And, given the nature and scale of problems, it is clear universities cannot be isolated from society, but must take in non-university stakeholders as part of these efforts. Doing so gains for them much-needed non-academic knowledge and a secure commitment to the relevant external stakeholders being involved in enacting solutions.

Universities have occasionally approached this kind of strategy, but only in exceptional times and when there is massive external support. The Manhattan Project, the space exploration programmes, and the sequencing of human DNA are examples of this. However, once the external funding and social pressure abates, universities fall right back to reliance on their Tayloristic

silos. This means the overall organisational structure of the university would have to be altered to convert universities into sustainable learning organisations.

In a recent book, Morten Levin and I laid out a view of what a university would look like as a learning organisation (Levin & Greenwood, 2016), so here I will be brief. Organisationally, universities need to transmute into 'matrix organisations', with their members organised into multiple, multidimensional, transdisciplinary teams (including relevant external stakeholders) that focus on particular issues, problems, or functions. Experts from a variety of backgrounds, plus practitioners differently situated in the organisation, combine as a socio-technical systems team to define the problems, gather information about these problems, propose solutions, manage the needed resources, enact the proposed solutions, and evaluate the results. Students are members of these teams and are both mentored by other team members and acting as contributors to the teams' work. The teams repeat the problem definition, research, action design, action, and evaluation cycle until the results of this research work meet the expectations of the stakeholders. After that, the team may dissolve or be reorganised to work on a different but related problem. Or the members may be seconded to other research teams where their knowledge and experiences are relevant and useful.

Leadership does exist in such organisations, but it is not based on a chain of command. Rather, leadership coordinates the search for the issues that need attention that the organisation can take on, helps compose and resource the teams, and assists in finding resources. It helps in connecting teams with outside stakeholders and can help manage conflicts or bottlenecks in the team processes when and if they occur. The functions of teaching, research, human resource management, accounting, and communication all continue as dimensions of each team. There is also an administrative leader in the university for each of these team functions. A team member—for example, someone with human resource responsibilities—can turn to the central human resource leader for support and problem-solving.

Low boundaries, flattened organisational hierarchies, support and rewards for collaboration, and flexibly dynamic teams are the key features here. Rather than the conventional organisational chart of Taylorism, a matrix organised university is composed of transdisciplinary teams coordinated and supported by a small central administration. Disciplinary departments would be treated only as sources of personnel and expertise in support of these transdisciplinary teams and would be evaluated according to the contributions they make toward various team efforts. Teaching and learning would be suffused throughout the team structures, with students doing a great deal of their learning in these transdisciplinary team environments.

This kind of organisational approach has been key to the successes of Norwegian companies, the Mondragon Cooperatives in Spain, Toyota, and many IT research and development organisations. It is, however, not on the immediate horizon of most universities I know of. This is because Tayloristic systems create many internal vested interests. Reducing the salary differential from the current seven-figure salaries of many university leaders to four or six times that of an entry-level professor or staff member strikes university leaders as an invitation for them to commit economic suicide. Requiring faculty to leave their mini cartels and interact with members of other mini cartels in search of shared learning and solutions to shared problems is the direct opposite of what the audit culture has promoted and continues to promote. Engaging university teams with external stakeholders opens up the possibilities of universities being engaged in conflicts over climate change, race–ethnic difference, gender differences, political power, and whatever social and cultural fracture lines the work crosses. These are conflicts that most current university leaders go through contortions to avoid.

Removing authoritarian command and control approaches to human resource management, promotions, merit pay, accounting, infrastructure improvement and maintenance, policing, dormitory management, resolving legal problems and the like would require a fundamental transformation of the working lives and

attitudes of all the personnel who are currently 'adapted' to the authoritarian structures. There is no reason to think that these organisations would spontaneously and smoothly adapt to these changes, nor that the current leadership (and even some of the 'inmates') would be willing to consider them. The possibility of converting current universities into learning organisations seems to me far-fetched. It is much more likely that this could happen only in the face of imminent collapse/bankruptcy or in the context of newly founded institutions.

A case where this has happened positively, by design, in a newly founded institution, is the Sabanci University in Turkey. It is a private university founded with an endowment from a very wealthy Turkish family but created through an action research process called a 'search conference'. In this process, the organisational socio-technical and political participatory issues were sorted through to create the design for the institution. The story of the university can be explored on its website,[7] and this same process has been used to create two other universities in Turkey under the guidance of Oğuz Nuri Babüroğlu[8] of Arama Consulting and now a professor at the Sabanci University.[9] Such cases shows that this matrix model for HE organisation works well and is sustainable. They also show that from a human point of view, the university modelled and operating as a learning organisation produces a much better place in which to work and live than the university operating on Taylorist business principles and philosophy.

Postscript

My 44 years of experience in HE make me quite pessimistic about the likelihood of most universities transforming into learning organisations. Vested interests and inertia are likely to keep the Tayloristic system in place with governmental support from the neoliberal audit culture until the cataclysm that unravels it has already begun. If my understanding of the future global problems we face is correct, without a sudden reversal of the demographic decline in North America and Europe, and reversal of the re-

emergence of totalitarian regimes, many current universities will simply collapse. When that happens, it is essential to be ready with well-articulated and studied alternative models to put into play to fulfil the roles that functional universities can and should play in solving world problems.

Given the political and social turmoil in the world and the downward spiral of the planetary ecosystem, it is now urgent that we learn to apply the best of what we know collaboratively toward solutions to these broad human and planetary problems. Understanding and advocating a general systems view of human problems, and matching this to the organisation and operation of HE institutions as transdisciplinary learning communities well connected to external stakeholders, is no longer optional. Promoting such views, promoting organisational alternatives to HE 'business-as-usual', is the only way forward for all of us. I now suggest what needs to happen for HE to bring about a new beginning. Although I am not convinced that vested interests will support such suggestions, hopefully they may encourage some stakeholders in HE to at least begin to think about making changes.

Practical suggestions for consideration, discussion—and action

1. Universities must make a concerted effort to reinvent themselves as learning organisations. An action learning and action research approach that requires all stakeholders to continually think about how to improve their practice to align with socio-technical organisational perspectives could be useful in this regard. This could be done by creating safe environments for inter-/transdisciplinary teams of administrators, academics, and management to dialogue about both internal and external factors affecting their missions of teaching, research, and community engagement and to apply creative thinking to find feasible pathways to improvement. The example of Sabanci

University provided in this chapter also offers a good example of how HE could do this.
2. Conducting action research to determine how a socio-technical organisational approach might be applied in HE in various contexts can help to find alternatives to the current neoliberal, Tayloristic modes of operation.
3. HE cannot operate apart from society, and external stakeholders need to be welcomed into the institution as part of the teams making decisions around operational and academic issues.

Questions for discussion

1. Why do you think disciplinary silos persist in HE despite the general agreement that all relevant human problems require transversal solutions?
2. Given the increasing costs of HE and diminishing public and employer support, why do these institutions not move rapidly to change in fundamental ways?
3. What would your ideal HE institution be like organisationally?
4. What would your ideal HE institution be like as a socio-cultural environment for all the legitimate stakeholders?

Notes

1 These basic references to Taylorism are ordered alphabetically. Despite differences over time, the basic critiques and analyses are similar, perhaps inevitably deepening over time on data and understanding of the larger consequences. Even so, the analysis from 1996 is as relevant today as it was then; the problems have only intensified. (See Bousquet, 2008; Davis, 2017; Deresiewicz, 2014; Ginsberg, 2011; Hall & Tandon, 2021; Kirn, 2009; Kirp, 2003; Levin & Greenwood, 2016; Lucas, 1996; Marginson & Considine, 2000; McGettigan, 2013; McMahon, 2009; Newfield, 2016; Readings, 1996; Robinson, 2022; Roij, 2022; Schrecker, 2010; Shumar, 1997; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; Strathern, 2000; Tuchman, 2009; Washburn, 2005; Wellmon, 2015; Whelan, 2013; Wright & Shore, 2017; Zuber-Skerritt et al., 2015.)

2 See https://www.cnbc.com/2022/04/25/companies-eliminate-college-degree-requirement-to-draw-needed-workers.html; https://www.shrm.org/ResourcesAndTools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/Pages/Eliminating-Degree-Requirements-Hiring-IBM-Penguin.aspx; https://blog.ongig.com/job-descriptions/no-degree-requirements/
3 See https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/23550366/ron-desantis-first-amendment-free-speech-woke-academic-freedom-new-college-florida
4 See https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2019/04/adjunct-professors-higher-education-thea-hunter/586168/
5 See https://academicinfluence.com/inflection/college-life/overcoming-administrative-bloat
6 See https://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/10112018%20Data%20Snapshot%20Tenure.pdf
7 See https://www.sabanciuniv.edu/tr/hakkimizda
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CHAPTER 4

Greenlighting the University

Re-envisioning the Role of Higher Education in Tackling the Climate Crisis through Action Research

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Abstract

Higher Education (HE) must take a leading role in addressing the current climate crisis. Universities have the capacity to provide the critical research and training to enable us to respond to the multiple environmental, economic, social, and cultural challenges this crisis creates. In order for this to happen, however, researchers will need to go beyond the confines of the academy to engage with government, industry, and civil society as active partners. Action research provides a model for researchers to expand their roles to include community relationship-building, collaborative design, and advocacy. Fortunately, there are already spaces within

How to cite this book chapter:
Brydon-Miller, M. (2024). Greenlighting the university: Re-envisioning the role of higher education in tackling the climate crisis through action research. In L. Wood & O. Zuber-Skerritt (Eds.), *Shaping the future of higher education: Positive and sustainable frameworks for navigating constant change* (pp. 71–90). Helsinki University Press. https://doi.org/10.33134-HUP-25-4.

and outside HE where this reinvention is taking place. This chapter explores how we might use action research as a model to create universities prepared to take their part in addressing the climate crisis and contribute to the well-being of human beings and the planet.

Preamble

My academic training is in the field of Environmental Psychology, but beginning with my doctoral studies, the focus of my scholarship has been in the area of action research. I've worked in institutions of higher education (HE) for nearly 40 years, first at a small liberal arts college teaching primarily undergraduate students, then at a school providing professional training in human services, and then in two large research universities. I currently teach and advise doctoral students in the College of Education and Human Development at the University of Louisville, in Louisville, Kentucky in the United States of America (USA). I have also had the extraordinary opportunity to spend time collaborating with colleagues around the world, including most recently in Australia, South Africa, the United Kingdom, the Philippines, Denmark, and Sweden.

Several years ago, after completing work on the *SAGE Encyclopedia of action research* (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014), I took some time to reflect on where I wanted to put my energies going forward. I figured then that I had about 10 years left of active scholarship (somehow that deadline continues to be pushed back) and I decided that I needed to do whatever I could to address the (not looming but very current) climate crisis. Working at the local level first in Cincinnati, Ohio and now in Louisville, Kentucky, I have built partnerships in the local public school systems using classroom-based action research to facilitate student learning to promote climate awareness and activism. We have brought students to the university campus for a Day of Science, secured funding to rebuild greenhouses on the grounds of our partner school, and partnered with the school's culinary academy to provide

freshly grown fruits and vegetables. We have also established international partnerships with schools in Australia, Austria, the Philippines, and South Africa to enable our students to share their knowledge of climate change as a global concern with peers from around the world.

Many years ago, I wrote a chapter titled "The Terrifying Truth" (Brydon-Miller, 2004). The truth referred to in the title is that we are each responsible for taking whatever action we can in the attempt to bring about positive change in the world. This requirement aligns with Anne Inga Hilsen's description of covenantal ethics as "the unconditional responsibility and the ethical demand to act in the best interest of our fellow human beings" (Hilsen, 2006, p. 27). Hilsen and I have since "added to this the responsibility to act in the best interests of the environment, acknowledging the interconnectedness of the human and non-human components of the biosphere" (Brydon-Miller & Hilsen, 2016, p. 101). In the context of the climate crisis, this responsibility necessitates both individual and collective action. HE institutions, with their vast resources of knowledge and technical expertise, are a vital source of potential innovation and action, but to date they have not had the kind of impact on policy and practice that is required.

In this chapter I present my ideas on the potential role that HE institutions might play in addressing the climate crisis, focusing on the ways in which action research might inform these shifts in practice. In particular, I explore the various roles and realms of action research and the ways in which centres of action research within universities might serve as spaces that model the kinds of processes that are required if we are to serve as active agents of change in addressing the climate crisis.

The scope of the climate crisis—and possible room for hope

The most recent synthesis report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2023) makes clear the current and future impacts of climate change if action is not taken

immediately to address the problem. The stark analysis provided in this report reflects the strong degree of confidence researchers have in their findings.

> Human-caused climate change is already affecting many weather and climate extremes in every region across the globe. This has led to widespread adverse impacts on food and water security, human health and on economies and society and related losses and damages to nature and people (high confidence). Vulnerable communities who have historically contributed the least to current climate change are disproportionately affected (high confidence). (p. 4)

But the report also offers hope that broad-based collaborative action can still help to mitigate the worst impacts of climate change, although it is clear that the longer we wait to take such actions, the more constrained our options become and the more severe the consequences. "Meaningful participation and inclusive planning, informed by cultural values, Indigenous Knowledge, local knowledge, and scientific knowledge can help address adaptation gaps and avoid maladaptation (high confidence)" (p. 67).

Clearly, HE institutions have an essential role to play in addressing the climate crisis. The data on which this report is based depend on the work of scientists trained and employed at research institutions. Educators and journalists trained in our colleges and universities are leading the effort to increase understanding of the causes and potential ways to address the climate crisis. And universities themselves have the opportunity through their own policies and practices to set an example of sustainability within their communities.

The climate crisis and sustainability in higher education

One way in which HE institutions have begun to address issues around climate change is by establishing sector-wide standards for measuring efforts to increase sustainability. The Sustainability

Policy of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE) guidelines state:

> We are committed to modelling sustainability across our operations and activities. AASHE defines sustainability in an inclusive way, encompassing human and ecological health, social justice, secure livelihoods and a better world for all generations. We operationalize this commitment through sustainable practices that address the organization's environmental, social and economic impacts. (p. 1)

In order to achieve these goals, AASHE has established the Sustainability Tracking Assessment and Rating System (STARS) to enable HE institutions to benchmark their progress toward addressing sustainability in the areas of academics, campus and community engagement, operations, planning and administration, and innovation and leadership. And I'm proud to report that the University of Louisville, through the work of its Sustainability Council, holds a gold STARS ranking. AASHE also provides professional development training, toolkits, and other resources, and conducts an annual conference.[1]

Despite the importance of these efforts, however, the potential for HE institutions to have a significant impact in addressing the climate crisis has been limited. I believe that a major factor holding us back is that the very scientists whose expertise is most vital to informing necessary changes in policy and practice have been reluctant to take on the role of public-facing experts out of a misguided belief that this kind of overt advocacy will undermine their professional standing as objective observers of physical and social phenomena. And while this attitude has shifted recently, in part due to the important role that medical researchers played during the Covid-19 pandemic in trying to communicate critical public health-related knowledge and guidance, in the general population there is still a lack of basic trust and understanding of the processes by which scientific knowledge is generated and the ways in which this information must inform action in all sectors of public life. For HE to achieve this necessary goal, we must

fundamentally rethink the structures of our institutions and their relationships to the broader community.

Ideas for the imagined university and feasible utopias

In his book *Imagining the university* (2013), Ronald Barnett introduces the concept of feasible utopias as a framework for developing multiple alternative models to guide the redesign and reinvigoration of HE. He suggests three criteria for these reimagined universities:

i The imagination should be bold and reach out … beyond the present imaginaries of the university and venture into a space currently denied in the contemporary policy framework …
ii The formation of the new ideas should be prompted by a desire to develop ideas and forms of the university which just might enable the university more effectively to promote human well-being … and
iii … [T]he idea(s) in question *could* be realized in policy and practical projects, however unlikely it is that they will be so realized. (p. 27)

In the context of addressing climate change, this requires us to mobilise the vast resources of our HE institutions with the common goal of tackling the multiple impacts of the current crisis. It means working across disciplinary boundaries to create more dynamic and creative solutions to the complex challenges of climate change. And it means taking an active role in drafting and enacting policies and practices at all levels—in government, industry, and civil society—to enact positive change. As Davydd Greenwood (Chapter 3) states in his critique of current models of higher education:

> Given the political and social turmoil in the world and the downward spiral of the planetary ecosystem, it is now urgent that we

> learn to apply the best of what we know collaboratively toward solutions to these broad human and planetary problems. (p. 65)

And for many of us reading this, "the best of what we know collaboratively" is action research.

Action research in higher education

In our article, "Carpe the academy: Dismantling higher education and prefiguring critical utopias through action research" (2016), Patricia Gayá and I explored some of the issues Greenwood explores here and in his earlier work with Morten Levin around the reforms necessary to enable HE institutions to fulfil their capacity and obligation to contribute to positive change. In that article, we argue that "action research processes offer us a means for keeping open, rather than shutting down, diverse and transgressive possibilities and debate around the nature of the educational offerings, pedagogical practices, and scholarly commitments we collectively desire for higher education" (Gayá & Brydon-Miller, 2017, p. 37).

Some of the affordances of action research—its specific qualities that make certain things possible—make it especially relevant to the effort to increase the engagement of HE institutions in addressing the climate crisis. These include its emphasis on community collaboration, its focus on creating practical solutions to pressing problems, and its ability to work on complex issues with high levels of uncertainty through iterative processes of action and reflection.

Realms of action research

In a recent chapter, my colleagues Alfredo Ortiz Aragón, Victor Friedman, and I explored the idea that there are multiple aspects or realms of action research (Brydon-Miller et al., 2021). This notion of realms of action research grew out of earlier work Alfredo and I had done exploring the variety of different roles

action researchers need to fill in order to build strong collaborations, develop meaningful research questions, design innovative ways of generating knowledge, and create strategies for translating that knowledge into action (Brydon-Miller & Ortiz Aragón, 2018). We then reconfigured these roles into five distinct realms of action research practice: Realm of Empathetic Relator, Realm of Emergent Design, Realm of Dynamic Sense Makers, Realm of Advocacy and Activism, and Realm of Traditional Research. Each of these realms represents specific tasks and challenges requiring distinct skill sets.

In the *Realm of Empathetic Relator*, for example, the key role of the action researcher is to develop ongoing relationships grounded in mutual respect and common cause with organisational and community partners. This requires a willingness to set aside one's expertise to learn from and with others and an appreciation for the myriad ways in which knowledge can be generated and communicated within and across communities. This focus on the centrality of relationships is reflected across the action research literature and has been one of the most personally meaningful aspects of my own work as an action researcher over the years. At the same time, it is this focus on relationships that often deters those coming from more conventional research traditions from participating in community-engaged practices based on the false belief that these relationships will somehow compromise (rather than enrich) the outcomes of their investigations.

The *Realms of Dynamic Sense Makers and Emergent Design* reflect the flexibility and adaptability that are hallmarks of action research practice. Rather than being based on a traditional hypothesis-testing model in which the methodology constrains the potential outcomes of the research process, action research flourishes in situations of constant change. This demands that researchers engaging in this practice have a high tolerance for uncertainty and open-endedness. But the rewards of this willingness to step off the cliff are manifold and are especially important in addressing issues like the climate crisis. In these situations, so many factors contribute to the problem that it is impossible to

control the contexts within which our research takes place, but at the same time this offers a broad range of potential solutions, if only we are willing to go beyond established understandings and practices in order to embrace novel strategies for addressing the issues at hand.

The *Realm of Advocacy and Activism* is central to the practice of action research. Frankly, it is what made my own move to become an action researcher necessary in the first place, as I sought to find a way to integrate my scholar and activist selves. But it is also one of the aspects of action research that is most daunting to researchers trained in more conventional approaches to research. It simply flies in the face of everything they have been taught about what it means to be a scientist—that is, to be objective and value-neutral, to assume it is the researcher's task to generate valid understandings of phenomena, and not to decide how this knowledge might inform policy and practice. Inhabiting the Realm of Advocacy and Activism also requires a distinct set of skills and dispositions, including an ability to use multiple formats to communicate our findings and why they matter, and a willingness to build coalitions with others and to engage with policymakers.

One concern Alfredo, Victor, and I (Brydon-Miller et al., 2021) have identified for prospective action researchers is that, although those of us who have academic backgrounds receive extensive training in the *Realm of Traditional Research* through coursework in research methods, the knowledge and skills required of the other realms—effective group facilitation, community organising, policymaking, etc.—most often have to be learned through experiences outside the academy. Nevertheless, with increasing interest in community-engaged research and emerging programmes in action research being offered in some universities, this is beginning to change. This is one reason why it is so important to bring diverse groups of collaborators together in an action research project, because so often it is our community partners who bring those skills of facilitation, mobilising local knowledge, coalition building, and effective communication to the table, enabling us to learn from them.

If we are to successfully contribute to meaningful action to address the climate crisis, these realms of research must extend to include any researcher whose work has the potential for informing and mobilising the public, impacting policy, and effecting change. In the area of climate change research, this would include scholars from Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields, as well as researchers from the Social Sciences, Arts, and Humanities whose work touches understanding human behaviour and exploring problems through creative expression. But too often research in STEM and Social Science areas is still very much driven by the expert model of knowledge generation in which the academic is responsible for all aspects of the research process. The same is often true in the Arts and Humanities where the artist or scholar, working alone or in collaboration with their peers, makes their insights and creative work available in a unilateral process of knowledge dissemination, designed to inform or perhaps elevate, but not engage, the public at large.

The task at hand for action researchers based within HE institutions and committed to addressing the climate crisis is then twofold. On the one hand we must create and hold spaces within our universities where the practice of action research is valued and the skills and dispositions required by action researchers can be nurtured among our students and colleagues. The other is to reach out beyond these spaces to encourage our colleagues from other research traditions to question the assumptions they have been taught and to encourage them to find ways of inhabiting these realms of research themselves.

Centres of action research as enclaves within the academy

Victor Friedman, in his paper "Revisiting social space: Relational thinking about organizational change" (2011), builds on the work of Lewin, Bourdieu, and Cassirer to explore the notion of social space and how it can help us to understand and influence social dynamics. One aspect of Friedman's framework that I have found especially useful is the notion of enclaves. "Enclaves constitute

'alternative' spaces within a field with rules of the game that are different, and often challenge, those dictated by a larger field of which it is part" (p. 253).

Action research centres and similar spaces in which new and innovative forms of research are developed and practised can serve as enclaves within the larger, more conventional, structures of research within universities. When I helped to co-found and direct the Action Research Center at the University of Cincinnati, I thought of my task as 'holding the space' for students, colleagues, and our community partners to operate by a different set of rules—a space grounded in an ethic of care and a commitment to using our research to create positive change. But, as Friedman (2011) goes on to observe, such enclaves:

> almost always come under pressure to conform to the larger field, which threatens their alternativeness. On the one hand, they may attempt to maintain their separateness by creating a strong boundary and strongly regulating and restricting the relationship with the larger field. On the other hand, they may attempt to influence the larger field by creating a field in which things can be done differently, thus expanding the range of the possible and challenging the established rules of the game. (p. 253)

I would argue that the alternative spaces we have created to promote and protect action research must engage in this work of challenging the larger field and established rules of the game if we are to fully mobilise the potential for academic research to do its part in addressing the climate crisis. It will take nothing short of the transformation of HE that Greenwood calls for (Chapter 3) in order for this to happen.

My own utopian vision for higher education

Responding to Barnett's call for the creation of as many feasible utopias as possible to guide the redesign and reinvigoration of HE, and building on some of the elements in Greenwood's critique, I decided to create my own version of the Green University.

This new model for HE is built on five key elements: authentic community engagement, transdisciplinarity, sustainability, global awareness, and multiple forms of knowledge. It is also grounded in the conviction that critical learning and creative problem-solving thrive within the context of caring and mutually supportive relationships. Through these characteristics, this model for HE provides opportunities for participants—students, faculty, community members alike—to develop the skills and dispositions required to operate within each of the five realms of action research, which enables the Green University to become an active agent in addressing the climate crisis.

The key to the success of the Green University is in the nature of the relationships it fosters. By recognising that everyone has the ability to contribute to the process of knowledge generation, and that the natural world as well has both rights and wisdom that must be respected, the Green University is able to create unique opportunities for learning and growth, and environmentally caring action, among its participants.

Community engagement has recently garnered a great deal of attention in HE, although this often seems to be more a matter of branding than of actual commitment to genuine collaboration. In my utopian Green University, there are well-articulated relationships between university personnel and representatives of government, business, and industry, the non-profit and civil sectors, schools, and the general public. Research is informed by the needs of the community—as these are defined by the community. And the community is afforded opportunities to deepen learning about these issues, so community members can act as informed contributors to these processes of knowledge generation.

Researchers—faculty, students, and community partners—work together across disciplinary boundaries, drawing upon multiple ways of knowing to understand and address the issues they've identified in more nuanced ways, recognising the fundamental entanglement of these concerns from ecological, political, economic, social, and cultural perspectives.

The Green University is itself a model of sustainability that serves as a space for designing and testing innovative technologies, policies, and practices that lessen the environmental impact of the institution and instead contribute to a more vital and vibrant space for living and learning. This might mean creating new, more energy-efficient structures; setting aside space for food production; or/and developing integrated cross-disciplinary curricula grounded in problem-based learning based within the community (see Chapter 2). And while firmly embedded within its own local setting, the Green University proposed here is part of a larger international network of campuses committed to promoting the health and well-being of people and the planet, and doing so by sharing knowledge and resources.

Integrating the realms of (action) research into the Green University

A core principle of the Green University is in the value it sets on offering opportunities for learning across the five realms of (action) research. If we are to realise the potential of the academy to inform and mobilise climate-change action, researchers from across the university will need to learn to work confidently in all five of the realms of research outlined here. They must continue to conduct the rigorous and thoughtful research that has been the hallmark of university scholarship, while at the same time embracing the more creative and transformative aspects of knowledge generation captured in the other realms of emergent designers and dynamic sense makers. They must embrace their role as public scholar and activist and find ways to share valuable knowledge they have helped generate beyond the academy in ways that are meaningful and accessible to the general public. And first and foremost, they must work to build relationships of trust and respect with members of that public so that their knowledge, and the knowledge and wisdom from the community, can be combined as a force for creating positive change. Figure 4.1 captures the ways in which these elements of the Green University

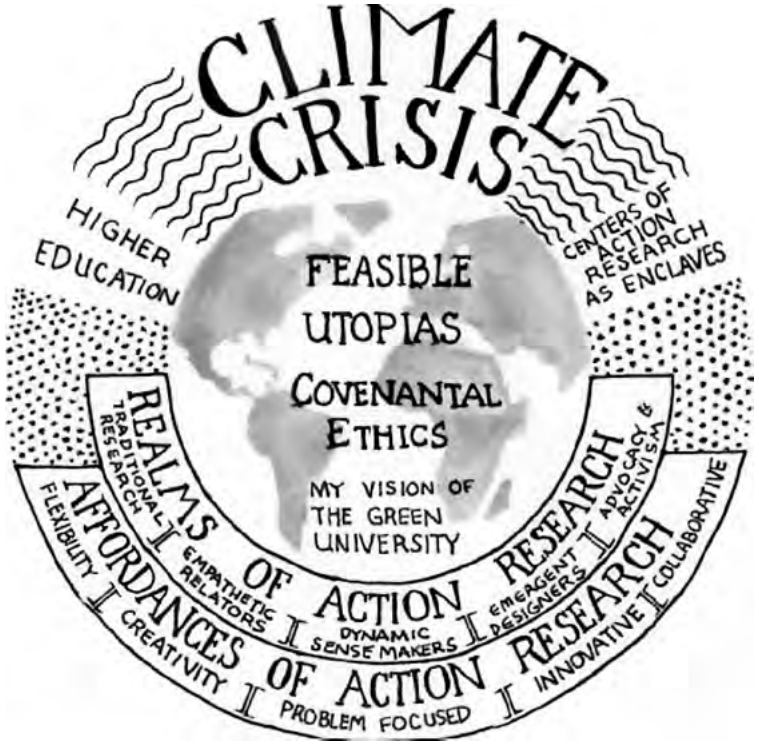

Figure 4.1: Elements of the Green University (designed by Steven Kroeger for this chapter).

intersect to create a vibrant space for fostering change within and beyond the academy.

Finding reasons for hope in current practice: Examples of existing centres of action research promoting positive change

Barnett (2013, p. 27) calls for the creation of "feasible utopias" that "*could* be realized in policy and practical projects". I propose that many of the aspects of the Green University I describe here have already been established, giving us hope that these elements might be brought together on a larger scale to create fundamental

change in the basic structures of HE. In some cases, this has been done on an institutional level, but more often it is found within smaller, more informal spaces within the larger organisation. These institutional enclaves can serve as sites for innovation within and across institutions. Existing centres of action research and other forms of innovative scholarship often serve as such spaces within larger institutions, reflecting the core values of action research and creating opportunities for collaboration and creative problem-solving.

An example of an institutional-level commitment to community engagement exists at Malmö University in Sweden. One central aspect of Malmö University is its foundational commitment to partnering with local government as a way of promoting positive change. The intentional establishment of these partnerships provides a structure for ongoing project development and research informed by real-world issues. The Medea Design Lab at Malmö University exemplifies the creative spark that charges the realms of emergent design and dynamic sense-making through its integration of technical innovation and community engagement.

The Sports Performance Research Institute New Zealand (SPRINZ) at Auckland University of Technology in New Zealand has committed to incorporating Indigenous forms of knowledge into organisational learning and decision-making. During my visit there, I was struck by the multiple ways in which Māori language, culture, and world views were integrated into events, leading to a much richer and more reflective outcome for the planning processes in which we were engaged. Both the Community-Based Educational Research entity at North-West University in South Africa and the University of Technology, Sydney in Australia reflect the importance of transdisciplinary research and teaching in the organisation of their research and training programmes.

And we can learn from the example of non-academic settings as well. The Highlander Research and Education Centre in Tennessee in the USA has for over 90 years led the way in integrating popular education, community-based research, and action to address issues from labour organising, to civil rights, to environmental

justice. Similarly, the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA) and Research Initiatives Bangladesh (RIB) both focus on community-based research to address pressing local issues.

International partnerships and collaborations are also an important means of connecting efforts globally. One such project is the International Climate Change Education project we designed to bring together university-based researchers with middle-school students and educators from Austria, Australia, the Philippines, South Africa, and the United States (Brydon-Miller et al., 2022). The goal was to provide students with the opportunity to learn about climate change in their own communities and then share that knowledge with peers in other parts of the world, enabling them to understand that climate change is happening everywhere, but that it takes different forms and has different impacts depending on where you are and what resources you have to address it. In this project we used a variety of multimodal strategies to link students up with one another, including classroom-to-classroom Zoom calls, a letter exchange, and graffiti walls. We are also continuing to develop Ripple Effects International, a community-based photo contest around themes related to nature and environmental issues that has been conducted in the US and Australia, with plans now in the works to extend the project in the UK. While these projects have focused on younger learners, the same strategies can be used to engage college and university-level students. International service-learning projects offer another opportunity for students to engage in climate-related research and development projects. One example of this kind of project is Adam Stieglitz's dissertation project which brought Engineering students from the University of Louisville to work alongside community members through the Andean Alliance for Sustainable Development, the non-profit organisation he co-founded in Peru, to help the community to map irrigation systems to respond to climate impacts. We are also currently developing a proposal to fund a knowledge exchange between rural communities affected by recent severe flooding events in Eastern Kentucky and the Northern Rivers region of Australia.

These are just a few of the vast range of current projects and programmes in which action research and innovative forms of knowledge creation are demonstrating how we might go about creating a multitude of versions of the Green University to address the climate crisis locally and globally.

Postscript

It is true that this work faces continuing threats from forces that would silence community voices. These forces promote a status quo where hand-wringing and public displays of concern by governmental and industry leaders mask the lack of genuine commitment to addressing the climate crisis, and where university researchers continue to be sidelined and silenced. Still, I choose to be hopeful about the future. The conclusion of the chapter on the Terrifying Truth reminds us that after all the ills escape into the world from Pandora's box, at the end hope emerges. This hope is grounded in my belief that we can still come together to find ways to address the climate crisis and that HE institutions can—and must—take a leading role in bringing about this change.

Practical suggestions for consideration, discussion—and action

1. Build alliances both locally and globally with colleagues who share your concerns. Make a point of reaching out across disciplinary boundaries and to a range of community partners to enrich your understanding of the issues and to increase your opportunities to make an impact.
2. Engage with your partners in your own version of utopian thinking. One strategy for doing this is through the Future Creating Workshop process developed by scholars at Roskilde University (Brydon-Miller et al., 2022; Nielsen & Nielsen, 2006). This process invites participants to identify challenges, imagine possible utopian futures, and collaborate in designing strategies for moving forward toward those visions.

Questions for discussion

1. What does your Green University look like? How would you take up Barnett's challenge to create a feasible utopia to address the climate crisis?
2. What skills and dispositions do you feel are vital for enabling researchers to successfully occupy all five realms of action research? How might we better prepare students to do so?
3. Where do you see change happening? What strategies do you feel are necessary to enable these enclaves to take up the challenge to transform HE institutions to enable these institutions to effectively contribute to addressing the climate crisis?

Acknowledgement

The author would like to thank Davydd Greenwood for his very thoughtful feedback on an earlier draft of this chapter, and Steve Kroeger for his incredible ability to combine so many diverse elements into a coherent and compelling diagram.

Notes

1 See https://www.aashe.org/.

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CHAPTER 5

Indigenous Knowledge for Sustainable Change in Higher Education

An Opportunity Not to Be Missed for Humankind

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Abstract

Across my 30-year journey through higher education (HE), I have had the honour to learn from and with members of several Indigenous peoples in Colombia. I bear this in mind while appreciating the valuable opportunity that HE offers for human beings—to explore broader ways of understanding life and the problems affecting us all, and to co-construct alternative solutions. I argue it is not enough to simply acknowledge Indigenous knowledge (IK) in institutional discourses; these intentions for inclusion need to be translated into institutional actions. Academics must leave their comfort zones and begin an authentic dialogue as praxis

How to cite this book chapter:
Santos, D. (2024). Indigenous Knowledge for sustainable change in higher education: An opportunity not to be missed for humankind. In L. Wood & O. Zuber-Skerritt (Eds.), *Shaping the future of higher education: Positive and sustainable frameworks for navigating constant change* (pp. 91–114). Helsinki University Press. https://doi.org/10.33134-HUP-25-5.

with Indigenous and Afrodescendant peoples to imagine and help cultivate the better world we all desire. An intergenerational strategy can make our collaborative efforts sustainable through participatory intercultural education actions. To this end, HE institutions need to strengthen institutional governance through more inclusive participation in decision-making. Collaborative actions need to leave behind competitive models to re-signify the 'higher' component so long distorted in HE. These actions must aim to transform realities through university–school partnerships, and collaborative work with diverse cultural communities and entities at different levels. Practical suggestions include exploring with student teachers creative and innovative initiatives to support the school system. These initiatives need to co-create with diverse cultural communities a wide range of intercultural educational bridges and pathways, aimed at preserving and strengthening Indigenous students' cultural identities in their transition to HE and throughout their academic journey.

Preamble

"Things have to happen when they have to happen; neither before nor after." This was the response of an Indigenous U'wa leader in 2017, when I expressed my regret that we could not begin working with the 20 Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers at the schools in the U'wa nation in the northeast of Colombia in 2015. He explained that his community had asked the university where I worked (Universidad Nacional de Colombia) to help them hold on to their cultural identity and language in the face of national policy guidelines imposed by the Ministry of Education. But as Guardians of Mother Earth, they had to prioritise their time, actions, and funding, to prevent attempts to transform their sacred snowed mountain Zizuma[1] into a national park. The proposed transformation to national park entailed authorising the entry of about 19,000 tourists annually to this sacred place of the U'wa people, with tragic consequences also for Mother Earth. The U'wa people asserted that they should be in charge of caring for

Zizuma, especially since one of its precious glaciers had already melted away.[2] The U'wa people's political action resulted in a series of agreements with the national government, one of which suspended tourist visits. By 2023, eight years later, Zizuma has recovered its pristine waters and snow.

This instance of the people's resistance and nature's recovery is just one of the many struggles where the U'wa people have been forced to invest their efforts to preserve their ancient lands. It is part of the endurance and determination that mark the collective efforts of the U'wa people to preserve U'wa heritage, as reflected in the wise words about time/happening that open this chapter. While certainly later than scheduled, by the end of 2017 the team I was part of from Universidad Nacional de Colombia could start working with these Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers of the U'wa schools in their territory, to more deeply understand their concerns and share some suggestions they could consider to enrich their teaching and students' learning.

Here I have flagged this memory of my experience with the U'wa people because I believe it illustrates well what I want to argue in this chapter. That is, HE may miss an enormously valuable opportunity to make positive and sustainable change to educational training if it fails to broaden understanding of the world with IK. Through long and deep reflection, I recognise that my own experience in HE is marked by meaningful milestones that happened when they had to happen, "neither before nor after". Across this chapter I present some important milestones that have influenced my practice and conceptual thinking in HE. My understanding of these experiences alerts not just my mind and my heart, but my entire being—my blood and bones as well as my soul—to the imperative to learn mutually from and with Indigenous and Afrodescendant people—for the well-being, or perhaps it is the survival, of humankind on this precious but abused planet.

Figuring out my role in higher education while forging my position in the world

I spent 30 years of my 40-year working life in the field of education, teaching and researching the actual and possible contribution of HE to positive and sustainable social change in Colombia. For the first 10 years I focused on promoting critical intercultural communication, aiming to help construct a more socially just world by co-creating safe and respectful communicative spaces in which participants could acknowledge, celebrate, and co-construct a better world from and through cultural diversity. I was drawn towards participatory action research (PAR) because it emphasises participation and action by members of communities that are affected by the research, and in the process of research, education, and action, participants transform themselves as well as reality. And very significant for me, PAR gives priority to knowledge that tackles challenges caused by unequal and harmful social systems and seeks to visualise and realise alternatives. My background as an English language teacher and linguist, and my role as an English as a foreign language-teacher educator, led me to run several PAR projects with groups of interested colleagues and students. Works by Wilfred Carr and Stephen Kemmis (1986), John Elliott (1991), and Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt (1992) were my first English language readings on action research and its deeply participatory and inclusive approach, and they provided me with valuable insights that continued to inform my academic work. From a retrospective point of view, although I had already been introduced to Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (1987) during those years, it is ironic that my initiation to the field of action research was triggered by readings from the English-speaking world. "Things have to happen when they have to happen; neither before nor after."

In 2003 I began employment as a part-time professor in the Department of Linguistics at Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Colombia's largest university.[3] This gave me the opportunity to start teaching, researching, and working with members of several

of Colombia's numerous Indigenous communities.[4] Simultaneously, I taught part-time in a master's degree in education in a private university, where academics from several universities were researching problems in HE. There, I included critical intercultural communication when researching on HE from multiple disciplines and professions. Works of Paulo Freire (1987, 1997) and Orlando Fals Borda (1979) emerged as the main inspirations in my PAR journey from these years on.

Starting my action research journey 10 years before with the views of scholars from the English-speaking world helped me to better appreciate the actual contribution of Freire and Fals Borda to the field of PAR in the world. Having met some of the action research and PAR scholars in person, in 2007 I helped organise a special event in Bogotá to honour the life and work of Fals Borda, where he could reunite with some of his long-standing colleague friends, many of whom were very well-known scholars from the English-, Spanish-, and Portuguese-speaking worlds. Ten years later I co-organised an event in Cartagena, Colombia, to celebrate two of the most important conferences on PAR that were organised by Fals Borda in that city. Scholars from across most of the PAR approaches, and leaders of several Latin American social movements, including Indigenous ones, attended this event.

In 2006, by then a full-time professor at Universidad Nacional de Colombia, I led a research project on academic writing in Spanish of Indigenous, Raizal,[5] and Afrodescendant students in HE institutions in Colombia. This research proposal was my response to an invitation from Professor John Elliott of what was then called the International Centre for Applied Research in Education (ICARE), now called the Centre for Applied Research in Education (CARE), at the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom (UK). He had invited me to join a discussion group about the geopolitics of academic writing, with HE researchers from the UK, Peru, Mexico, Pakistan, Tanzania, New Zealand, the United States of America (USA), and Australia. The group's key concern was the way universities were approaching the academic

writing process in English as a second or non-native language of international students.

Fate struck—or perhaps it was the U'wa wisdom that "Things have to happen when they have to happen"—when I started drafting my contribution on circumstances in Colombia. A student was protesting outside my office window, loudly voicing concerns about how academics were doing research *on* Indigenous communities. Maybe I could have ignored this call and kept on writing the PAR proposal I had in mind. But I couldn't; the truth, the wisdom, the justice in this call resonated with my head and heart. Instead, I changed the nature of the research we would pursue. For me this was also a valuable, if humbling, wake-up call to listen to university students more carefully, more mindfully, before doing anything that concerns them. I proposed to my Colombian colleagues that we could formulate a critical ethnography on the academic writing of Indigenous, Raizal, and Afrodescendant students in bilingual and intercultural HE settings in Colombia, and my colleagues supported this idea. The critical ethnography model we adopted, to which the participating students had consented, emphasised ethical considerations that educational researchers should keep in mind to avoid reproducing social injustice through research practices in education. Working in the PAR paradigm, we conducted a descriptive study along these lines in each of the three universities where we worked (two public and one private).

Re-signifying the 'higher' component of higher education

The critical ethnographic study we carried out in my university provided deeper understanding of these university students' experiences in the Colombian education system. All of the Indigenous students we interviewed identified that their first contact with the language of the 'whites',[6] i.e. Spanish language, was in their early childhood, when this newfound awareness of difference awoke them to an overwhelming need to learn to deal with the people who were dominant, made the rules, and spoke the language of

'whites' automatically. Their childhood minds were not yet aware that this same power relationship had kept their peoples socially excluded for centuries. The participating students explained how their confusing but seemingly necessary desire to successfully interact with the so-called whites was always met with mestizos' unwillingness to accept them or recognise and treat them as equals. These students told of their experiences speaking the Indigenous and Creole languages at school, but the trauma of having to adopt white schooling practices. They were commonly frustrated. These feelings continued in secondary school, where most of the study participants experienced schooling practices informed by Catholic religious communities that imposed their colonially derivative world views. Indigenous communities have considered these schools to be the best option for their children to achieve the education they need as adults, to live in society, indeed, a nation, where whites still exert their dominance over people of other ethnicity.

The study participants' stories revealed that these feelings and experiences of disempowerment/inferiority to whites continued in HE. Overall, in fact, their life and experience of education worsened. Many of the participating students expressed their despair on discovering that although they were considered the best students in their secondary schools in the isolated areas where they lived, on entering university, academic staff told them they were the worst students in their classes. This about-face in appreciation of these students' academic achievements came alongside social and cultural discrimination in daily life both on and off campus, which prompted many to consider giving up at the very early stages of their university life. In general, the participating students described academics as implacable gatekeepers of academia, who justified their actions with "every student must be treated equally at the university", and "academic writing is painful". Ironically, the teaching staff we interviewed for this study claimed they did their best to support Indigenous and Raizal students, but perceived themselves as inevitably disadvantaged in their capacity to meet the needs of a culturally diverse university community.

Findings of this critical ethnographic study on academic writing (Santos, 2009) were the basis for two PAR projects aimed at supporting two curriculum reforms at my university. From 2012 to 2015, I led a PAR project to support course subjects aimed at helping a group of first-year students (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) at the main campus to improve their academic reading and writing skills in Spanish. Also, from 2013 to 2015, I led a PAR project to work with teaching staff from all faculties and campuses of the university to collaboratively reflect upon and strengthen their pedagogical competencies to guide undergraduate and graduate students in academic reading and writing in Spanish (Santos, 2016). During these years, I supervised undergraduate teaching practices and research projects of students who were supporting Indigenous, Raizal, and Afrodescendant university students in the most isolated campuses of the university.

A personal turning point

Before mounting these two programmes on academic writing, I undertook my PhD in Australia for three years from mid 2009. During these years in Australia, while studying the political lives promoted by PAR projects in HE, I experienced a turning point—truly enriching and exciting—in my positioning on Indigenous worlds. All my life I had assumed of myself, and identified, as a mestiza, even though I was frequently asked what ethnic group in Colombia I belonged to because of the shape of my eyes and the colour of my skin and hair. On occasion, while discussing first person and second person research at academic events, I was questioned about my ethnicity and my positioning when researching with Indigenous people. Some academics had asked me inquisitively, "What is this about you being a mestizo?" Uncertain about my ancestors, I always replied somewhat confidently that I wanted to think of myself as the best version of all of the ethnicities in my family history. While doing my PhD in Australia, I was asked to deliver an already designed subject on Aboriginal education in a teacher education course at the university where I was enrolled.

This request was on the basis that I had worked with Indigenous people in Colombia. I had to read and learn a lot about Aboriginal people in Australia and their historical and contemporary socio-political circumstances. I was particularly shocked to learn about the tragedy caused by public policies in Australia in the early 20th century, and their sequels in contemporary times. I went back home to Colombia looking not only at the Indigenous peoples' movements in Colombia with pride, but also at myself, with new, more curious, eyes.

Ideas for transforming higher education from within

After my return to Colombia in June 2012, something that I had thought could never happen occurred. The Colombian government and the largest and longest-standing guerrilla group in Latin America, the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), agreed to start a new dialogue process to end a 52-year armed conflict in which over 250,000 people were killed. In 2016 when the parties signed the peace agreement, many academics understood that HE could not continue as before. The power relationship between Colombia's ethnic peoples and the mestizo had changed irrevocably. The ethnic chapter was one of the last issues to be agreed in that five-year dialogue process. It was included near the end of the dialogue, then being held in La Havana, Cuba, because Indigenous peoples claimed their voices and requests had not yet been heard. Although the Indigenous–mestizo relationships have to change in these contexts, the change began as, and is still, a very slow process. I would be working with Indigenous people while the reincorporation and reconciliation processes were under way. Historical example has taught us that participatory methodologies are crucial to support peacebuilding in and after armed conflict, so I felt well placed to contribute.

HE was called to change its ways, while helping to sort out daily life troubles in the communities where many Indigenous, Raizal, and Afrodescendant people live. My university began to

face this challenge by issuing a set of institutional statements and initiatives to reaffirm its historical commitment to the pursuit of peace in Colombia. These were embraced by a small group of individuals and small collectives in the 21 faculties spread across 9 campuses. Supporting peacebuilding in isolated territories of the country meant academics had to leave the comfort zone of their campus offices. Indeed, this was the main call of the university's first female Rector, who was appointed in March 2018. By then I was participating in a face-to-face workshop run in New Delhi, India, by the UNESCO Co-Chairs in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, as part of their Knowledge for Change (K4C) mentorship programme. There, we were reflecting on key issues and challenges of different community-based research traditions with colleagues from India, Canada, Indonesia, Italy, South Africa, Mexico, and Colombia. In this learning context, I was able to share what my university was doing to contribute to the peacebuilding process through participatory methodologies (Santos 2022a).

To strengthen the impact of the university's efforts to support peacebuilding in Colombia, the Rector proposed creating an institutional network aimed at articulating individual and group teaching, research, and community engagement initiatives for peace. I coordinated this peace network from February 2022 to June 2023, when I retired from employment. But creating this institutional network for peace has been a very slow process given the difficulties it faces securing university funding (even though this initiative was formally proposed by the Rector!). Fortunately, the university has continued to support this peacebuilding process under unfavourable circumstances in the most isolated and complex territories of the country. And in the process, subtle and interesting institutional changes have been taking place. Finally, the network was officially formalised in 2019, after many administrative and financial obstacles. Since then, the network collective has been exploring and co-constructing new ways of approaching complex historical problems in the territories.

Academics have been creating new spaces of dialogue and action, where members of all the affected communities in these territories, including Indigenous communities, plan and work in a participatory way on short-, mid-, and long-term solutions to problems, aiming to satisfy needs and serve interests that sustain peace and promote well-being for all. They have been working with national and local government officers, professionals from institutions created by the peace accord, and various international community groups that accompany and verify implementation of the peace accord, among other actors, in ways these academics had not explored before (Santos, 2023a). In doing so, we have been transforming our academic practices for teaching, research, and community engagement. In 2023, times are still difficult in Colombia, but these ways of working with communities have nevertheless served to strengthen local and institutional governance. Eight years after the signing of the peace accord, we recognise that transformation of HE in Colombia will take considerable time in organisational terms, but we also understand that this transformation is already taking place while Network members and other university staff work with and across the communities.

Partnering for transformation

When I moved from the university's Department of Linguistics to the Institute of Research in Education in 2015, I supervised a PAR project on bilingual intercultural education with Wayuú Indigenous school students in an isolated desert area in the north of Colombia. I also supervised an educational action research project with Embera Indigenous students in a school in Bogotá, the capital of Colombia. These were school–university partnerships aimed at deepening understanding of the challenges Indigenous students and Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers face when trying to find alternative participatory paths and solutions aimed at promoting more socially just schools. In 2019 I also worked with the heads of all the public schools in the Archipelago of San Andres, Providencia and Santa Catalina, to help them while they

face pedagogical challenges to strengthen Raizal cultural identities and Creole language in their students' daily life. These school heads agreed that acknowledging and revitalising Indigenous and Creole languages must not be a minor issue in schools and universities. For these schools, geographical isolation was exacerbated by socio-cultural marginalisation.

In 2022 and 2023 I was invited to dialogue with Indigenous leaders in the Amazon territory in the southeast of Colombia. In our first encounter in 2022, two huge challenges were identified. First, the Indigenous leaders needed to work with the University to find new ways to strengthen the capabilities of many Indigenous people who served as interpreters and translators for non-Indigenous people. Second, young Indigenous leaders warned they were not finding echo from their Indigenous elders to support their ideas on preserving their cultural identities and cultures. Governance began to appear to be a critical issue for the university, and Indigenous communities were called upon to work together. In fact, in 2023, Indigenous leaders spoke out about the need for education in governance and leadership, to eradicate the seeds of corruption that produced a never-ending return to zero in their communities. They proposed exploring new pedagogies aimed at achieving authentic bilingual intercultural education in schools and universities.

Companions to understand the world we live in

During the four decades of my work life at university, my teaching, research, and community-engagement efforts in and from HE have been inspired by the experiences such as those I have discussed briefly above. But I have also been inspired by the ideas of many academics, to whom I will be forever grateful. My journey to explore knowledge generously shared by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people has been characterised by a never-ending, sometimes overwhelming, feeling of surprise at its power to transcend space and time. First, I want to especially acknowledge scholars with approaches from different critical pedagogies

around the world. With them I moved from radical positions on how to promote social change to more moderate, compassionate ones. This journey was dramatic; through it I learned painfully what happens to academics when those who hold power in HE perceive that change-making presents a threat to them. Human reactions and actions can be unpredictable, and may cause harm to many people beyond those leading change-making processes. Fortunately, during these experiences I learned key insights and strategies that I have held as a compass for life across the years.

Two Latin American scholars in particular became beacons for my actions. They are Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (1921–1997) and Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda (1925–2008), whom I mentioned briefly above. Freire's invitation to the world at large to reinstate ethics in education captivated me. His understanding of dialogue as praxis has inspired my facilitating role in many initiatives for social change-making, at many levels and with many types of communities and problems. I have also remained captivated by Orlando Fals Borda's passion and wisdom, especially the notion of praxis as political action that helped me to make sense of the long history of struggles of many social movements. Many years of reading and re-reading their thoughts and analysing their work enabled me to understand more clearly why Freire and Fals Borda teamed together so well. Their teachings helped me to participate in contemporary trends that strengthen ethics in the academic world. Freire's claim that there can be no dialogue without humility, faith, hope, and trust, and Fals Borda's idea of the need to be 'feeling thinking' beings (*sentipensantes* in Spanish) when doing research, inspired me to fight against the idea that feelings must be cast away when working in contemporary HE (Santos & Soler, 2023).

Fals Borda's *'Investigación Acción Participativa'* (IAP, an acronym in Spanish for a specific approach to PAR) has served me and others well as a way to allow empathy, local knowledges, feeling–thinking researchers, and ethics to be central in education when trying to solve problems in our societies. Soon after encountering the IAP concept, I began to read about decolonial pedagogies that,

while aligned with critical pedagogies in many respects, added a powerful claim for reinstating Indigenous and Afrodescendant knowledges in contemporary societies after the imposition of European world views through education. It's now amply evident that these knowledges, which have enabled Indigenous and Afrodescendant peoples to survive in a socially unjust world, are key to solving 'planet' problems that may erase the entire ecosystem, or most of it, in the not-too-distant future. The bilingual intercultural education movement became an urgent path for me to explore in HE. In this respect, I believe we need to overcome functional views of intercultural education that aim to fit those social and cultural groups different from the dominant ones into hegemonic world views. Rather, contemporary societies need an intercultural education, one that can help to build bridges that allow the encounter and dialogue of people who have different world views to co-construct ways of living together. These personal explorations led me to delve more deeply into political theories. Since the early 2000s, the writings of German-born American intellectual Hannah Arendt (1906–1975) have helped me with this.

Arendt invited readers/thinkers to 'stop and think' what we do as human beings to prevent evildoing, and this is what I have continually tried to do, including in my PhD studies. In Arendt's understanding, the human condition of plurality underlies 'action', which with labour and work comprise the three fundamental activities of our being human in the world (Arendt, 1958). Her explorations of action as philosophical enquiry inspired me to revise my understanding of 'action' in PAR. She claimed that action, the only activity that goes on directly between human beings without the intermediary of things, and that can bring about something new every time it happens, corresponds to the condition of plurality, which is an essential condition of all political life. Therefore, the condition of natality, which Arendt argued is the central category for political thought, also guided me towards engaging more deeply in the political actions we PAR practitioners were promoting. So, with ideas of Arendt, Freire, and Fals Borda, I began to explore PAR in different ways within

and beyond HE, and to investigate the notion of 'ethical literacy' in studies on academic writing (Santos, 2022b).

The ideas and learnings from community-engagement projects to support the peacebuilding process in Colombia also enabled me to reflect on the pedagogies of community engagement in HE (Santos, 2023b) and in political education (Santos, 2023c). While studying for my PhD in Australia, I learned about the theory elaborated by a group of researchers from the international network 'Pedagogy, Education, and Praxis' (PEP). PEP was created in 2005 by action researchers from several educational traditions who aimed to promote social change by transforming educational practices. To more clearly describe and explain what they mean by a 'practice', a group of them proposed the Theory of Practice Architectures. I have started exploring this theory in a fruitful dialogue, with reflections upon the notion of 'action', and upon the place and role of feelings when understanding 'practice' in this way (Santos & Soler, 2023). More recently, and as a concern shared with a group of researchers in this network, I have started to reflect on PAR projects through the lens of 'sustainable educational change' (Santos, 2023d).

Drawing together my ideas about how Indigenous knowledge can help reshape higher education

From my four decades of teaching, researching, and leading community engagement initiatives in HE, I have become especially concerned about the difficulties HE institutions face in practising what they preach, specifically in relation to making the importance of Indigenous knowledge (IK) a reality for helping to achieve a better world. Inability to do so has been strongly connected to the weakening of institutional governance in HE. Here I cannot follow through on this inquiry in detail, but I use this opportunity to present some ideas I have to help address these concerns.

From embracing Indigenous knowledge in discourses to embodying it in institutional actions

HE made a huge step forward when it began to formally acknowledge that IK is key to comprehensively understanding the world and the challenges that we, humankind, face as a species. We can see signs of this intention, conviction, desire, or project, explicit or implied, in most mission statements and visions of HE institutions, as well as in statements in cross-national proposals and initiatives. But statements/words are not actions. So, what is missing to inspire us, to enable us to move from discourse to meaningful institutional actions?

If we draw on the U'wa principle of life, "Things have to happen when they have to happen; neither before nor after", we can make several interconnected claims about what is at stake. First, the transformation of the current idea of HE, still based on the understanding of what is the 'whole' in terms of knowledge that was created in Europe in the Middle Ages, will also take shape over some centuries. When a way of understanding what knowledge matters dominates for 10 centuries, its weight lasts. Second, while the Western appreciation of time for social change-making struggles with Indigenous notions of time for that same end, we could ask what sort of things should happen along the way. To identify possible answers, we could resort to what Arendt called the most political of all mental faculties, namely, imagination, which would mean leaving aside HE as we have always known it. Third, to achieve that, dialogue as praxis with Indigenous and Afrodescendant peoples would serve as a beacon to imagine HE as we described it in our institutional discourses, namely, one that can educate people to understand how to—and to actually seek to—live together in more socially just, egalitarian, and happier societies. Thus, imagination, or the mental faculty that enables us to bring into the present what does not yet exist, according to Arendt (1978), could serve us well to bring into the present the type of human beings and life together that we dream of in this already at-risk planet.

Fourth, although we are talking here about an intergenerational endeavour, we have in place some favourable conditions for education to ignite that collective challenge all over the world. What is missing is the socio-political requirement—the will—to make this happen. To make this educational change one that benefits all humankind and is sustainable, we need to learn from one another, non-Indigenous from Indigenous people and vice versa, in the HE institutions that already exist. Those who have influence in HE systems could lead the creation of intercultural communicative spaces where IK can be comfortably incorporated into learning and knowledge creation, and be welcomed for its valuable capacity to contribute to resolving the challenges communities and HE institutions already face. These people with influence could also help in initiating and establishing institutional arrangements that put into motion intercultural educational actions tailor-made so that IK can be not only used by non-Indigenous people, but especially can be acknowledged by all as equally important to Western ways of understanding and living.

An important move by some HE institutions is opening the door to include Indigenous knowledge in learning, teaching, and research, although this is taking place through already established non-Indigenous educational traditions, frameworks, and rules. These individual learning and organisational learning processes, informed by, incorporating, and cultivating Indigenous knowledge(s), need to be carried out intentionally, purposefully, and collectively in HE institutions, and in a participatory manner. To bring this learning into reality, we who work in or otherwise contribute to education need to mindfully change our approaches, to develop creative ways to inclusively explore alternative curriculum and leadership initiatives towards necessarily inclusive outcomes.

Strengthening institutional governance with Indigenous knowledge

Institutional governance may be the most important process in contributing to social change-making in HE. Some observers claim from contemporary trends in HE that broader participation is crucial to strengthening institutional governance. Unfortunately, however, participation has been instrumentalised to meet demands for 'efficiency' in this competitive, need-to-be-accountable, widely neo-liberalised world. The PAR initiatives I led across the years of my university employment positioned me to recognise that participation in decision-making is lived as a privilege in HE, as a result of institutionalised rituals performed by a few and the proximity to power that participation can bestow. PAR initiatives become opportunities to reflect upon and make sense of participation in decision-making and collaborative actions aimed at transforming realities.

In this context, institutional governance must not be defined by market-based or managerial trends, or be focused narrowly to address the challenges that HE now faces. These are fair claims. However, the challenges that HE must face require participation by social actors who can bring into the decision-making processes new understandings of, ideas about, and action for, such challenges. Members of Indigenous communities and other social actors can bring into the process their knowledge as partners who are also interested in and co-responsible for achieving a better world. When these partnerships are based on authentic and respectful participation, aimed at social change-making through collaborative work, a more inclusive approach to HE will emerge. Dialogue as praxis and praxis as political action can come about in settings that are more socially just. These partnerships may inform the characteristics of a governance system, which meaningfully serves academics and social actors involved in social change-making. Leadership in HE should change, or be changed, to facilitate the creation of communitive spaces that promote dialogue about

different types of knowledge required to solve complex contemporary problems.

In short, figuring out our positioning in the world through our experiences in and from HE can be an exciting journey. But further enriching this journey, by engaging with IK and the people who create, hold, and pass it on across generations, requires us to leave the academic practices forged throughout centuries, which many academics have long experienced as a comfort zone. Acknowledging, knowing about, and learning from Indigenous peoples can help us to re-signify the 'higher' component that has been distorted in HE as a result of decisions shaped in ideology and in practice by the currently dominant push to marketise education. Treating HE as a marketplace shuts out ideas, understandings, world views, and actions that would serve to meet the aspirations of individuals and communities at local, national, and international levels. Transforming HE towards inclusivity—of ideas, knowledges, and perspectives, and of people, irrespective of their ethnicity, heritage, and capacity to pay fees—will surely take time. Important changes towards this end can already begin from within HE. But this is not a task for individuals working alone. It can be achieved only by partnering with like-minded people and other institutions in the HE system, and with a diverse range of social and cultural communities with which we can learn from each other, particularly about how to make social change happen.

Postscript

Here I have presented stories drawing from my years of experience in HE, mostly in Colombia. I hope these may offer some useful guidance for leaders of PAR initiatives in HE to collaboratively create opportunities for students, academic staff, and other social actors such as Indigenous, Raizal, and Afrodescendant people to strengthen institutional and local governance, while sharing knowledges and insights to make social change for the common interest. Articulating efforts in teaching, research, and community engagement can help us to make sense of them, while

exploring solutions to real-life problems in the communities and societies where we live—locally, nationally, and globally. Here we see how transformation from within HE can inform and otherwise contribute to social change-making in any place or context. Making this change sustainable, in HE and in communities small and large, calls upon us to think and work collaboratively, with our minds and hearts open to different world views and experiences. Only through pursuing such change inclusively, learning from Indigenous and other ethnic peoples so long closed out from HE, can we acknowledge each other as equals, from an authentic intercultural educational approach, to serve the interests of humankind rather than interests of a small minority.

Practical suggestions for consideration, discussion—and action

Public policies on education mostly result in marginalising Indigenous people and IK in education systems at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. I strongly recommend promoting from the tertiary level, i.e. HE, the creation of school–university partnerships, in which academics and schoolteachers (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) together reflect on and explore ways of approaching policy guidelines through the lens of intercultural education. This entails starting to explore and implement with university students who are studying/training to become teachers, creative and innovative initiatives to support the school system in this way. The principles of PAR are particularly useful here, but this approach is not just for academics in education. All academics irrespective of their field need to participate in and contribute to a system-wide effort, exploring and implementing ways to transform HE inclusively, so that no valuable sources of knowledge, nor their creators or carriers, are excluded.

Initiatives proposed and explored through these partnerships should inform and gradually change daily life practices in the institutions involved, to make the change coordinated, transformative, and sustainable across all three levels of the education system.

Such partnerships can ideally be used to smooth the usually difficult transition for Indigenous students who continue from secondary education to HE. Creative initiatives through partnerships can build both intercultural bridges between education institutions and intercultural pathways within them. In this way the initiatives help to preserve the cultural identities of Indigenous students in their transition to academic life, and while navigating academic waters for their higher degree. When they are part of a broader collaborative effort to promote intercultural HE, these initiatives support both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and the shared interest of society at large.

Questions for discussion

1. If we are called to broaden our world views to be able to work collaboratively in solutions to planet problems, how could Indigenous knowledges that are actually embraced by HE communities affect our cultural identities?
2. Indigenous people are diverse. Can we talk of Indigenous knowledge in the singular?
3. HE has been called to embrace world views that include understandings of knowledge different from the long-dominant scientific perspective that only what can be verified scientifically—seen or proved through hands-on testing or mathematical proof—is knowledge. Recognising other understandings of knowledge, such as Indigenous knowledges and knowledge created through PAR, what are the implications for curriculum development in educational systems worldwide?

Notes

1 This snowed mountain is known in Colombia as Sierra Nevada del Cocuy.
2 While tropical mountain glaciers are melting swiftly worldwide and roughly 99 per cent are in South America, some observers suggest those

in Colombia may melt completely by 2050. https://unboundedworld.com/critically-endangered-colombian-glaciers-face-extinction/

3 Universidad Nacional de Colombia has about 50,000 students and 3,000 academic staff spread over 9 campuses.

4 By the 2018 national census, the Indigenous peoples of Colombia comprise 115 ethnic groups and about 4.4 per cent of Colombia's 48.5 million people, although some estimates put this share closer to 10 per cent. https://www.dane.gov.co/files/investigaciones/boletines/grupos-etnicos/presentacion-grupos-etnicos-2019.pdf

5 The Raizal people are an Afro-Caribbean ethnic group from the Archipelago of San Andres, Providencia and Santa Catalina, located off the Colombian Caribbean coast. They are descendants of enslaved Africans, British emigrants, and Amerindians. According to the 2018 census, they currently number about 25,000.

6 The whites are the *mestizos*, people of Indigenous and mixed European ancestry.

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CHAPTER 6

Systemic Approaches to Transforming the University

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Abstract

This chapter explores some of the problems of contemporary higher education (HE) and discusses how a more participatory perspective on knowledge and meaning-making can inform some of the changes that are needed in the world. It offers a model of inquiry as a way of stimulating and supporting the process of transformation that is needed in HE. It highlights the importance of multi stakeholder participatory processes, to understand the system dynamics that hold the status quo in place, and to change them.

Preamble

I am a 59-year-old research professor who has been based at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) at the University of Sus-

How to cite this book chapter:
Burns, D. (2024). Systemic approaches to transforming the university. In L. Wood & O. Zuber-Skerritt (Eds.), *Shaping the future of higher education: Positive and sustainable frameworks for navigating constant change* (pp. 115–128). Helsinki University Press. https://doi.org/10.33134-HUP-25-6.

sex, in the United Kingdom (UK), for the past 12 years. Prior to this I worked for eight years as a professor at the University of the West of England, and before that I worked as a teacher and researcher at the University of Bristol. So this reflection is rooted in a variety of higher education (HE) contexts.

While my early career centred on citizen participation and decentralisation, in my mid and later career, I have focused on the development of participatory research methodologies, in particular systemic action research, which I see as an evolution of participatory action research. Most of my work has been with people who experience extreme marginalisation, including enslaved persons and bonded labourers, children in the worst forms of child labour, people living with disabilities, and people living in war zones. Methodologically, my interests have centred on how to enact participatory processes at scale while maintaining deep participation. I am also deeply concerned with the importance of understanding how change happens. Many participatory processes bring people together to identify desired changes, yet without an understanding of the systemic and complex nature of change processes, they will often fail to achieve that change, or create changes that are limited to a very localised context or are unsustainable. I work within a tradition of participatory research with a strong emphasis on systems thinking and complexity theory. Unlike some authors in both of these camps, I do not see these as incompatible.

Systems thinking helps us to see some of the complex causal patterns that have structured past outcomes. It cannot predict future outcomes from past patterns, but it offers these as potential pathways that invite inquiry questions for the action researcher. Complexity theory enables us to identify how change happens. Systemic action research has evolved to comprise a multi-staged process that typically takes 18 months to 2 years. The first step involves building trust and relationships among those who are involved, which can take up to three months. The second step, which can also take up to three months, is for peers to gather the evidence of those who are most affected by the issue that has brought them together (evidence that often, but not exclusively,

takes the form of life stories). The third step is to collectively analyse these stories (often, but not exclusively, through a process that causally maps both individual stories and the collectivity of stories). This process seeks to identify the key interrelated issues that are the subject of action research groups. The fourth step is to collect more evidence on the specific issues being explored, and the fifth step is to generate theories of change for action.

The steps that follow from there are to open out the cycles of action research—plan action, take action, evaluate action, re-evaluate, and so on. These steps enable people to not only recognise the complex system dynamics that drive the issues and problems they are looking at, but also identify who needs to be involved in the ongoing inquiry process, since to resolve systemic problems, it is necessary to engage the people across a system who impact it (Burns, 2021). In a HE context, this would mean bringing students, local and other communities, researchers, academic managers, human resources managers, and so on into either multi-stakeholder or parallel stakeholder inquiry processes. I offer an embryonic example of how this can work later in this chapter.

A number of publications have particularly inspired me in the development of my work with systemic action research, the earliest being Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Freire & Ramos, popular edition). Snowden, and the University of Hertfordshire complexity team, have published a body of work on complexity and complex adaptive systems. Midgley's (2000) *Systemic intervention*, and Wadsworth's (2001) *The essential U and I*, both elaborate on how action research can be harnessed to support systemic change. Hoggett's (1992) *Partisans in an uncertain world* and his broader work on the importance of emotions in organisations and change processes have been influential. Gilligan (1982), in *In a different voice*, articulated the notion of an 'ethics of care'. Johnstone's (1979) *Impro: Improvisation and the theatre* explained how to improvise in response to a constantly changing world. The Club of Rome's (1972) *Limits to growth* was significant for me, and one of its authors, Donatella Meadows (1972), was

also a foundational writer on systems thinking. Also influential was E. F. Schumacher's *Small is beautiful (1973)*.

Growth itself is an interesting example of a dynamic system patterning that self-perpetuates. Universities, like most organisations, feel compelled to grow, and like most organisations often lose their heart in this quest. If we are able to understand how to limit growth, we may be able to understand how to positively change society.

Ideas about how a systems approach can bring about positive change in higher education

Here I focus on four main ideas and the actions these can inspire to initiate or support systemic change:

- existential questions,
- research programmes built on participants' knowledge and skills,
- new models of knowledge production based on collaborative and participatory work, and
- action against false news and artificial intelligence.

1. Focus energy on the existential questions, and engage with them in a systemic and action-oriented way

In my view, the great issues of our time are existential questions. How do we regulate and control technological development, in particular artificial intelligence (AI)? How do we take the action necessary to prevent the worst ravages of climate change (it is already too late to prevent major impacts), and what do we need to do to prevent the continuing and increasing threat of nuclear and biological warfare? How do we learn the lessons of the recent COVID-19 pandemic? What would happen if something worse developed? I feel amazed that the wheels of the academy continue to turn as if nothing is going on out there. Yet if we fail to deal with these issues, there will be nothing else to deal with. I have sup-

ported most of a decade's participatory research work on slavery and bonded labour and on worst forms of child labour, but the gains from this sort of work will likely be wiped out entirely by the impact of climate change. Similarly, the work that I and others have done on peacebuilding will quickly unravel as people fight for resources and land, and safe spaces and food, as the effects of climate change really start to hit.

Understanding the hidden complexities and dynamics of these problems is critical, in order to identify the leverage points for changing them. So teaching people to understand the systemic connections between things is perhaps the most important educational task for the next decades.

This research needs to be intrinsically linked to action. Action research posits that we learn as much through doing as through our intellectual analysis of a situation. It is an iterative process that involves taking a step and then viewing the world anew, and each time asking these questions: Are we asking the right questions? Do we have the right people to answer our questions and/or to take action? What have we learned from what we have done? What can we see anew that we could not see before? What new knowledge do we need in order to act further? What methods do we need right now that perhaps we did not need before? This approach is necessary in order to engage with fast-moving complex issues, but it stands in radical opposition to what are usually two key enablers or disablers of research. One is that most institutional research ethics committees require projects to detail in advance key questions or lines of enquiry, action that will be undertaken, and tools or other materials that will be required. The other is that most donors want to know what the results will be before we even know what the most appropriate questions to ask are.

2. Build research programmes around the skills and knowledge of those who live with the issues

One of the things that I find most troublesome about the concept of HE is the implicit assumption that people who have been

through the 'education system' are somehow more intelligent than people who have not. The people who are mostly assumed to have little or no research skills are often the ones who are the best analysts.

I have facilitated large-scale processes with illiterate enslaved persons and bonded labourers, child labourers, people living with disabilities in almost unimaginable poverty, and people living in active conflict zones. What these people generally have in common is the ability to analyse, to see the bigger picture, to understand causal chains and feedback loops, etc. Most marginalised people every day navigate complex risks that most academic researchers will never come close to facing in their whole lives, and they frequently have to make what are life or death decisions. Living like this compels people to develop deep analytical capacity based on both experiential knowledge and reasoning. When I work with professionals and other university-trained researchers, I rarely see this capacity. It takes far longer for them to 'unlearn' the way they deconstruct and atomise knowledge. Of course, this is not universally true, just as it is not universally true that marginalised people are good analysts. But it is true enough to blow away the hierarchical assumptions that pretty much the whole of social science rests upon.

3. Develop new models of knowledge production that incentivise collaborative and participatory work

Peer-reviewed journal articles are an outdated form of knowledge dissemination that needs to be replaced. They represent the few (usually elites) talking to the few. So called 'high impact journals' actually have an incredibly small average readership. Blind peer review is never blind. Any reader can identify the work of well-known writers because of their citations and reference lists, and the context provided in the articles. Busy academics will often review submissions in tiny fragments of time because of everything else they are called on to do. Reviewers have no accountabil-

ity to the writers. There is no critical dialogue. The whole system is constructed around a fiction that few dare to call out.

Collective analysis is of central importance to participatory work. Meaning is always interpreted, and the more people who are implicated in the issues being explored and who can contribute to that meaning-making process, the more robust the analysis will be. This runs against strong currents in social science, which perpetuate the practice of single researchers analysing data that pertains to large numbers of people, and which privilege sole authorship of research. The result of collective analysis should be joint authorship, but researchers facilitating this important work will often not be named or acknowledged at all. This means that as far as the academic system is concerned, their work is invisible.

The phenomenon frequently cited in relation to women and people of colour—they have to work harder and longer in order to be promoted—is also true for participatory researchers. The 'invisible' participatory research they conduct across their full-time career is not acknowledged as 'research' according to the understanding dominant in most universities, so participatory researchers also have to produce a traditional academic output in order to get promoted. They will likely need to work on more than twice the number of publications than those on mainstream academic trajectories will have to work on. Importantly, then, how is this work assessed? Even in the IDS where I work, which has been espousing participatory methods for more than three decades, the promotions committee comprises mostly mainstream academics who require IDS researchers to indicate how many academic journal articles they have produced in order to be considered for promotion.

4. Act against false news and artificial intelligence

Universities need to re-enforce their early mandate to be places that are home to, and cultivators of, creative and critical thinking. It is almost impossible to think critically or work collaboratively if we do not know what is real and what is not, in a world where AI

can be used to fabricate artificial reality in ways that are more or less impossible to detect, and in which reality itself can be erased. Without these anchors to shared reality, democracy can be ever more easily wrenched away by dictatorship. Even more serious is the existential threat that AI poses to humanity. Despite the ease and immediate gratification it appears to offer, AI is extremely dangerous. Far from 'embracing' these technologies, universities should be warning society about actual and potential dangers of AI given its uncertain—possibly destructive—capability, and carefully exploring alternative knowledge models that will benefit society in a sustainable way.

Postscript

In the end, I think two things are critical in the quest for HE to fully embrace a participatory world view in generating knowledge. First, we must continue to model participatory practice and build on the critical mass of practice that shows participatory and learning-based approaches are at least as robust, if not more robust, than mainstream approaches (and they are also more ethical!) (Burns et al., 2021).

Second, we who care about HE need to work together to change the institutional environment. It will not be enough to build change solely around a vision. People seeking to craft positive change in and through institutions will need to understand the complex ways in which long-established system dynamics prevent change. To understand, navigate, and respond effectively to these system dynamics, those who seek to initiate and embed positive change in HE institutions will need to integrate participatory inquiry and action research methods into their own change processes. In other words, it is not enough to promote participatory methods in university research, teaching, and so forth. The university itself needs to build these methods—indeed, the understanding and practice of participation, inclusion, collaboration, critical thinking, democratic process, recognition of multiple sources of knowledge, and

other hallmarks of systemic action research—into its own learning and change processes.

In the practical example I provide in the following section, the identification of common patterns relating to specific themes opened up pathways for action. Institutions need to move from a planning model to this sort of participatory inquiry and action research process as the primary vehicle to drive institutional change. The problem we face is that these sorts of processes take time to establish, and we have little time. Yet the alternative road seems only to lead inexorably toward dictatorship and loss of freedoms, opportunities, and capacities in response to what appear to be impending crises. I believe that modelling and living our vision of the future for HE, as I've outlined here, is the only way to draw the millions needed towards it. An education system that models the values of inclusion, engagement, and active citizenship at least has a chance of seeing these values mirrored in society.

Practical suggestions for consideration, discussion—and action

Rather than summarise what I have discussed above, here I offer an example that clarifies what might be done in HE to bring about positive systemic change. In 2009/2010, I was asked to facilitate a process that might be seen as an embryonic version of what the inquiry processes to identify and seed such positive change could look like. I worked with the National Coordination Centre for Public Engagement, and Heather Squires in particular, on an action research project designed to explore the changes that HE institutions need to make to become more publicly engaged, i.e. with public input in the decision-making process so all participants are aware of the range of associated interests and points of view, to help ensure decisions are widely informed and sustainable. It was quite an experimental process, and reflecting on it I can see both gaps and major flaws. But conceptually it provided a foundation for identifying and thinking about critical issues and how to constructively engage with them. Box 6.1, presenting an excerpt

Box 6.1: Example of suggested pathways for action by multiple stakeholders

The national action research programme convened a series of parallel learning streams. These drew together participants with different organisational relationships to public engagement into a series of small inquiry groups that met between three and six times (depending on the group). As key issues emerged across the groups, facilitators inter-connected them. The facilitators attended all of the group meetings allowing effective integration. Each of the groups had a central starting question around which their inquiry was structured:

1. *Heads of departments* How can we balance the competing demands on staff time to ensure that public engagement is embedded in the university?
2. *Beacons* [When we started this process a small number of educational institutions were designated as Beacons of Public Engagement tasked with modelling different approaches to higher education engagement.] How can an intensive investment in PE projects translate into sustainable PE across the universities?
3. *Vice Chancellors and other senior management* What are the strategic drivers which affect PE and what strategic changes need to be made in order to ensure sustainable public engagement?
4. *Human resources* How do work practices, performance management systems, appraisal, recruitment and promotions systems, etc. need to be changed to support public engagement?
5. *Experienced public engagement academics* What can we learn from our public engagement work about how best to embed public engagement in higher education?
6. *Additional stakeholder input* The sixth strand of the programme involved insights streamed in from other universities and other initiatives. This included a workshop of student volunteers, and a whole organisation learning process initiated within the University of the West of England.

> We made considerable efforts to ensure that each of the groups represented a mix of different types of university. More than 40 Higher Education institutions (HEIs) had participants in at least one of the action research groups. The total number of active group members was approximately 50. ... In July 2010 we carried out a detailed analysis of all of the action research group transcripts identifying a number of key themes from across the streams. These were collated into a set of theme papers providing the basis for a cross stream workshop – with approximately 70 people attending. Participants took the theme papers as the starting point for discussion. They were provided with these in advance, but were also given ten minutes at the start of each session to read (or re-read). The ideas and views contained within the papers were then subjected to scrutiny and further developed. (pp. 4–6).[1]

from the Introduction to the report that Heather and I prepared on this project, explains how the process was constructed (Burns, Squires et al., 2011).

While the process did work with a small number of community organisations that were connected to the University of the West of England, overall the biggest weakness of the process was that it remained largely within the organisations themselves. A stronger version of this process would have run in parallel action research groups of students and of community organisations that have relationships with HE institutions.

All institutional inquiries would differ from each other, but this process elicited some important cross-cutting patterns:

- Reputation and reputational risk. Here the inquirers explored how reputational risk inhibited institutions from taking risks or making radical changes.
- Organisational responsiveness and the need for an approach to engagement that is more emergent than the highly planned

approach to organisation still characteristic of HE institutions. Here the inquirers were interested in how universities could respond to real-time issues. Their systems were seen to inhibit rapid responses.

- Recognition and incentives for change. Here the inquirers were interested in exploring in more detail how, for example, what counted in the promotions and recruitment processes would have to change.
- Equity at departmental level when some are involved in public engagement and others are not; and the organisation and management of public engagement. Here the inquirers wanted to explore how to manage inequities in the workload system, when some people were able to do more engaged work, and others were locked into more traditional work.
- How to make HE spaces and places more conducive to public engagement. Here the inquirers were interested in how to make universities more open and welcoming places that do not intimidate local community members ...
- The opportunities afforded by the impact assessment of the Research Excellence Framework.

Inquiries of this sort could become embedded within the HE system, but they should not be isolated from HE policymakers. Policymakers should be invited into the inquiry groups from where they would learn directly about what is needed and what can be done.

Questions for discussion

1. In what ways can HE be underpinned by a systemic understanding of how things happen and how things can change?
2. Who are the stakeholders who maintain the status quo in HE, and are there new or other stakeholders who can effectively champion change from within and/or from outside the HE system?

Notes

1 The full report can be accessed at https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/sites/default/files/2023-11/action_research_report_0.pdf.

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CHAPTER 7

Mental Health Matters in Higher Education

A Duty of Care

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Abstract

In higher education (HE) institutions with a toxic environment, emotions can be easily triggered, heightened, and often pushed out of control. Crowded spaces, tight schedules, hierarchical bureaucracy, chasing targets, constant changes in technology, processes, and procedures, when coupled with a diverse population, increase the possibility of a toxic culture developing. Conditions like these lead to poor mental health and decreased productivity. It seems staff and students can do little to change the environment in HE institutions. But they can take ownership of their own emotional responses within the environment and positively create a healthier climate in which to work and study, by being agents of change. This requires a shift in the dominant paradigm

How to cite this book chapter:
Waddington, R. (2024). Mental health matters in higher education: A duty of care. In L. Wood & O. Zuber-Skerritt (Eds.), *Shaping the future of higher education: Positive and sustainable frameworks for navigating constant change* (pp. 129–154). Helsinki University Press. https://doi.org/10.33134-HUP-25-7.

towards driving transformation from the bottom up, challenging toxic institutional culture, and improving mental health of staff and students. The new paradigm rests on the premise that people are not means to an end but are the end in themselves. When HE employees and students experience being cared for and developed, instead of being used, they have better mental health and are more productive. The ideas I present in this chapter offer readers the opportunity to reflect on their own practice and the practice of HE institutions generally, in promoting positive mental health in the spirit of care. After all, nourishment of the human mind is surely a core purpose of HE institutions.

Preamble

The very nature of teaching and learning in universities today can easily contribute to stress and anxiety. For many students, the transition from school to higher education (HE) is an emotional experience. So much that is new—location, friends, subjects, teachers—can create tension for students, in addition to meeting assessment deadlines and sitting examinations. Academic staff can also experience tension from multiple sources, including institutionalised pecking orders, subject allocations, workload, expected research outputs, applying for research grants, taking leadership roles, and managing staff, all of which can contribute to stress and anxiety. When stress levels increase, interpersonal relationships tend to sour, and this can increase interpersonal conflict. Working as a human resource (HR) manager in HE in South Africa, I observed October as usually the worst month for staff conflicts and tension between staff and students. By then, staff were physically and emotionally drained as the academic year drew to an end. Staff faced pressures of marking, submitting term marks, completing syllabi, reworking manuals, and planning for the forthcoming year. The soil for tension was fertile.

In this chapter I share insights from my experience working for more than 30 years in various capacities in HE in South Africa, and in recent years in the UK, and I explain the theoretical thinking

that has influenced my practice. I offer insights, suggestions, and approaches that others may find useful for reflecting on their own experience of trying to reduce emotional stress and strengthen mental health while working or studying in HE institutions.

I worked in HE in South Africa from 1985, first as an academic teaching in fields such as ethics, religious studies, philosophy, and psychology of education. I then gained management experience as the Head of a Department, later as Vice Rector, and then as acting Rector of a teacher training college (Taung College of Education) in Taung, Bophuthatswana, a previous homeland in South Africa. Second, when teacher training colleges were merged with technical colleges in 2002, I was appointed HR manager of a mega Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) college with six campuses in the North West province, a position I held for nearly 15 years. During these years in academia, and perhaps especially so given my position in HR management, I experienced considerable conflict that resulted in emotional stress and trauma for me and my colleagues, especially from student unrest and staff discontent resulting in strikes. But through it I gained first-hand experience in understanding how thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are intertwined with our emotional responses.

In 2021 I moved to the United Kingdom (UK), where I now consult with schools and colleges on well-being. I work closely with the UK National Health Service, training in mental health programmes face to face and online. I am also involved in community development, counselling, and volunteering in non-governmental and community-based charity organisations to promote mental health and well-being at grassroots level. In addition, I run my own mental health consultancy, specialising in therapy for post-traumatic stress disorders and other kinds of stress.

Social constructivism, the sociological theory recognising that knowledge is constructed through interaction with others (see, e.g. Berger & Luckmann, 1991; Schunk, 2012), underpins my understanding of the contextual nature of learning and the open-ended, unfolding nature of knowledge generation. Because I have

firm roots in participative, collaborative, and visual arts-based approaches to co-creating knowledge (see, e.g. Huss & Bos, 2022), which itself is entrenched in praxis, i.e. action to change society, this helps to ensure that I instinctively treat people as human beings and not as objects. Learning throughout my years in HE, I have long tried to ensure that in all my work, with individuals or with organisations, the discussion of opposing ideas from practice and theory remains a focal point for knowledge to emerge. I have been influenced particularly by chaos theory (see, e.g. Lorenz, 2001) within the broad framework of systems thinking, and I rely heavily on existentialism to ground my ontology in the values of humanism. Consistent with my belief that we human beings are each responsible for creating purpose or meaning in our own lives, I uphold democracy and human equality, collaboration, and participation, and I practise and advocate for mutual care.

From a Human Resource Development perspective, I have been influenced by Bushe and Marshak's (2015) Dialogic Organisational Development (OD) theory as a valuable model for staff development and organisational change. Rooted in systems thinking, Dialogic OD is a bottom-up approach that rejects using external consultants as experts to drive change, an idea embedded in traditional Diagnostic OD. Organisations are seen as meaning-making networks rather than as living systems that need fixing. Often, conversations that act as catalysts for changing mindsets are not had in the echelons of a senate boardroom, but in the dialogue and interaction of students and staff around a water fountain or from a lowly paid janitor reflecting with colleagues on how best they could be managed. Emerging knowledge and wisdom change mindsets, reduce emotional toxicity, and improve well-being in HE.

The change of mindsets in organisational development most influential in my work is the Care and Growth model of Etsko Schuitema (2022). This model refutes the commonly held principle in management theory that leadership is defined by achieving results through people. Although it may sound counterintuitive to some, by caring for and making people ends in themselves and

not means to an end, positive people development and production outputs are achieved. Caring for and developing staff and students cultivates a positive culture of well-being that supports positive mental health.

Over the past 10 years, my attention in psychology has turned to the importance of how space (location, distance, and direction) and metaphoric language impact our psyche. I immersed myself in the work of Grove and Panzer (1991) and of Lawley and Way (2017) to understand Clean Language and Clean Space concepts, which seek to minimise the influence of the facilitator in therapeutic relationships, and to track symbolic language in spatial relationships between objects. I have used Lucas Derks' work on Mental Space Psychology (MSP) (2018) and on Social Panoramas (2005), along with Clean Language and Clean Space concepts, to form a theoretical platform for my understanding of human relationships and mental health in HE. MSP has been described as a paradigm shift in psychological thinking, as its premise is that space is the primary organising principle of the mind.

In other words, cognitive development begins within space, namely, the womb. When a baby is born, it moves from one space into another unfamiliar space, a foreign environment, which leads the infant to map the world in terms of direction and distance. The cognitive development of mapping the world eventually leads the infant to find their bearings in a space with its own meaning. As the infant develops language, it starts to describe space in 3D terminology using words such as up, down, under, far, near, etc. Mental space is the medium that allows us to function and navigate in and through the world as external space. We project images of people (and objects) into our social panorama (the space around us), so that when we imagine someone, we can project that person in our mind's eye into a particular location in external social space. For example, distant friends whom we hardly think of, we may experience at a distance; they are small, and to the rear. But an angry boss, we may experience and locate up front, face to face, large, close, and breathing down our neck. Moving people from one location in the social panorama to another changes the

emotional impact they exert and the meaning they convey. MSP is useful in coaching teams and in therapy and can be successfully applied in HE to help staff and students deal with negative emotions, poor relationships, stress, and diminished mental health.

Ideas on improving mental health in HE

Based on my work experience and theoretical influences, I offer some ideas that may provide useful guidance in a HE environment marked by rapid change; ever more diversity among staff and students; economic, social, and political challenges; and administrative pressure. The ideas can usefully help to answer this important question: "How can we work effectively and harmoniously in this HE environment while maintaining our own emotional well-being and mental health, as well as that of our colleagues and students?" I agree with many observers that staff and students of HE institutions are impacted negatively by the neoliberal ideology that permeates how HE institutions are managed and run. Strain and stress caused by the competitive management that neoliberal ideology fosters both cultivates and sustains toxic culture (Smyth, 2022). Staff suffer poor mental health, which negatively affects the support they can offer students (Brewster et al., 2022).

I share the concern of many that mental (ill)health is generally on the increase globally. In the United States of America (USA), one in five adults has experienced a mental health problem in their life (Reinert et al., 2022). Statistical data for the UK indicate that one in four people will experience mental health issues in any given year, and one in six adults in any given week (Baker & Kirk-Wade, 2023). In Australia, one in five adults reports a mental illness over the same period (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). That is not to say that mental ill health is so chronic that it lasts for an entire year, but it will be experienced for some length of time within the 12-month period. It may emanate from stress, anger, moodiness, anxiety, depression, bereavement, or addiction, any of which can impact negatively on mental health and impede optimal functioning. Whether this increase in the scale of mental

ill health recorded in statistics is due to more people being diagnosed with mental health issues, to mental health losing its stigma and becoming more openly spoken about, to an increase in environmental triggers, or to some mix of these or other factors, is open to research.

In this chapter, I focus on the poor emotional well-being of staff in HE caused by factors in their work environment, such as toxic work culture, work overload, personal burnout, and stress resulting from technologisation, marketisation, and massification (Brewster et al., 2022). A toxic workplace culture generally features factors such as poor management, physical and psychological abuse, bullying, mobbing, favouritism, exploitation, intimidation, discrimination, harassment, unfair workloads, and the violation of human rights. Workplaces are dysfunctional not just because of leadership styles, but also because of governance through oppressive policies and procedures, as well as the role of subordinates in instigating and sustaining the toxic culture.

A further concern is the rate at which toxicity in HE culture is being reported and documented. Over the past 10 years, concern has grown among staff and students globally about toxic cultures in HE and their impact on mental health and well-being (Morrish, 2019). The neoliberal ideology driving institutional change in HE transforms these institutions into replicas of capitalist business enterprises, with market-related forces dictating management and governance. The neoliberal approach makes HE institutions susceptible to toxic behaviour taking root, since people are made means to financial ends. The Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) in the UK published a report on mental health among HE staff (Morrish & Priaulx, 2020) based on statistical data from 17 universities from 2009/2010 to 2017/2018. A staggering 170 per cent increase in the number of staff accessing counselling signals the significant decline in staff mental health over this period. I am concerned about the negative emotions felt and expressed in toxic HE cultures that lead to poor mental health among people in HE.

Recently, in conversations about mental health in HE with South African and UK academics, I sense there is agreement that—

post-COVID—stress, anxiety, and frustration have increased among students as they struggle to readjust to full-time student life and to meet submission deadlines that require students to attend classes for optimal performance. Teaching staff struggle to keep up with new teaching methods as a result of evolving technology. Junior staff are not always consulted on work allocations, leading to additional stress, strain, and perceived abuse, which, in some instances, result in conflicts among staff. Conflict among students spills over into lecture rooms, and staff are experiencing these conflicts on campus. When academics were asked whether there were HR mechanisms in place to deal with grievances, abuse, and internal conflict, the answer was simply, "Yes, there are." However, I am even more concerned by what they did not say, namely, that the HR policies and procedures are not effective to address staff grievances. Instead, they indicated that staff perceive HR processes and policies as pure tokenism. In other words, HE institutions have HR policies, but in some or perhaps many institutions these policies are only minimally or not at all implemented to address toxicity in HE culture and champion the well-being of staff, students, and others who are affected by this toxic culture.

A report by publishing house Elsevier and UK research company Ipsos MORI (2020), on how leaders in universities were responding to shifts in the HE sector, raised my concerns even further. The report used both qualitative and quantitative methods to solicit data from heads of HE institutions, senior executives, and research service executives across Asia Pacific, Europe, North America, and Brazil. The rest of South America, and Africa, were not included in the research. What struck me about the findings and underlined my concerns is the absence of matters concerning staffing, apart from the drive to attract the best staff and students. The report and its findings make no mention of staff retention, support, and well-being, or of the mental health of staff and students. The report highlights shortages of other resources such as funding, infrastructure, and technology as areas of concern, but makes no mention of the HR component.

This is a major concern for me. I uphold the axiom that an education institution is only as good as the staff and students it recruits, trains, develops, supports, and nurtures. The Elsevier and Ipsos MORI report paints a picture where staff and students are a means to an end. Outputs, targets, deliverables, performance management reviews, and funding are prioritised at the expense of a HE culture that supports well-being and positive mental health of staff and students. The Care and Growth Model of Schuitema that I discuss below highlights the fallacy of this approach and calls for a radical redress of priorities so institutions do not operate from the business mindset that uses people as a means to an end.

These three concerns I identify above—the increase in poor mental health globally, workplace toxicity identified recently in HE institutions, and mere lip service to HR policies and procedures to support human well-being—need to be addressed. Students and staff who are exposed to toxic HE cultures can face stress and anxiety that often leads to depression and mental illness. Some may be resilient and overcome trauma, or they may exit the system for more satisfying workplaces. The majority, however, will have to challenge themselves and the system in order to flourish. Doing nothing about mental health in HE is therefore not an option.

Trauma: The new buzzword

Trauma has become a buzzword in the field of mental health. There is valid concern about the emergence of a victim-acquired personality trait, where virtually everyone claims to be traumatised. This view is often expressed on campuses among students who claim to be victimised, bullied, or unfairly treated by peers and teaching staff, and who are often labelled as belonging to the snowflake generation. The idea that childhood trauma is responsible for all mental health issues has been popularised by many trauma experts such as Gabor Maté (2022), but it disregards that children are extremely resilient and can usually overcome the effects of childhood trauma on their own, without external

intervention. The destigmatising of mental illness, a more open society willing to discuss mental health, and the diagnostic drive to access mental health support have encouraged the word trauma to be used almost to pandemic levels in everyday speech.

Overstating trauma as the root of all mental health problems dilutes the real impact of trauma. However, trauma has increased in many societies. The rise in gender, race, family, and societal violence has led to more diagnoses of acute trauma (once-off), chronic trauma (repeated or sustained, such as abuse), and complex trauma (multiple and varied events over time). Working in HE can cause staff and students to feel traumatised if the institution displays the characteristics of a toxic culture due to the disturbing consequences of embedding a neoliberal agenda. It must be acknowledged that traumatisation may be a result of experiencing trauma directly or merely witnessing a traumatic event, referred to as vicarious trauma.

Trauma is defined in various ways, but the common thread in these definitions is that trauma is an emotional response. Through this lens, when the survival brain, the amygdala, is triggered by external threats (sounds, feelings, sights, tastes, and smells), the hormonal system, including the adrenal glands, release hormones, particularly cortisol, which prepares the body for the fight, flight, freeze, or fawn response.[1] Yet I have a different perspective. I believe trauma is not an event. Rather, it occurs as a subconscious response when a violation of human values is experienced. When a person's values are trampled upon and disregarded, their response is often trauma. When a person feels dehumanised, and the event that caused this contrasts starkly with their values, they lose their sense of dignity and worth. When a person is attacked, or perceives they are attacked, for their integrity and authenticity, they experience being wounded or hurt. Not surprisingly, the English language term 'trauma' derives from the Greek term 'trauma' meaning wound. The emotional impact of being dehumanised, being treated as an object, can produce poor mental health. If the emotional wound is not worked on, the effects may linger indefinitely. Wounds make us sensitive and they need to be soothed;

simply picking at the scabs can be equivalent to re-traumatising the wounded person and prolonging the emotional burden.

Trauma is now more commonly identified as a cause of mental ill health partly as a result of work done in the United States by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (2014), which has made this approach more popular and has inspired legislation to this end for government departments. In the UK, the terms trauma-informed approaches, trauma-informed practice, and trauma-informed care are used interchangeably across education, health, and social care sectors and systems. A trauma-informed approach acknowledges traumatic events, experiences, and effects that accompany people experiencing poor mental health. It aims to ensure that these people are treated and cared for appropriately to avoid re-traumatising them through lack of knowledge, skills, or systems. Hence, 'trauma' is the buzzword in any health setting these days.

Controlling emotions: You have them or they will have you

Understanding emotions is a good place to start in order to understand the decline in mental health in HE. This is because trauma cannot be uncoupled from emotions. Emotions are the communicative process between thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. What a person thinks about a traumatic event (stimulus) evokes an emotional response that is translated into a feeling, which in turn manifests in the body as behaviour. This process takes place because of the mind–body connection. We think with the whole body, as the entire neurological system is at work in trauma. Hence, trauma expert Bessel van der Kolk (2015) emphasises that trauma is locked up in the body through the mind–body connection.

Researchers have constantly tried to define and categorise emotions. William James (1890) identified four basic emotions: love, fear, grief, and rage. Ekman and Friesen (2003), based on facial recognition research, identified six: surprise, fear, disgust,

anger, happiness, and sadness. More recently, using short emotionally evocative videos, Cowan and Keltner (2017) used a statistical inference model to trace emotional responses and categorise them into 27 categories. Emotions tend not to be isolated, but layered or textured by other emotions. In this sense, emotions are experienced subjectively as an array of feelings in response to stimuli. The permeation of the array leads to multiple categories of labelling emotions.

Reframing emotions

Only when we understand that emotions are a language and not a possession can we move away from a categorisation approach into a functional approach when researching emotions. I contend that to experience positive mental health in HE, emotions need to be reframed. We need a new way of approaching what those in HE experience almost daily. Emotions are messages—nothing more, nothing less. Emotions, as messages, are part of the communication process that we use to engage with ourselves and others. We live in two worlds simultaneously: the reality of the inside world, which represents what we are aware of through our senses, and the reality of the external world, which exists apart from us and constitutes our environment. We communicate what we think and feel through our emotions as internal messages—what we say to ourselves. We then express our emotions as external messages through communication with the outside world, observed through our language (verbal and non-verbal), attitudes, and behaviour.

What mindset shift is needed to improve mental health in HE?

If trauma is becoming the common experience of staff and students, it is interwoven into the fabric of emotions as messages. The Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) model would ask a victim of trauma: "What are you thinking, and how does that

make you feel? And when you think that and feel that, what do you do behaviourally?" The process begins with a thought. Students, staff, and management all have thoughts about everyday experiences in HE. Some of those thoughts must be negative to solicit negative emotions that play out in negative behaviour, leading to poor mental health. I contend that these thoughts come from a mindset that asks: "Why am I here in this institution in the first place?" Ultimately, staff and students, when unhappy and experiencing poor mental health, will ask themselves that question.

Schuitema's (2022) model that I mentioned above offers a framework to address mindsets in institutions. Called the Care and Growth Model, it has been tested for trustworthiness and efficacy on four continents, and at its heart lies humanism. In my view, no one has expressed humanism better than Fromm (1961), writing more than 60 years ago in what was then common patriarchal language. I do not support the patriarchal disposition, but otherwise recognise the validity of Fromm's view that humanism is:

> a system centered on man, his integrity, his development, his dignity, his liberty. On the principle that man is not a means to reach this or that end but that he is himself the bearer of his own end. Not only on his capacity for individual action, but also his capacity for participation in history, and on the fact that each man bears within himself humanity as a whole. (p. 147)

The Care and Growth Model's contribution to addressing mental health is through explicitly identifying people—in the case of HE, staff, and students—not as means to an end, but as ends in themselves. When employees or students experience their managers or teachers as people who care and are interested in their growth, the power dynamic between them changes. The key to shifting the mindset and the power dynamic is to change the core question from "What do I take or get?" to "What can I bring or offer?" But with the neoliberal ideology now on firm footing in HE, the

dominant mindset is one of taking, seeking to maximise financial benefit while minimising financial cost.

In typical business-model thinking, business entities want to get as much as possible for as little as possible, so they need to be agile, lean, and able to outperform competitors. In the HE context, universities appear to have applied or adapted this strategic 'business' thinking. To lower costs, universities have reduced staff numbers. To raise income, they seek to expand their 'market share' by increasing the number of fee-paying students, through variously applying technology and increasing the diversity of qualifications students can gain. These moves entail maximising the time, effort, and performance, the so-called productivity, of academic staff, to meet the greater student load. But they also increase the workload for administration staff by creating the need to capture metrics, conduct performance reviews, and carry out other tasks involving data and accountability. These moves to maximise income and minimise expense, and all of the tasks they make necessary, are with a view to ranking the university as highly as possible among all universities, against which they are now competing when marketing their product—academic credentials, in the form of graduation certificates.

But education is not a product, HE is not a business, and HE institutions such as universities and colleges are not companies. Two core understandings about HE—what it is and what it does—have been subverted in the push to embed neoliberalism. HE is not an industry or a market. Publicly funded HE is a public service, to provide HE that through teaching and research benefits not just individual students, but communities, nations, and potentially humankind. As such, these institutions were not formed to compete against each other but to work in concert, for the common good. HE institutions should therefore not be required to maximise their own financial support, effectively by selling academic credentials to students who have effectively bought them through the fees they pay, in the style of a market transaction.

In the contemporary neo-liberalised HE environment, however, the public university has to a considerable extent been

privatised, with the competitive, profit-maximising mindset this entails. A culture of 'take' or 'get' overshadows a culture of 'give' and 'offer'. The emphasis is on delivering ends as if in a competitive commercial arrangement, not on caring and developing people for the common good. This scenario is reciprocated by staff who want to take as much as possible out of the institution, raising conflict between managers and employees. When institutions and staff have a new mindset, moving from understanding work life as what can I get out of my employee or what can I take from my employer to what can I offer and give for mutual benefit, then positive mental health can be cultivated. Staff and students who perceive and experience that the institution is interested in them as people first and foremost, that they are cared for, and that they are being developed, are more likely to be productive and loyal. This mindset is aligned with Corporate Humanistic Responsibility (CHR) principles (Koon & Fujimoto, 2023) that are "rooted in positive psychology, such as promoting employee engagement that encourages employees to bring their whole selves to work and find meaningfulness in being cared for by their organisations" (p. 3).

CHR encourages institutions to adopt a humanistic approach that places staff wellness over institutional performance. I believe this can happen only when the dominant mindset celebrates care and growth, where people are appreciated and treated not as means to an end but as the end in themselves. When people are no longer treated as cogs in a wheel but as individuals, their dignity, self-worth, and self-image improve, resulting in better mental health. Staff and students who are treated as humans are better placed to experience positive emotions. These positive emotions will influence their internal dialogue—what they say to themselves about themselves and others—and how they communicate with colleagues.

Strategies for change: Changing mindsets, reframing emotions, building resilience

How are mindsets changed? Dialogic OD represents a paradigm shift from conventional Diagnostic OD and offers an approach in which all employees, from top to bottom in the organisation, have a voice in influencing policies, procedures, and the manner in which the institution is run on a daily basis. The key to successful Dialogic OD is the creation of safe spaces for conversations to take place. Safe spaces refer to the climate that is created with positions of power suspended. Communication, dialogue, and conversation take place, but rank is unimportant in terms of what is discussed. Positions taken, points of view held and expressed, and the manner or duration of each member's contribution are not curtailed in any way while they have the floor. What matters is that the employees' voices are heard. The only constraint on having a productive critical conversation is failure to uphold the human values of trust, respect, collaboration, equity, justice, and honour. The role of the facilitator is to maintain these values as boundaries that hold the conversation—the content of what is being raised. These spaces are referred to in Dialogic OD as containers.

HE is now dominated by a culture of competitiveness. Output targets drive processes. Awards for academic excellence, published research, and international recognition may be motivating and rewarding, but they can also have a negative impact on those struggling to become recognised in academia but who have not achieved an award. HE institutions can be a very lonely place for those who, by their own choice or less ability, are seen as underachievers. There is nothing wrong with competition per se, but there is a problem when competitors lack emotional intelligence and compassion, take glory in their own grandeur, and celebrate their achievements at the expense of others. The underperformers' emotional feelings, coupled with their low self-image, negatively impact upon their mental health, which in turn perpetuates a vicious cycle of underachievement. Unless there is a culture of caring that supports well-being in the institution, these negative

feelings contribute to a decline in mental health among staff and students.

The traditional HR response to a toxic culture is to ensure that there are remedial HR policies in place, such as protection for whistle-blowers or for those who report grievances and harassment, along with reporting structures that are confidential. HR is often reluctant to intervene directly, especially if the perpetrator is from management. However, for the victim, the need for remedy becomes a matter of concern, as perpetrators will never find themselves guilty of misconduct. In simple terms, a referee cannot be a referee and a player at the same time. Conflict in the workplace is an abuse of power, and the suggested model calls for a levelling of power. Power can be balanced only when there is no pulling of rank or positional lobbying.

In Dialogic OD, these safe spaces function as containers that hold conversations among equals, serving as vehicles where knowledge emerges from the interactions of staff. A facilitator holds the dialogues in tension by acknowledging the worth and value of all participants and ensures that no power play, rank, or inequality interferes with the process. In this respect, the facilitator's role is to contain the dialogue and emotions within the container. It is these containers, where all staff feel safe, protected, and equal, that allow difficult questions, suppressed desires, contentious issues, and strong emotions to become the fertile ground for emergent knowledge as robust and critical conversations take place. These containers are creative spaces to think outside the box, gain common understanding, become meaning-making employees, and bring about generative change in organisations.

HE institutions host a variety of staff (academic and support) and students who follow the dogma embedded in the various disciplines of the institution. When those in leadership and management find it hard to change, it can be a result of their allegiance to their respective paradigms. Working within closed systems limits the ability to be flexible, adaptable, and fluid in addressing the demands of a rapidly changing world. The older the institution, the deeper the traditions, and the more likely management is to

follow tried and tested practices that have made these institutions great. When the tried and tested practices are led and implemented by top management leaders, supported by susceptible followers, and strengthened by conducive environments, victims can be bullied, mobbed, overloaded, and emotionally abused as staff and students, especially if they challenge the status quo.

Containers as safe spaces

The concept of a container refers to both the facilitator and the safe space; anxiety will be felt by the facilitator and participants. Hence, the atmosphere in the space will carry both positive and negative emotional energy. The dialogue is Hegelian, with juxtaposing views, variant personalities, and emotions all contributing to the emergence of something new. It must be anticipated, for example, that when a director is called out by a junior for harassment, tempers will flare. Participants will feel anxiety, and the container must allow for moments of silence. Relaxation and breathing practices can be utilised by the facilitator to calm the emotions. The energy that flows in the safe spaces must be channelled, and energy is strongest at the boundaries, according to systems thinking. The facilitator sets the boundaries by summarising and redirecting the questions being discussed, interjecting with phrases like 'what if' or 'imagine'. The 'what if' and 'imagine' questions, accompanied by metaphors of change, allow participants to tap into their subconscious minds and think differently, outside the box. These facilitation skills help create a safe space and encourage dialogic discussions that lead to mindset changes, thereby reducing toxicity. Change occurs through mindset shifts brought about by self-reflection, prompted by seeing things from someone else's perspective and experiencing their feelings.

Another role of the facilitator in ensuring functional containers is to bring sense and meaning to the activities and conversations by maintaining continuity. The sense of continuity gives all participants a handle on where they are in their dialogue in relation to the past culture and the desired future of wellness. The

positive container relies heavily on the authenticity of the facilitator. An honest, open, safe dialogical space rests on the facilitator being present in the moment, sensing tensions, hurts, despair, and emotions at play for all who speak. Facilitators need to be able to suspend their own judgements and knit together the emerging ideas in a non-directive and non-imposing way so that generative change can take place.

Open Space Technology to find a voice

Dialogic facilitators embrace Open Space Technology as a communicative technique to nurture conversations in a container that allows emergent knowledge to surface and the group to co-create meaning for change. Open Space Technology can be run as a creative café where invitations are sent to all staff affected by the toxicity to address a concern over a cup of coffee. Each participant writes on a sheet of paper an idea related to the problem they want to have addressed. The collected sheets become the agenda for the meeting and are placed randomly on the wall. Each person states what they want addressed and provides reasons and motivations for their ideas.

To accomplish this, those attending the meeting need to adhere to the four principles of Open Space Technology: whoever comes to the meeting is the right person, whatever happens in the dialogue is the only thing that could happen, whenever it starts is the right time, and when it is over, it is over. Time is irrelevant when dialogue is taking place, which underpins the concept that change is generative and not planned. In the context of HE, this is bound to be irksome to many who want structure and time frames to be honoured and not altered.

Rituals to embed change

Once new knowledge that triggers a mindset change emerges within the group, it must be quickly embedded within the department or institution, depending on the scale of the required

change. When a common agreement is reached on what needs to be done, by whom, and when, anchoring it in the mindset of all employees is crucial. One way to accomplish this is through developing rituals. Rituals can be created through visual poster campaigns, using colours, symbols, signs, songs, catchphrases, slogans, daily e-mails, and incorporating a slogan into daily conversations. These rituals reinforce beliefs and feelings by reminding employees of the ongoing change. An effective way to use rituals is by incorporating a tagline in greetings. The message that emerges from the discussions should permeate the entire ethos of the institution and become a part of daily communication until the thoughts and plans are subconsciously put into action. For example, I implemented a ritual in a college where the middle managers (of whom I was one) named their action learning set 'Curatio – we care'. The phrase 'we care' was used in all e-mails, greetings, and posters, and embroidered on golf shirts. The message was clear to all: as middle managers, 'we care', and we were open to being held accountable to our slogan.

Building resilience through identity

A useful technique I have adapted from Derks' Social Panorama (2005) and Mental Space Psychology (2018) uses the concept of the Sovereign Self in identifying problems that underpin many mental health issues such as anger, anxiety, and depression. This technique requires the people participating to locate a personification of themselves associated with anger or anxiety (that they themselves have identified) and to calibrate this personification in terms of size, direction of gaze, elevation, and colour. The participants are then asked to imagine a positive resourceful image of themselves, in a different place, where they do not display anger or anxiety. They imagine the positive self-image having the ability to transfer knowledge, skills, and resources to the negative self-image. They then imagine a giant image of themselves directly in front of them, within a metre, so they can start to associate with this image, their new Sovereign Self. They can now move

the original negative image, which has received the resources from the positive image, to the place of the Sovereign self, which absorbs that image.

By evoking their imagination, participants make the image of their Sovereign Self into a magical figure like a huge statue, gold and glistening with sunrays. Relocating the problem self with its learnt new resources into the Sovereign Self allows the transferred resources to become solidified in the new identity, leaving the participants free of anger or anxiety, in control, and able to cope with the problem self. This technique enables participants to form a new identity. By learning how to facilitate this belief, participants can use it on themselves and to help colleagues do likewise. This way the technique builds resilience among staff who have experienced poor mental health through their HE employment.

Postscript

In HE institutions, like in any other institutions, good mental health of those involved rests on individual staff looking after not just their own well-being but also the well-being of peers. They do so by caring for and developing one another, not as means to an end, but as human beings just as they are themselves. Acknowledging this, the institutions must create the culture, policies, and governance framework that put employees first, recognising that sustaining satisfied staff who are willing and able to work hard is essential for achieving strong institutional performance. When a culture of caring is in place right across a HE institution, conversations will be less confronting, emotions will lift, mental health among staff and students will improve, and the toxicity experienced by many in HE institutions will dissipate. Most significantly, people will cooperate with each other, the positive consequences of which are far and deep. Indeed, these positive consequences are likely to stretch well beyond the university in space and in time, which is the very purpose of HE for the common good of society.

Across society, including in all institutions, mental health is vital. Yet it has a particular imperative in HE these days. As I

have explained in this chapter, staff in HE institutions can find it extremely difficult to perform the work asked of them while the embedding of a neoliberal agenda disrupts so much of the long-standing earlier approach to HE, which did not depend at all turns on market forces, numbers, and relentless competition among individuals, institutions, and so forth. Here I have argued for a different approach with new techniques and especially with a mindset of what it means to be human in HE. It is only with a duty of care, with understanding that all lives matter and that mental health is everyone's business, that HE can best engage in teaching and research to serve the interests of all. And that is surely where the future of HE lies.

Suggestions for consideration, discussion—and action

At an institutional level, HR departments generally engage in OD practices. However, I believe department managers should be trained in using Dialogical OD approaches to deal with matters of concern in their own departments and to assist in organisational change. Being proactive and immediately addressing matters that are perceived as traumatic within a toxic culture removes lag time in policy implementation and development. Driving OD from the bottom up removes the criticism that only lip service is paid to HR policies and procedures when dealing with toxicity. Dialogic OD's strategies using Open Space Technology, having containers as Safe Spaces, and facilitating critical crucial conversations, can all facilitate change and can be called for by any staff member feeling overwhelmed, victimised, or experiencing mental health issues. Line managers attuned to staff and student mental health needs have an obligation to take action as a duty of care and can implement Dialogic OD processes.

Departments in HR concentrate on closing skills gaps based on their training analysis. However, to improve poor mental health and change mindsets, they need to incorporate soft skill training. By that, I mean they need to concentrate on supporting staff by

offering training that impacts individual well-being and the culture of the institution. CHR emphasises the need to concentrate not only on job skills but also on humanism to promote training and development that impacts on being human at work, including developing staff well-being (Koon & Fujimoto, 2022). Traditionally, well-being has been linked not to training, but to events such as excursions, team-building exercises, and outdoor activities for staff. The impact of such events is limited, often because of poor attendance, and poor weather does not offer a return on investment for HR departments. Training programmes on Mindfulness, Breath Work, Conflict Resolution, Emotion State Management, and Social Panorama are more beneficial in helping staff to improve their mental health.

At an individual level, staff and students must experience their worth as humans. Staff mindsets can be changed, but only when staff feel and experience that they are cared for and that the institution is investing in their individual growth, such as can be achieved through a Care and Growth approach. All staff and students should be cared for across the board, horizontally and vertically, within the HE institution. After all, in a change model, all participants are activists, all are held accountable, and all understand their role as catalysts for change. Change is the responsibility of all, with individuals collectively seeking and contributing to the common good.

Questions for discussion

1. How can HE institutions be held accountable for the well-being of staff at a department, faculty, and institutional level without external litigation?
2. Which human rights values could positively contribute to a flourishing work climate in HE, and (a) how could they be embedded in the mindset of staff; (b) how and why could they be helpful; and (c) how could they make HE institutions more agile and adaptable to achieve positive change?

3. How might victim mentality due to trauma, betrayal, and co-dependence from their past aggravate negative emotions in the present life of staff and students in HE, and how can these past-traumatised people be distinguished from those actually suffering from stress, burnout, abuse, bullying, and/or victimisation in the present?

Notes

1 'Fawn' here indicates an attempt to please the source of threat and avoid conflict.

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CHAPTER 8

Shaping Socially Responsible Higher Education Through Knowledge Democratisation[1]

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Abstract

Beginning with early influences, I share some background on my 60+ years of engagement with the world of higher education (HE). Sharing a world view deeply critical of the contemporary domination of global capitalism, I suggest that knowledge activism, knowledge democracy, and questions of knowledge equity are key to the radical reinvention of HE that is needed. I go on to outline principles of socially responsible HE, closing with a message of the urgency of our times.

Preamble

I currently hold a UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research (CBR) and Social Responsibility (SR) in Higher Education (HE),

How to cite this book chapter:
Hall, B. (2024). Shaping socially responsible higher education through knowledge democratisation. In L. Wood & O. Zuber-Skerritt (Eds.), *Shaping the future of higher education: Positive and sustainable frameworks for navigating constant change* (pp. 155–172). Helsinki University Press. https://doi.org/10.33134-HUP-25-8.

a privilege I share with Dr Rajesh Tandon, founding President of the Society for Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), New Delhi, India. I am a Professor Emeritus from the Universities of Toronto and Victoria in Canada. I am an Associate in the Centre for Global Studies at the University of Victoria and an Adjunct Professor in the Faculties of Education and Human and Social Development.

I began my HE career with the Institute of Adult Education at the University of Dar es Salaam in 1970. I was appointed as a research fellow and taught in the Diploma in Adult Education programme offered by the Institute and the University of Dar es Salaam. Following my years in Tanzania, I joined the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE) based in Toronto, Canada. I began as a Research Officer in 1975 and in 1979 was appointed Secretary-General. The ICAE is an international non-governmental organisation with United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) and UNESCO status supporting the global movement of adult learning and transformation.

In 1991, I joined the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto as a Professor and later as the Chair of the Department of Adult Education and Community Development. I worked building a diverse faculty in the field of adult education until 2001 when I took up the position as Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Victoria in British Colombia. I held the position of Dean of Education until 2006 when I became the founding Director of the Office of Community-Based Research, the first such structure for community–university research partnerships in English-speaking Canada.

My world views

I have been influenced by a variety of experiences, engagements in theory, and practical efforts to create transformative spaces for change. My world view continues to deepen and grow every day as I am exposed to new ideas and thoughts. My world view is not static or contained within a single box. I am informed by an awareness of the negative impact of the contemporary neoliberal

economic system on virtually all the peoples of the world and on the earth itself. Savage capitalism reinforces patriarchy, homophobia, racism, threats to our biosphere, and the silencing of the knowledges of the excluded. I was first exposed to what we now call post-colonial perspectives during my period as a student at the University of Nigeria in 1964. It was there that I learned that the dominant academic disciplinary structures of that time were Eurocentric and exclusionary of African intellectual thought, and were in fact contributory to epistemicide, the killing of community-based experiential knowledge, Indigenous knowledge, knowledges of the Global South.

I subsequently spent two years teaching history at the Government Secondary School in Katsina, Northern Nigeria, where I learned of the history of the ancient Islamic universities in Timbuktu, Kano, and elsewhere. I studied for my PhD at the University of California in Los Angeles, in the late 1960s. As a student activist, I learned of the power of collective action, alliances between students and workers, and the nature of solidarity with post-colonial, gender justice, and Indigenous sovereignty movements around the world. My awareness of the construction of anti-black racism was informed by lectures from a young African American activist scholar, Angela Davis (for more on her life and work, see Davis, 2022).

By August 1970, I joined the Institute of Adult Education at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania as a Research Officer. Mwalimu Julius K Nyerere was the founding President of Tanzania and had been the Independence leader during the 1960s. Unusually for a political figure, he was an intellectual who believed that as education had been used to enchain colonial Tanzanians, education could also be used to liberate the Tanzanian people. He was seeking to create a nation based on principles of *Ujamaa*, sometimes referred to as African socialism. Importantly for myself as a young person wanting to see my work contributing to a better world, he believed in the transformative power of adult education (see Masabo, 2023). The year 1970 was named *Mwaka ya Elimu ya Watu Wazima* or Adult Education year, when the entire coun-

try was mobilised to learn to build a new Tanzania based on the experiential knowledge of ordinary women and men who were making the day-to-day decisions about their lives. I completed my PhD while in Tanzania on the contribution of adult education to the development of socialism in Tanzania.

Since 2001, I have been living and working on the territory of the Lekwungen-speaking peoples, the Esquimalt, Songhees, and W̱SÁNEĆ First Nations in the city of Victoria, British Colombia. Since relocating to British Colombia, I have been deeply influenced by the world views and ways of knowing of the First Nations peoples with whom I have had an opportunity to learn. I appointed the first Indigenous scholar to the Faculty of Education during my period as Dean of Education and have supported many efforts for Indigenisation of the curriculum, the teaching staff, student enrolments, and more.

My ideas on shaping socially responsible higher education

Influenced by my early experiences, a world view that calls upon us to hasten the death of a dying modernity/coloniality, and a desire to support the emergence of newer HE structures and paradigms, I have found the discourse of social responsibility to be helpful. Much recent debate about HE has focused upon rankings, quality, financing, and student mobility. Larger questions about the social relevance of HE have, however, taken on new urgency. The COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, the calls for decolonisation, the persistence of gender violence, and the rise of authoritarian nationalism have given rise to a new era of uncertainty and perhaps to an opportunity for what some have called a great transition or a civilisational shift to a newly imagined world (Hall & Tandon, 2021). We have reached a point where we have a limited capacity to understand the way forward but must have an unlimited capacity of caring for each other and the planet within which we are but one small part.

The social responsibility of higher education was chosen as the opening paragraph of the Conference Communique of the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) in 2009. Specifically, the communique notes, "Higher Education as a public good is the responsibility of all stakeholders, especially governments" (UNESCO, 2009, p. 1). It goes on to note:

> Faced with the complexity of current and future global challenges, higher education has the *social responsibility* to advance our understanding of multifaceted issues, which involve social, economic, scientific and cultural dimensions and our ability to respond to them. It should lead society in generating global knowledge to address global challenges, inter alia, food security, climate change, water management, intercultural dialogue, renewable energy and public health. (p. 3)

The 6th World Higher Education report on a socially responsible university by the Global University Network for Innovation (Grau et al., 2018) argues:

> Social responsibility emerges as the need to reconsider the social relevance of universities in light of the encounter of the local with the global, regarding priorities, demands, impacts and knowledge needs in the context of globalization. The competitiveness of nations – as the only way to achieve progress – should be balanced with inclusive social development and sustainability of the entire global population. (p. 38)

Rajesh Tandon and I have built a foundation of our thinking and practice related to HE over a period of 45 years. Our UNESCO Chair provided us with an organisational framework for the theoretical and practical discourse that we have been engaged in since the 1970s (Hall et al., 2013, 2015, 2017a, 2017b; Tandon & Hall et al., 2016; Tandon & Singh et al., 2016; Tandon, 2017). As we have followed our mandate to build research capacity in the fields of community-based research and social responsibility in HE in the global South and the excluded North, we have found ourselves in conversations, in conferences, in research projects and networks

in all parts of the world where the questions are being asked by academics, HE leaders, and policymakers in the global South: How should universities respond to present circumstances? What are the changing roles of the university today? Is the university contributing to our global crises or does it offer stories of hope?.

In recent years we have seen an extraordinary growth in policies, critiques, practices, theories, and networks that have added significantly to a depth of understanding, identification of challenges, and new architectures of knowledge in response to the calls for social responsibility. The creation of our UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education, one direct outcome of the UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE), is an example. We have seen impressive work being done through national and global HE networks and organisations, such as the Association of Indian Universities, the Association of Commonwealth Universities, the Asia Pacific University Community Engagement Network, the International Association of Universities, the National Coordinating Council for Public Engagement in Higher Education, the Global University Network for Innovation (GUNi), the Living Knowledge Network, the PASCAL Global Observatory, and the Talloires Network.

The call to social responsibility has been elaborated in many parts of the world. Anamika Srivastava notes in the Raj Kumar (2018) study *The future of Indian universities* that "social responsibility is universities' prime responsibility which should get manifested not only in their core activities but also in their governance structure and institutional environment" (p. 329). A few years earlier in a submission to the Rae Commission, Ontario's postsecondary review, it was noted, "the social contract with universities is formulated over time and shaped by history … The social contract requires continuous reflection and dialogue among the university and society as each era renews the social contract according to its needs" (Rae, 2005, p. 37). It reminds us of the 1972 report on Creating the African University, which noted that "the truly African University must be one that draws its inspiration from

its environment: Not a transplanted tree, but one growing from a seed that is planted and nurtured in the African soil" (Yesufu, 1973, p. 33). Ron Barnett, in his book on the 'ecological university' (Barnett, 2018), notes that the university is now back 'in' society and that if once the phrase 'the ivory tower' had any legitimacy, now the phrase has no prospect of being a serious depiction of the academy's situation. And in his recent book on HE in a globalising world, Peter Mayo (2019) comments:

> There has been a general groundswell of reactions against the neo liberalisation of universities in many parts of the world, a reaction where people cling to the idea of knowledge and learning as a public and not a commodified good. (p. 11)

This move has foregrounded the need for public engagement by HE.

Engagement

The concepts of engagement, public engagement, community–university engagement, engaged teaching, and community-engaged learning cover another wide range of responses to the call for social responsibility in HE. Universities will need to implant engagement into their culture, mores, policymaking, and daily life. What historically has been called the 'third mission' of the university, after teaching and research as the first and second missions, is being replaced by an understanding of engagement that is called upon to be all-informing. Ahmed C. Bawa (2007), Chief Executive of Universities South Africa, elaborated:

> University mandates throughout the world have statements that relate to community-based engagement in some form or other. It is important to understand why it is that this has happened, what forms these take, what effects they have on universities, what effects they have on communities with which they are involved, what effects these have on the students who are involved, how they relate to teaching, learning and research, and how they are

> organised internally in terms of the structures and governance of universities. (p. 55)

The 2014 GUNi book, *Knowledge, engagement and higher education: Contributing to social change*, has provided the most extensive global compendium on the discourses of engagement. This book was the GUNi 5th World Report on Higher Education. With reports from 70 countries and over 100 contributors, it is the benchmark by which the engagement 'movement' can be judged at a global level.

> The report offers us elements of a vision for a renewed and socially responsible relationship between higher education, knowledge and society … The Report calls upon policy-makers and leaders of HEIs [higher education institutions] around the world to rethink the social responsibilities of higher education in being a part of society's exploration of moving towards a more just, equitable and sustainable planet. (p. xxxi)

Sophie Duncan and Paul Manners have led the UK National Coordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) in Higher Education[2] since its inception in 2008. They note that "principles of engagement capture the imagination and commitment of many of those working in HE … But this only takes us so far. Shifts in funding priorities … provide an equally important driver in the system" (GUNi, 2014, p. 75). Engagement should go hand in hand with the decolonisation of HE.

Decolonisation of higher education and knowledge

Social responsibility calls upon us to examine and critique the ways of knowing that have dominated the majority of the world's HE institutions. That is a body of knowledge which is sometimes referred to as the Western canon, or the Eurocentric body of knowledge. The discourses of decolonisation and knowledge

democracy have arisen as spaces to talk about the role of knowledge discourses in general.

Dzul Razak, a Malaysian HE leader, says it this way:

> For the sake of argument, we postulate that the present state of education is W.E.I.R.D., Westernised, Economic-centric, Industry-led, Reputation-obsessed and Dehumanising. I think we need to remap the world, we need to remap our minds, we need to redraw our mindset and set new rules and standards for the new world to come … Western Civilisation is a metaphysical construct, a conceit, an identity game, an intellectual invention designed to promote the interest of its inventors. If one wanted to be mischievous, one could say it was neither Western nor civilised. (Razak et al., 2018, p. 20)

The National Inuit Strategy on Research produced by the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami illustrates the story in this way:

> The relationship between Inuit and the research community is replete with examples of exploitation and racism. Research has largely functioned as a tool of colonialism, with the earliest scientific forays into Inuit Nunangat serving as precursors for the expansion of Canadian sovereignty and the dehumanization of Inuit. Early approaches to the conduct of research in Inuit Nunangat cast Inuit as either objects of study or bystanders. This legacy has had lasting impact on Inuit and it continues to be reflected in current approaches to research governance, funding, policies, and practices. (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2018, p. 5)

This leads to the need to set some principles for the emergence of socially responsible education.

Principles of socially responsible higher education

Rajesh Tandon and I have elaborated a number of principles of socially responsible HE in our book, *Socially responsible higher education: International perspectives on knowledge democracy*

(Hall & Tandon, 2021). These are now discussed in the following sections.

Recognition of diversities of knowledge systems and epistemologies

Production, dissemination, teaching, and promotion of knowledge are at the core of HE. Each HE institution performs its knowledge functions in its own unique way, although national standards, international templates, and disciplinary domains tend to tightly specify what is meant by knowledge, knowledge production, and knowledge mobilisation. Central to the discourse on social responsibility of HE institutions is the recognition, appreciation, and valuing of diversity of knowledges, their underlying epistemologies (ways of knowing) and knowledge cultures (norms, values, principles). Historically, the HE community has defined academic knowledge as the only valid, scientific knowledge. Acknowledgement of multiple sites and forms of knowledge is now beginning to be recognised (Hall & Tandon, 2017b). Respect for such diversity has been reinforced by several chapters in this collection, from a wide diversity of contexts and experiences.

Coherence and integration of teaching, research, and service missions

Institutional design, faculty role allocations, and resourcing patterns of HE institutions since the Second World War resulted in the *fragmentation* of functions and structures serving the three core missions of a university—teaching, research, and service. This fragmentation left them disconnected from each other. Some departments and centres focus on research, some faculty (mostly junior or graduate students) are assigned teaching responsibilities, and public engagement tasks linked to service to society are 'outsourced' to a partner or performed through extension depart-

ments. Teaching generally happens in classrooms, research in labs, and service over weekends or during holidays.

Socially responsible HE demonstrates the *integrated* nature of teaching, research, and service, through actual practice. Students make meaningful contributions to societal needs while learning and gaining credits for this. Faculty members are able to integrate enquiry while teaching students in the real world. Students gain satisfaction that their competencies are helping society. In the process, they improve their learning through contextual theorising. Thinking and doing are not artificially separated, but carry on simultaneously. Those assigned the task of public engagement and service to society are not ghettoised in a corner or basement or faculty or discipline. Social workers alone need not be assigned such tasks; physicists too can be 'engaged' with society around them.

Contextually responsive, locally rooted, place-based, and linguistic plurality

An important facet of the social responsibility of HE is its contextual responsiveness. All institutions derive meaning in a contextually responsive manner. Institutional culture is deeply influenced by local culture, even if it is designed to be insular. For most responsiveness, context matters. In HE institutions, what is taught, what is researched, and what is served derive purpose from being responsive to the context. A university located in a mountain region should be teaching geography and hydrology differently from one located near the ocean. Management education in a country with two-thirds of its workforce in small businesses should be undertaking research and teaching programmes predominantly covering small business ecosystems. Several chapters in this collection bring out nuances of HE with such a contextually responsive nature.

Socially inclusive—seeking diversity of students and academics

Another key principle of socially responsible HE is the nature of inclusion it seeks to value and promote. Deviating from the historical role of university as 'producer' of society's elites, a contemporary socially responsible system of HE makes special efforts to embrace, value, and facilitate diversity of perspectives, communities of experiences as reflected in the student body, teaching and research staff, and societal engagement so promoted. Recognition of diversity and social inclusion in HE is not merely an instrumental arrangement; social inclusion of diversity is acknowledged as providing impetus to responsible teaching and research. Several chapters in this collection have presented both theoretical and empirical materials in support of such a renewed and inclusive meaning of social responsibility.

Pluriversalism replacing universalism

A significant aspect of a framework of social responsibility of HE is recognition, appreciation, and valuing of the pluriversal character of teaching, research, and service. The word 'university' seems, however, intended to place an emphasis on the universal nature of curriculum, teaching, research, and faculties. The emphasis on *universal* tends to make HE homogeneous in concepts and theories, underlying world views, epistemologies and knowledge, disciplines and structures of admission, certification, graduation, and accreditation.

These tendencies towards the 'universal' nature of HE have given rise to international comparisons. Various forms of national and international ranking systems have been created to measure performance of HE institutions. Rankings are imposing further homogeneity, which is neither existing, nor feasible, least of all desirable. Not only do rankings tend to attempt false comparisons, the metrics are biased in favour of Western knowledge systems, European institutional designs, and American models of quality

benchmarks like publications in English-language journals, intellectually and materially controlled through a small domain elite located in such elite institutions.

Higher education for the public good

In order to understand and encourage use of this framework of social responsibility of HE, it is important to return to the basic question: what is the purpose of HE in society? If the answer to that question is to promote personal fulfilment, human capital and talent development, and preparation and supply for global labour market, and to produce research and innovation to fuel a knowledge economy, then this framework will not be very appropriate. It is this very neoliberal commercialisation of HE systems around the world that propelled and justified rankings, gradings, and resultant homogenisation, one-size-must-fit-all!

How far will this commercial knowledge economy model travel? The COVID-19 pandemic has shaken its roots. International student mobility, and resultant recruitment of fancy-fees-paying international students, are unlikely to privilege universities of North America, Europe, and Australia in the future. Globalisation in its current form is already shaken. Preparation of knowledge solutions and talent for local economy and society is likely to be the 'new normal'. The present 'scientific' paradigm of instrumental rationality treated ecological contexts as 'unlimited resources to be exploited forever'. The colonial project deliberately 'killed' local, Indigenous, and diverse knowledge systems and epistemologies. That journey of epistemicide is now haunting humanity, and COVID-19 is an immanent manifestation of this phenomenon.

It is time that all societies begin to 'reclaim' the public purposes of HE. It is important to 're-set' knowledge within a public knowledge common, where respectful and transparent sharing of academic and non-academic knowledge happens—where knowledge plays a transformative and active role for the benefit of the public good. It is time that teaching/learning, research/knowledge,

and service to society are aligned to a common goal of well-being of all people rather than to a neoliberal world view that humankind comprises individuals who must compete against each other and in so doing sustain the domination of global capitalism by an inordinately wealthy few. In this 'refresh' lies the seed for reimagining socially responsible HE locally and globally.

Postscript: The Knowledge for Change (K4C) Global Consortium on Community-Based Participatory Research

Our UNESCO Chair has supported the development of a decolonial transformative HE consortium designed to train thousands of young community and university researchers. The Knowledge for Change (K4C) Consortium is a concrete example of what can be done to transform HE and contribute to the attainment of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Based on five years of state-of-the-art research, the K4C Consortium responds to the question of how to create economically viable and sustainable structures in the global South and the 'excluded' North for building research capacity in community-based participatory research. The K4C strategy that has emerged supports the creation of K4C hubs as formal partnerships between universities and community or practitioner organisations. These partnerships emphasise training by doing community-based participatory research (CBPR) linked to the SDGs, with an emphasis on climate justice. The K4C model builds capacities through a carefully crafted 21-week Mentor Training Programme (MTP). Academics from HE institutions and practitioners from civil society organisations are trained as mentors, who go on to become champions and carry the socially responsible research agenda forward at the level of the university. On completing the MTP, the mentors are expected to design and launch a locally contextualised course in CBPR. From 2017 to 2022, this low-cost, high-impact model has trained 145 mentors (in 8 cohorts), who have gone on to create 24 K4C Hubs in Burkina Faso, Cuba, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy,

Malaysia, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, and Canada. We welcome readers' interest in the work of the K4C Consortium and in a conversation about creating new K4C Hubs.[3]

In a recent conversation that I had with some colleagues planning a panel on the future of HE in Canada, one of my friends expressed her view that the policy conversations over the past 10 to 15 years have been calling on HE to negotiate a new social contract with society. But she went on to say that the majority of conversations amongst HE leaders is about falling enrolments. I have had similar experiences. I have been fortunate to have been involved over recent years in many remarkable discussions about imagining a new role for HE. But I agree with my colleague that most of the conversations with senior HE leaders are about day-to-day issues that are not of a visionary nature at all. HE leaders are most often taken up with issues of enrolments, partnerships with the market sector, and attracting higher amounts of research funding.

We are living in a time of transitions globally. The earth itself is speaking to us. The failure of market structures to address issues of health, housing, food security, education, sustainability, and reconciliation with the histories of slavery and colonial conquest is clear. Modernity itself is in shambles. Those of us in HE are in a key position to first imagine, then act collaboratively, in ways that are socially and ecologically responsible and that prepare young people for a dramatically different, more just and fairer world.

Practical suggestions for consideration, discussion—and action

There are many roads to transforming HE. Each one of us as students, as community knowledge workers, as academics, as movement activists, as researchers, as leaders in HE, as policymakers, as funders, as authors can contribute to transforming HE. As students we can choose what to read. We can choose new ideas that give us insights into the kind of world we want. We can write papers for courses on our challenging new ideas. As academic staff

we can radically transform the course readings we offer to our students. Can we destroy once and for all the reading list made up entirely of white male European or North American scholars? As HE leaders, we can support recruitment of diverse students and teachers. We can support the creation of structures for facilitating community-engaged research. Authors, such as those in this book, can speak out about the failings of our current HE and express ideas of a better way forward. Above all, we can engage in the nourishment of a radical imagination. We cannot be effective in bringing about the change we deeply need without being able to imagine what a new and radically transformed HE world would look like. We must move beyond the predominant expression of academic work—the spirit of critique—to the more powerful and needed spirit of creation.

Questions for discussion

1. To what extent do the strategic plans and vision statements of your university address the challenges of university social responsibility?
2. How are the questions about decolonising knowledge being discussed and acted upon in your university?
3. How does your academic unit actively support collaboration amongst academic staff, students, administrative staff, and community partners over competition?
4. Where do you find personal support for transformative thinking about HE?
5. Which networks are you aware of in your region that support institutional change in the directions introduced in this chapter?

Recommended reading

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Notes

1 This chapter builds on various written works that Rajesh Tandon and I have published under Creative Commons licences since 2012, under the aegis of our UNESCO Chair in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility. Given the theme of this book, I have drawn mostly, with the approval of my co-author, on material from our book: Hall, B., & Tandon, R., (Eds.). (2021). *Socially responsible higher education: International perspectives on knowledge democracy*, Brill. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004459076. Reproduced with permission from Brill.
2 See https://www.publicengagement.ac.uk/.
3 See https://www.unescochair-cbrsr.org/k4c-2/.

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CHAPTER 9

Constructing an Artificial-Intelligence Higher Education Environment

Guidelines for the Future[1]

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Abstract

The ongoing advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) presents both significant opportunities and challenges for higher education (HE) and for HE institutions. In this chapter, we adopt a constructivist perspective to explore the implications of integrating AI in research, teaching, and learning, with a focus on fostering inclusion and accessibility within the HE environment. We begin

How to cite this book chapter:
Marais, E., Marais-Botha, R. & Coertzen, F. (2024). Constructing an artificial-intelligence higher education environment: Guidelines for the future. In L. Wood & O. Zuber-Skerritt (Eds.), *Shaping the future of higher education: Positive and sustainable frameworks for navigating constant change* (pp. 173–192). Helsinki University Press. https://doi.org/10.33134-HUP-25-9.

by examining the constructivist world view as a theoretical foundation for understanding the role of AI in facilitating knowledge construction and active participatory learning experiences. Next, we address concerns related to the ethical, social, and pedagogical aspects of AI implementation in HE, such as privacy, equity, and the potential for bias in AI algorithms. We then discuss the transformative potential of AI in HE, and its capacity to personalise learning experiences, enhance teaching effectiveness, and improve research methods. To guide the responsible integration of AI in HE, we propose specific actions for research, as well as for teaching and learning. By embracing AI integration with caution, HE institutions can maximise the potential of AI to foster an inclusive, engaging, and transformative learning environment as we move into a constantly changing future.

Preamble

As lecturers and young academics in a Faculty of Education at a high-ranked university in South Africa, we play an important role in helping to shape the education and future of our students, and by implication, future teachers. Our roles can be divided into three main areas: teaching, research, and community service within the South African context. Our primary responsibility as lecturers is to teach future teachers. We design and deliver lectures, modules, and practical sessions, and assess student work. We have, through our teaching, an opportunity to inspire and motivate students, and we seek to provide them with the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in the field of education. As academics, we are also expected to engage in research and scholarship. This involves conducting original research, publishing research articles and book chapters, and presenting at conferences. Our research can help to advance knowledge in our field, and it also influences our evolving teaching practices and pedagogies.

We also engage in service-learning projects at our institution and in the community. We participate in outreach activities, as well as in service-learning projects that promote the quality of

education in the communities. We aim to empower teachers to improve their own teaching, and by implication, positively influence the learning experience of learners in our community. We also have some influence on the curriculum and pedagogy within our Department of Language for Education, where our focus is on language education and integrating technology not only at the tertiary level but also in schools.

In today's technologically advanced world, the significance of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education (HE) cannot be overstated. AI has the potential to revolutionise HE by providing personalised, adaptive learning experiences tailored to individual learners' needs, while supporting academic staff with grading and administrative duties, thus allowing them to have more time to focus on lesson plans, student support, and research projects (Alam, 2021; Reis et al., 2019).

AI through our looking glass: A constructivist viewpoint

ChatGPT, an AI-powered language model, was launched in November 2022 (OpenAI, 2022). By then we were familiar with AI and its capabilities, and we had started to delve into both its implications for HE and how as academics we might use it within our context. Our curiosity and interest have steered us on a road of discovery, experimentation, and questioning. On this road (in mid 2023), we are viewing AI from a constructivist viewpoint, as it emphasises the active and dynamic nature of learning, and the importance of learners in constructing their own knowledge (Mcleod, 2022; Phillips, 1995).

Tegmark (2018) states that, given the interdisciplinary nature of the field of AI, there is little agreement among AI researchers on a common definition and understanding of AI—and about intelligence in general. Jianzheng and Xuwei (2023) also emphasise that even though AI technology is already being introduced in the field of HE, many academics are unaware of its scope and, above all, what it consists of, or its potential.

For our analysis of AI in HE, we first clarify what we mean by constructivism as a paradigm concerned with learning that acknowledges the active role of learners themselves in the learning process, not just as passive recipients. We are then placed to consider how, by recognising the learner's agency, the constructivist approach influences views on the use of AI in HE. LeBow et al. (2003) explain through the lens of this paradigm how learners themselves are involved in constructing knowledge and understanding, through their interactions and experiences, and interpretations of them. Huitt (2009) similarly explains in terms of constructivism that each person brings to the learning process their own unique perspectives, beliefs, and assumptions, which can influence how they interpret and construct new knowledge.

Constructivism therefore sees learning as an individualised process that is shaped by each learner's prior knowledge, experiences, and understandings (Hein, 2016). For co-authoring this chapter, we used a collaborative action research approach to bring together our own individual understandings and discoveries to form a shared understanding. We engaged in learning and knowledge creation for this chapter not as three individual authors working independently, but through ongoing interaction and collaboration among ourselves and others. We appreciate that through collaboration, individuals can engage in purposeful dialogue, reflect critically on actions and understandings, share perspectives, co-create mutual understanding, and construct new knowledge together (McNamee et al., 2020). In essence, because constructivism underscores the active and dynamic nature of learning, we believe it is a very useful framework for conceptualising and applying AI in HE. Here students as well as academics can use AI as a tool to help in actively creating their own knowledge and in making this knowledge available to others. Our own collaborative inquiry into AI encourages the critical thinking and scepticism essential for forming reliable ideas. Our own perceptions are then validated by developments and scholarly articles of other academics that are currently exploring AI in HE.

We acknowledge that in these early days of the public life of AI, we three authors, perhaps like most people inside and outside HE, are on a perplexing and intriguing journey to construct our own understanding of it. We have drawn from existing literature and tested new AI innovations in our classes. We have exchanged ideas with each other and with interested students and colleagues, and together developed a common understanding of the benefits, potential pitfalls, and applicability of AI in HE in these early days of its public usage. We understand that as AI makes headway in the sphere of HE, our journey as both academics and learners will be one of exploring possibilities, talking, and collaborating with others—and discovering. Our knowledge and action will change with the times—with our students' needs and with our own evolving understandings within a participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) approach—as AI takes on a life of its own, metaphorically and perhaps literally.

A changing world—AI and HE

AI refers to the ability of computers and machines to perform tasks that require human intelligence, such as learning, problem-solving, decision-making, and language understanding. AI systems are designed to function autonomously, adapting to new situations and improving their performance over time. Machine learning is a subset of AI that enables computers to learn from data without being explicitly programmed (Aggarwal et al., 2022; Cioffi et al., 2020; Huang & Rust, 2018). Looking at this definition it is understandable that there is distrust in AI, and that some HE institutions have even banned the use of ChatGPT (Mearian, 2023). We see this response as throwing out the baby with the bathwater—while trying to remove something unwanted, also unintentionally removing something that's potentially valuable. We feel it is wiser to explore AI to find out how it can improve learning and teaching in HE, what are the ethical considerations, and what discussions we should have with students and faculty

alike so that we can maximise the benefits it offers and minimise the risks.

Ideas on harnessing the benefits of AI and reducing its risks

We share the view that HE is not transforming at the pace required for teaching and learning to stay relevant (García-Morales et al., 2021). Without clear understanding of AI, teaching staff remain sceptical. Yet scepticism has a valuable place here, as Popenici and Kerr (2017) warn of its absence:

> Maintaining academic skepticism on this issue is especially important in education, as this is an act that can be reduced to information delivery and recollection; we need to maintain its aim to build educated minds and responsible citizens that are attached to general values of humanism. (p. 3)

Ultimately, the use and incorporation of AI in teaching, learning, and research hold vast possibilities that will be lost if academics choose to avoid AI (Baidoo-Anu & Ansah, 2023). That is why academics can recognise AI as a tool that, when used effectively, has ability to expand human capabilities and the teaching, learning, and research experience. So that AI is used most effectively in HE, it is crucial to critically examine and evaluate the possible implementation of AI specifically from an academic perspective. Popenici and Kerr (2017) see that the role of technology in higher learning is to enhance human thinking and to strengthen the educational process, not to reduce this learning to a set of procedures for content delivery, control, and assessment. Shifting the focus from teaching new knowledge to teaching adaptive expertise will equip students with the skills they need for life in the 21st century. This will likely require HE institutions to incorporate AI literacy and critical thinking guidelines and courses on AI in the HE curricula.

The increasing prevalence of AI creates the need for meaningful discussion about how AI will shape the future of teaching and

learning in HE, and what decisions universities will ultimately make about integrating it most effectively. The rapid pace of technological advancement, along with the acknowledged potential for job displacement in this field (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019), point to a pressing need to reconsider the role of teachers and the pedagogical approaches used in HE. We believe a primary objective is to create an environment where the capacity of students to learn efficiently and effectively is further developed by utilising the ability of AI, sophisticated data analytics, and machine learning. Here the perspective of teaching staff is important. They are key players in revolutionising academia, as they hold a key to unlocking students' potential to use AI effectively and maximise students' learning experience. AI-driven education empowers teaching staff to provide individualised instruction and personalised feedback that are unmatched by traditional HE teaching methods.

Ethical, social, and pedagogical aspects of AI in HE

Increasing use of AI by ever more students and teaching staff has inspired investigation of ethical, social, and pedagogical aspects. AI systems can amplify existing biases in education such as gender, race, and socio-economic status (Baker, 2021), so fairness, transparency, and accountability need to be upheld as key concerns in the development of AI algorithms (Baker, 2021). Teaching staff need to keep in mind the potential impact of AI on pedagogy and on their own role in the classroom and recognise the need to harness advancements in automation and personalisation to ensure they and their students use AI most effectively for the learning process. For example, AI algorithms might be trained on biased datasets, leading to discriminatory outcomes. Similarly, existing racial and socio-economic disparities might be reinforced if AI-based decisions favour certain groups over others. The problem of algorithmic bias is particularly evident in recruitment and admissions processes, where AI might rely on standardised measures

and ignore individual circumstances of potential students such as socio-economic background or non-traditional routes to HE. Thus, institutions need to ensure that AI systems are designed to address and mitigate underlying biases, and that ethical standards are integrated throughout the decision-making process to enhance transparency and fairness. Ultimately, the goal should be to use AI to create more equitable and inclusive learning environments that promote academic success and social mobility for all students, regardless of their background or identity.

The increasing role of AI in our daily lives has prompted the need for ethics education for both AI developers and users. AI can greatly impact society and individuals, so it is important to be aware of the ethical implications of AI systems. AI developers need to consider ethical principles when designing and deploying AI, since they have a responsibility to ensure AI systems function responsibly and do not cause harm. Meanwhile, AI users must be responsible and diligent in using AI to avoid unintended consequences and understand the ethical implications of their choices. Ethics education for AI developers and users can help build a culture of responsible AI use, which can ensure equitable and safe deployment. Moreover, universities can integrate ethics education into AI curricula, ensuring that graduates are equipped with the knowledge necessary to use AI responsibly and ethically (Williamson et al., 2020; Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019).

The drive for ethical use of AI has subsequently initiated competition to develop AI detectors that can identify where students may have used AI to aid their writing. Some experts believe that it may be difficult to detect AI usage (De Carvalho, 2023; Fowler, 2023; Mujezinovic, 2023), but Liang et al. (2023) suggest that these detectors may be biased against non-native English speakers. It is clearly important for educators to discuss the use and ethics of AI in academic work, and to carefully consider the reliability of AI detectors and associated consequences and rather focus on training users to us AI in an ethical way.

Improving research

AI can be used to improve research methods, including the accuracy and efficiency of data analysis and modelling. This enables researchers to better understand complex phenomena and provides insights into previously unexplored areas. Machine learning algorithms can quickly identify patterns and correlations within large datasets, helping researchers to draw meaningful conclusions and make more informed decisions. Additionally, AI-powered data visualisation tools can help to present research findings in clear and engaging ways, making it easier for non-experts to understand complex information. By automating many of the labour-intensive tasks associated with research, AI can free up time and resources for researchers to focus on higher-level tasks and more creative endeavours.

ATLAS.ti is a computer-assisted data analysis software that facilitates analysis of qualitative data for quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research. It has included AI coding that enables researchers who conduct qualitative research to use AI to conduct thematical groups from narrative data. This can help researchers to identify new areas of study, refine their research questions, and develop more effective research designs. Yet it is important to keep in mind that AI can only react to text and cannot necessarily evaluate and comment on human behaviour and emotions. Ultimately, AI's capacity to help with research methods has the potential to enhance the quality and impact of research across a range of disciplines and therefore to contribute to advancements in knowledge and innovation, but it is imperative the user evaluate the results, as through our experiments we have seen that the results cannot necessarily be trusted.

Benefits of AI in promoting inclusivity and accessibility

One benefit of AI is its capacity to be instrumental in promoting inclusivity and accessibility in HE. For example, AI tools can

help overcome language barriers by providing real-time translations during lectures and discussions. AI can help students with disabilities by providing them with equal access to educational resources and materials through the use of technologies such as text-to-speech and image recognition software. AI can also provide personalised learning experiences for each student, tailoring the content and delivery of coursework to their individual needs and preferences. Personalising the learning experience is highly valuable in HE, as it provides students with the support they need to excel academically and develop as individuals who can contribute positively to their communities. In this context AI has the potential to revolutionise the way education is delivered by providing personalised recommendations and feedback to students based on their learning style, preferences, and progress. With the help of AI, educators can create personalised curriculum, customised assessments, and adaptive learning paths that cater to students' individual needs (Ouyang et al., 2022). For example, AI algorithms can analyse individual engagement patterns and provide tailored recommendations to improve student success.

AI-powered tutoring tools can also adapt to individual student needs and provide individualised feedback, increasing the chance that every student receives the attention and support they need to maximise learning as they choose. This enables students to learn at their own pace, and in so doing to strengthen their motivation, retention, and engagement in the learning experience. These possibilities of AI-powered tutoring tools also apply in the multilingual environment. For example, AI can be used for language editing, as we have done for this chapter, and such editing can also help with improving learners'—or any author's—language skills. By personalising learning experiences for each student, AI-enabled systems have the potential to create a more inclusive and accessible learning environment that can accommodate a much wider range of students with different learning needs and aptitudes. By utilising the capacity of AI in this way, academics can help to make HE more inclusive, accessible, and effective for all students (Vincent-Lancrin & Van der Vlies, 2020).

One of the most promising applications of AI in HE is its ability to provide access to educational materials for learners with disabilities. For instance, AI can convert written materials into audio (*VEED*), thereby providing access for visually impaired learners. AI can also help deaf learners by providing real-time captioning of lectures and videos (*Captions*). Furthermore, AI can be used to create personalised learning plans that cater to learners with distinctive needs, challenges, and backgrounds. This can be done by using a chatbot like *ChatGPT*, *Bart,* or *Copilot,* once it is activated within *Microsoft 365*.

Students can ask questions, or, with the correct prompts, have these chatbots plan a personalised learning plan. By making education more inclusive and accessible, AI can help reduce the inequality gap and ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed in their university learning. This is especially relevant for a multilingual environment such as South Africa where we have 12 official languages. Students whose first language is not English can use AI chatbots like ChatGPT or Bart to find more accessible material. Such capabilities promote a more inclusive learning environment, breaking down the barriers that can stand in the way of students from marginalised backgrounds, and helping them to feel a greater sense of belonging in the HE community.

Utilising AI in the HE environment is problematic for some academics, as they feel that students will not engage critically with the content. Yet students' critical engagement with content of materials, whatever their form or source, is an aspect of university education that most academics seek to achieve in their teaching, whatever the subject or teaching mode. We understand that academics should collaborate with each other and with any other people who are AI capable and interested in its application. Through training, discussions, and working with students, academics can cooperatively develop a way forward where AI becomes part of the HE landscape. Above we have explored different types of AI and different applications of them, so here we believe it is useful to offer practical suggestions for ethically including AI and maximising the value of its utility in the HE landscape, but it is important

to note that AI is developing at exceptional speed and that several new uses of AI in HE will have been developed after the date of publishing of this chapter.

Postscript

Integrating AI into mainstream teaching and research in HE is a new development that requires careful understanding not just of procedure, but also—vitally—of its potential impact. It is important to foster AI literacy and to continuously explore new ways to use AI. By critically discussing and evaluating AI applications, teaching and research staff in HE can better prepare students for future work environments and ease concerns about using AI. In this fast-paced field, a central question is which applications in what context/s? Practical collections of AI applications have been created (see, for example, Nerantzi et al., 2003). By exploring and using AI, we can collectively develop a better understanding of how AI fits into HE. HE institutions can lead the way in adapting proactively to change by addressing potential challenges and solutions associated with AI. An important aspect to keep in mind is that AI is changing at an accelerated rate and will continue to do so for the foreseeable future. Within the HE context these developments will not only influence our interaction with AI, but also the approach to teaching by lecturers and the way that students learn. We now provide some practical suggestions on how stakeholders in HE may begin to do this.

Practical suggestions for consideration, discussion—and action

Developing interdisciplinary collaboration on ethical and philosophical concerns

One way to develop interdisciplinary collaboration on ethical and philosophical concerns about AI is by establishing platforms or forums for cross-disciplinary dialogue and discussion. Such

discussions could bring together professionals from diverse fields, including computer science, philosophy, sociology, psychology, law, policy, and ethics, to exchange ideas and engage in productive debates.

To promote transparency and accountability in the development and use of AI technologies, we will have to establish governance frameworks that incorporate interdisciplinary collaboration. Such frameworks need to have capacity to consider ethical and philosophical concerns and to incorporate diverse viewpoints, including those of marginalised and under-represented groups. Governing bodies within HE institutions should establish policies that encourage the adoption of ethical AI systems. Adopting ethical AI technologies that respect human rights, privacy, and dignity will be key to preventing harmful impacts of AI on society, while also promoting digital equity and accessibility for all students. These measures will help ensure that AI technologies are developed and used in a responsible and transparent manner, providing a more equitable path towards realising full potential.

Collaboration across different academic disciplines encourages innovation and contributes to the development of more informed and thoughtful approaches to ethical concerns and considerations related to AI technologies. Interdisciplinary collaboration can also help to identify potential negative consequences or outcomes of AI implementation, enhance ethical decision-making processes, and improve the overall quality of moral and ethical discussions on AI.

Introducing ethical and philosophical concerns in AI

Uncertainty surrounding AI means that as people and AI itself continue to develop AI technology, ethical and philosophical implications of developing and implementing AI need to be considered deeply—inside and outside HE. AI has the potential for untold impact on societal norms and values, raising serious concerns around issues such as privacy, autonomy, bias, and plagiarism. Moreover, as AI becomes increasingly prevalent, AI literacy

and critical thinking need to be integrated into HE curricula to prepare students for the diverse challenges they may face. Incorporating AI literacy and deepening the reach of critical thinking about AI in HE curricula can enable students to better understand the ethical and societal implications of AI technologies. It can also help to maximise the chances that people involved are well-equipped to develop and deploy AI technologies in a responsible, critically considered, humanitarian manner.

Banning the use of AI on the grounds of ethical and philosophical concerns is not an option. Graduating students will enter a work environment where AI and the use of AI may well be part of their daily tasks, whether they recognise this or not. Ethical and philosophical concerns around AI should therefore be discussed widely and embedded in the HE culture of learning and knowledge creation so staff and students understand as clearly as possible the implications of AI usage. It is also important to foster throughout HE equity in both digital access and digital literacy to help ensure that all learners have access to and learn to use these technologies. Finally, promoting transparency and accountability in development and use of AI technologies is vital for building trust with stakeholders and for preventing potential negative consequences, as we discuss later in this chapter.

The importance of integrating AI literacy and critical thinking about it in higher education

Developing capacity to think critically—to carefully unpack, analyse, and evaluate so we can understand clearly and act wisely—has always been a highly valuable purpose of HE. Given the complexity of what some warn about—and what some applaud—as potential consequences of AI, AI literacy and critical thinking about it are essential skills in today's world. As AI continues to impact our lives, people need to be able to understand it and to navigate the responses it creates. This suggests the need to incorporate AI literacy, with a firm component of what we might call AI critical thinking, into HE curricula, to equip students with the

necessary skills to tackle these issues. AI literacy should include critical discussion about the AIs available within the HE context and their positive and negative aspects. Importantly, students and teaching staff alike need to understand not only how AI can be used to aid learning, but also how it can be used in unethical ways. A key aspect here is rethinking assessment standards in both undergraduate and postgraduate coursework. Assessments need to focus on ability to critically evaluate content, a skill that students will find not just practically useful but also life-enriching for the rest of their lives. We should adapt our understanding of the use of AI and train students and staff alike in the use of AI.

AI literacy also equips students with the skills they need to communicate their findings effectively to stakeholders outside the computer science field. These skills are especially valuable as AI technologies continue to permeate ever more aspects of life, as experiences in HE reveal. Critical thinking skills enable students to evaluate the limitations and biases inherent in AI technologies and in the output such technologies generate. Already the use of these skills to critically analyse content created by AI is becoming more important than using AI to create that content.

These days, when equity stands as not just a social, economic, and political concern, but as a goal many communities and societies are now working towards, incorporating AI technology into HE curricula is vital for fostering digital equity as well as literacy. Hand in hand with this is making sure that all learners, regardless of socio-economic status, have access to the resources and knowledge they need to understand, create, and use AI technologies. Universities and colleges can promote digital equity by giving priority access to technology and training for under-served and under-represented communities. Training in AI, including in high-quality AI applications, can make a valuable contribution to preparing students for the workspaces of the future.

Using AI as a tool of inclusion

Assistive technologies—such as text to speech, speech to text, zoom capacity, predictive text, spell checkers, and search engine—are just some examples of technologies initially designed to help people with a disability. Use of these technological solutions was later expanded, and we find them now as generic features in all personal computers, handheld devices, or wearable devices. These technologies now augment the learning interactions of all students globally, enhancing the possibilities opened for teaching and designing educational experiences (Popenici & Kerr, 2017). Using AI to support speakers of additional languages can open the HE landscape for many multilingual students. These students' language ability and the language editing of texts they create could be supported by AI, and doing so would expand the opportunity for them to succeed in and beyond HE. We therefore encourage teaching staff in HE institutions to explore AI-assisted technologies, and to use these resources with their students.

Promoting transparency and accountability in the development and use of AI technologies

Increasing use of AI technologies in various domains strengthens the need for transparency and accountability of AI systems to ensure they are credible and trustworthy. Transparency can be achieved through measures like adherence to ethical guidelines, clear communication of algorithmic decision-making processes, and deployment of documentation and reporting capabilities. Accountability can be ensured by implementing mechanisms for feedback, correction, and remedy of any flaws or biases that may be introduced into the AI system. To deploy AI successfully, promoting transparency and accountability in the development and use of AI technologies is prerequisite.

It is also crucial to have open and well-researched dialogues about the applications of AI within the field of HE. AI is a relatively new addition to the HE ecosystem, so it is important to not

simply make assumptions about it. Instead, people in the HE field need to focus on exploring the implications of AI usage, particularly with regard to problematic AI detectors.

Interactions with AI systems

Promoting practical experiences and hands-on projects that enable students to interact with AI systems may expose students in a more powerfully educative way to the benefits and limitations of AI. These experiences could involve designing and implementing AI-based applications and lessons, which will help deepen students' understanding of the limitations and biases of AI algorithms, and better prepare them to critically evaluate algorithm performance.

Questions for discussion

1. What are your views on the ethics of using AI? What do you think it can be used for in HE, and what should it not be used for?
2. How can AI be used to open HE for all students?
3. How can assessment be adapted to counter students' use of AI chatbots?

Notes

1 This chapter was initially language edited by ChatGPT, and later by a professional academic copyeditor.

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CHAPTER 10

Frameworks for Actioning Positive and Sustainable Change in Higher Education

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Abstract

This final chapter draws conclusions from an analysis of knowledge contributions gleaned from previous chapters to develop a consolidated framework for actioning positive and sustainable change in higher education (HE). Reiterating the argument of the book introduced in Chapter 1 that individuals and groups of people working in HE are best placed to initiate and bring about positive and sustainable change in their own practices, it begins with a recap of our thesis about why change is necessary, what needs to change, and how this change might best be brought about. The

How to cite this book chapter:
Wood, L. & Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2024). Frameworks for actioning positive and sustainable change in higher education. In L. Wood & O. Zuber-Skerritt (Eds.), *Shaping the future of higher education: Positive and sustainable frameworks for navigating constant change* (pp. 193–217). Helsinki University Press. https://doi.org/10.33134-HUP-25-10.

questions raised in the first chapter are then revisited, drawing insights from the ideas put forward by the various authors who contributed to this book. We then present a potential framework for actioning these ideas to bring about positive and sustainable change and close the chapter with some critical questions for readers to consider into the future.

Introduction

We embarked on this book because we are deeply concerned about the current developments in higher education (HE) that appear to mismatch the needs of modern society. Our aim was to compile the insights of some leading thinkers in the field to contribute to possible structures and processes, to enable greater relevance, inclusivity, and flexibility in HE. Of course, in keeping with the participatory paradigm that has underpinned our collective work over the years, we approached possible contributors who we know share our ontological and epistemological assumptions, inclusive and life-enhancing values, and passion for making the world a more just place for all. Some may say that because of this, the book offers views from a particular perspective. Indeed, it does, and having carefully considered all of the contributions, we are now even more convinced that a transformative and participatory paradigm, operationalised through collaboration of those involved in the daily operations of HE, is the only way to bring about sustainable positive change.

Each of the contributors in this volume echoed these beliefs within their various contexts: leadership (Chapter 2), organisational development (Chapters 3, 7), research (Chapters 4, 6, 8), teaching and learning (Chapter 9), and Indigenous knowledge systems (Chapter 6). Of course, these categories are not mutually exclusive, since the contributors support an integrated and engaged scholarship that rejects the artificial silos between the core activities of teaching, research, and community engagement, as well as between disciplines and between the institution and external stakeholders. We now recap our arguments for why

positive change is necessary, what form such change might take, and how it can be actioned.

The need for positive and sustainable change in higher education

As we discussed the content and structure of this final chapter, we received the good news that the International Institute for Global Health of the United Nations University had convened an International Expert Group (IEG) whose task it was to issue a statement on the practice of university rankings. The aim behind this was to encourage "equitable and improved academic public health education, research, and practice as a global public good" (United Nations University, 2023, p. 1). Like many of the authors who contributed to this book, the IEG believes that the ranking system is problematic, and its statement identifies nine reasons why the system is detrimental to development of the university. It points to the conceptual invalidity of the system that is biased toward English language and Western institutions that are strong in the (Western conception of) science and engineering fields—a conceptual invalidity that perpetuates inequality and creates an unfair hierarchy that is exploitative (pp. 1–6). The points made by the IEG reiterate many of the arguments contained in this book, and while not all the problems in HE can be blamed on the ranking system, it does seem to perpetuate colonial domination by English language and traditionally oriented universities whose main aim is to attract and graduate large numbers of students to make a profit for the university or at least to enable it to remain financially sustainable.

This short report on the ranking system thus seems to capture the main problems, as explained by the various contributions in this volume. HE is not inclusive, and remains an elite establishment that increases the social, digital, and economic divides in society; its present structure and way of operating is not responsive to the accelerated change taking place in society; it is more focused on sustaining itself rather than contributing to the pressing problems

facing our world that indeed threaten the world's (and our) very existence. We acknowledge that good work is being done in many areas of HE by many champions, and that calls for change are amplifying. But we think that the time for talking about the need for change is over; we need to action that talk and thinking to positively and sustainably change the shape of HE.

We uphold that for this to happen, an inclusive, participatory, and transformative paradigm (Wood, 2020) is necessary. Inclusive means that as many different perspectives and interests as necessary are involved in identifying what needs to change; in decision-making on how the change should be accomplished; and in ongoing evaluation of the effect of that change to inform future action. Participatory refers to the acknowledgement that no effective change can really happen without collaboration from those involved, based on trusting working relationships, characterised by an ethic of mutual care. Transformative implies acceptance of ongoing change as inevitable and desirable, since inclusion and participation will better enable positive and sustainable development.

The process that best operationalises this paradigm is action learning (Zuber-Skerritt & Wood, 2019; Gold & Pedler, 2022; Pedler, 2020), most effectively combined with action research to produce evidence-based change. We and others have written about this in numerous publications, too many to mention here. Suffice to say that the process is based on diverse groups coming together to dialogue, listen, and learn from and with each other to address a common goal. It is based on questioning issues from all angles and perspectives, collectively deciding on actions, trying these actions in practice, collectively reflecting on the outcomes, and deciding on the way forward. The addition of action research to the process means that the impact of the change can be documented and shared outside of one particular context to deepen knowledge about both the process and the topic of investigation (see Zuber-Skerritt & Wood, 2019 for a concise overview of action learning and action research from various leaders in that field). Participatory action learning and action research

(Zuber-Skerritt, 2018) promote agency, and action rather than reaction, helping people to feel in control of their situation, which in turn improves general well-being, inculcates a sense of purpose, improves relationships, and increases both self- and group leadership (Lawance et al., 2022; Passfield, 2018).

The above explains our philosophy of the world, and we have seen, over many years, much improvement in both individual and systemic functioning where such ideas are practised. People do not just cope with change; they learn to innovate and create the change themselves. Most importantly, action is grounded in life-enhancing values that promote the common good, value people for their inherent worth, and underpin an ethic of care for both human and non-human lives.

Current practices in HE may be perpetuating and creating injustice and missing the mark in terms of what and how they are teaching and researching, and how they are engaging with society at large. Yet there is ground to hope for a more positive and sustainable future, as outlined in the chapters in this book, if the calls to action are heeded.

Having reminded the reader of the aim and philosophy underpinning this volume, we now turn to the analysis of the knowledge presented by contributors to identify how these ideas can be brought to life to begin to reshape practices and systems in HE to promote social responsibility, knowledge democracy, and proactive change. This is important for the development of graduates who are ready for the challenges of modern life, and staff who enjoy and take pride in contributing to the future of society through the important work they do. Our hope is that by operationalising the theories generated by the contributors to this book, HE might begin to resemble more closely the definition and purpose as outlined by the IEG (United Nations University, 2023):

> Universities are crucial organisations of our modern times. They play a key role in the delivery of education and training. They also provide knowledge, information, and evidence and play a critical role in policy, practice, and public debate. Through independ-

> ent academic enquiry and enabling informed public discussion, universities help strengthen democracy and protect human rights. Everywhere, they contribute to regional development and serve as hubs for cultural and civic engagement. By enabling equitable access to higher education, universities encourage social mobility and fairness across society. And through international research and scientific collaborations, universities promote cross-border cooperation, trust, and peace. (p. 1)

Clearly, this is still a vision, but it's a vision that we hope this book will contribute to turning into reality. In the next section we present an analysis of the contributions the different chapters make to answering the critical questions we posed in the first chapter.

Responses to the critical questions about how to action positive and sustainable change in higher education

In Appendix 10.1, we briefly summarise answers to four questions derived from the UNESCO findings discussed in Chapter 1, based on the knowledge and insights offered by the contributors of Chapters 2 to 9. As these answers to this book's four questions indicate, HE needs to seriously rethink its neoliberal, transactional mode of operation, which tends to exclude any ideas, paradigms, and actions that do not fit its 'business plan'. As Santos (Chapter 5, p. 109) says, "transforming HE towards inclusivity—of ideas, knowledges, perspectives, and of people, irrespective of their ethnicity, heritage, and capacity to pay fees", will take time, and indeed we can question whether it will even happen, unless some drastic event forces a complete change in mindset as Greenwood wonders (Chapter 3). Despite the similarity of ideas presented in the chapters, there are also differences. For example, differing views of AI are expressed by Marais et al. and Burns in Chapters 9 and 6 respectively. The obvious question arises: is AI a blessing or a threat? There are no definitive answers about what the future of HE will look like, but one matter that all contributors agree

on is the need to move towards inclusivity, collaboration across disciplines, and recognition that the knowledge residing in communities is vital for addressing the complex issues we face. They also stress the importance of starting where you are to bring about change where you can. We now turn to a discussion of the cross-cutting, innovative ideas for change presented by the contributors.

Cross-cutting themes regarding change in higher education

The following themes bring together the insights and ideas of the contributors (summarised in Appendix 10.1) on the need for and ways of operationalising change in HE. The collective themes are based on condemnation of neoliberalist practices and exclusionary, hierarchic, and hegemonic systems; the absence of an ethic of care; and the transactional nature of current global HE. The contributors propose that these issues can be ameliorated only by rethinking and reconstructing HE functions—teaching, research, and community engagement—through participatory, transdisciplinary action. The following themes address what needs to change. Note that while we offer author names and associated chapters to substantiate specific statements, the same message might have been reiterated in other chapters, since the contributors shared many ideas. The chapters highlighted denote where the specific idea was particularly emphasised.

Rethinking of ideas, norms, assumptions and practices to work towards a complete ethical repair and renewal of HE over time to make it culturally, politically, and epistemologically responsive to the fast pace of change. For this to happen, individuals involved in both leadership and teaching roles need to mobilise with other innovative, inclusive, and transformative thinkers who are willing to critically reflect on the what, why, and how of their practices and engage them in utopian thinking (Brydon Miller, Chapter 4) to identify actions for change. Just as a computer program only performs according to how it is programmed, so there needs to be a reprogramming of HE systems. This will take time

and will not be easy; indeed, Greenwood (Chapter 3) suggests such radical change can only be attained by purposeful design. Evans (Chapter 2) reminds us, however, that we need a balance between preserving traditions and driving change, so as not to 'throw the baby out with the bathwater', so to speak. We can innovate to address issues by embracing new technology. For example, Marais et al. (Chapter 9) suggest the use of AI to do mundane administrative tasks, which would help curb the administrative bloat that Greenwood identified and would free up people to do the 'real' work of the university, i.e. thinking.

To help shift norms and paradigms within HE, Burns tells us that we should be demonstrating through real-world examples that participatory and learning-based approaches are robust and ethical alternatives to mainstream approaches. Such modelling of participatory practices will help develop graduates who want to perpetuate this approach in their respective organisations. A critical mass of evidence (Burns, Chapter 6) needs to be developed to help understand and address systematic dynamics within institutions. In other words, integrating participatory inquiry and action research methods into change processes will help all involved to rethink their assumptions, practices, and norms. These methods can help navigate complex institutional barriers and facilitate more effective change initiatives.

Future knowledge has to be relevant, useful, inclusive of Indigenous knowledges, and generated democratically (Hall, Chapter 8; Santos, Chapter 5). Most importantly, it has to be translated into strategies, and policy must reflect this changed thinking. Knowledge should be guided by a commitment to creating shared values across disciplines/institutional structures and to mobilising these values (Evans, Chapter 2). As Burns, Hall, and others argue, participatory action learning spaces become opportunities to reflect upon and make sense of participation in decision-making and collaborative actions aimed at transforming realities. Evans (Chapter 2) offers a good example of such spaces in the concept of transdisciplinary research beacons. Participatory and learning-based approaches in HE would turn institu-

tions into learning organisations (Greenwood, Chapter 3), both demonstrating the effectiveness of such modes of working and embedding them into institutional practices.

Teaching and learning must enable students to develop inclusive epistemologies and transversal skills. Santos (Chapter 5) argues that the university needs to form partnerships with schools to prepare future students to think in an inclusive and transdisciplinary way to foster peaceful relations with others and appreciate diversity. The introduction of Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) at all levels of HE (Santos, Chapter 5) would help achieve this aim and challenge outdated and oppressive modes of thinking and operation. Marais et al. (Chapter 9) stress the need for digital literacy and ethics to be part of every programme. Given the urgency of the climate crisis and its related consequences, all chapters highlighted the need for teaching to prepare students to critically think about and respond to pressing social issues.

Human development, rather than just employment, must underpin internal institutional structures and processes. To curtail dehumanisation of the academy, it is necessary to flatten the old hierarchic structures to create collaborative learning groups with permeable boundaries (Greenwood, Chapter 3; Waddington, Chapter 7). Such collaboration could be motivated through various structural supports and rewards. Waddington (Chapter 7) explained how dialogic organisational development can help staff cope with change, as well as foreground an ethic of care. This argument is based on the premise that if people feel involved as important role players in change, they will accept responsibility for making it happen and for contributing to the common good. As Margetson (1978, p. 40) said around 50 years ago, "participation then is educative in that it is itself a learning process with the crucially valuable function of developing what is essentially human about persons". Through active participation in the structures and processes that shape their work lives, staff can improve their own well-being and develop a sense of purpose.

Cognitive justice can be attained only when all voices are included. The democratisation of knowledge is a theme that

weaves through all of the chapters. Positive and inclusive change in HE is achievable only through the collective efforts of diverse stakeholders, with a focus on diversity, inclusion, community engagement, advocacy, imagination, and individual contributions (Hall, Chapter 8). Change is multifaceted and requires individual and collective action from a wide range of stakeholders to achieve better futures for HE.

Technology is driving change at a rapid pace. Most chapters referred to this, but only one chapter addressed the potential impact of AI on HE. This contribution was, of course, targeted, since we editors realise that it will have a huge impact—whether positive or negative—on the sector. Marais et al. (Chapter 9) are positive about the potential of AI to reduce mundane administrative tasks, personalise and support student learning, and assist in data analysis, for example. However, Burns (Chapter 6) has a different view: He warns against the very real dangers of AI, a theme echoed by many in recent literature (see Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019 for an overview of literature on this topic) and which has given rise to a flurry of regulatory policies to protect against harmful use of AI. At this stage, no one can say just how AI will impact HE, and indeed our societies at large, but it is vitally important that all engaged in HE become aware of the risks and benefits and ensure that such benefits can be harnessed, while minimising the risks.

The above themes offer a clear pathway to what we should be doing to make HE more inclusive and relevant and an important contributor to global and local education to promote a peaceful and sustainable future. These efforts for positive change become more pressing given some current tendencies as outlined in a recent report. The following excerpt comes from the Free to Think Report (Scholars at Risk Network, 2023).

> This year's report analyses 409 attacks on higher education communities in 66 countries and territories. These attacks occurred in the context of authoritarian entrenchment and democratic backsliding, and governments increasingly used their regulatory

> power to constrain higher education and limit university autonomy, academic freedom, and free expression on campus. (p. 1)

This is happening not just in authoritarian or conflict-ridden states, but also in so-called open democracies such as the United States of America (USA), Sweden, Hungary, Japan, and Australia. In the USA, several state governments have legislated to limit teaching and research linked to issues such as race, diversity, equity, inclusion, and gender—the issues that in this very book we have been urging HE to address. In Hungary, the government has been enticing academics away from the public system to private HE, so that their academic freedom could be curtailed. These are just two examples related to the very real threats facing the traditional notion of academic freedom to engage with pressing issues to raise awareness and ultimately bring about change for the common good. These events represent the danger that growing illiberalism—meaning narrow-minded, bigoted thinking—and right-wing ideas among governments encourage such trends.

A consolidated framework for actioning positive and sustainable change in higher education

Compressing the wealth of complex and broad-ranging ideas from across this volume into a one-dimensional diagram is difficult. Yet we believe it is especially useful to capture the main ideas put forward in this book in an accessible, diagrammatic way, in the spirit of both participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) and the zeitgeist of 2023/2024 when this book was produced. Figure 10.1 discussed below is our attempt to do this.

Throughout this book the authors have explained why change is urgently needed, what form such change might take, and how it should be actioned. The sections on "practical suggestions for consideration, discussion—and action" in each chapter are especially useful here. At this stage where, as editors, we have reflected deeply—individually and together—on the content of this book

and our experiences preparing it, we recognise at least two more needs/change factors that will influence the success of change in HE. These are (1) discussion of knowledge based on past experience from successful change practices, and (2) examples of change frameworks that can guide leaders and practitioners in HE globally on the 'how' of navigating fast and sustainable change in the future. After all, most of those involved in the daily operations in HE do not know how to action change without guidance and support from action leaders and change agents.

That is why we turn our lens here to focus on the practical processes and models of effective change projects and programmes we have used (designed, implemented, and evaluated) with our colleagues to improve learning, teaching, research, and professional and organisational development. We have experienced, observed—and learned richly through—the success of these projects and programmes, not only in HE but also in business, organisations in industry, government, and communities. This is true in many countries around the world, including in remote and poor communities in over 50 countries in partnership with GULL (Global University for Lifelong Learning,[1] international aid agencies, and other government support/grants.

Building a framework

A framework can be expressed in the form of text or summarised tables and figures. In this section we present one table and one diagram for brevity, with text for further explanation. Here we present a new framework for actioning positive and sustainable change in HE, amalgamating ideas presented in this book with models that have used the paradigms of action learning (AL) and action research (AR), and their integration in ALAR and PALAR, for successful change programmes. The first is a framework for our four questions (why, what, who, and why) about shaping the future of HE, based on the data analysis in Appendix 10.1 from contributors of this book with their brief statements, as summarised in Table 10.1.

Table 10.1: Framework for questions about shaping the future of HE, and brief responses

Why?	What?	Who?	How?
The present HE system is not responding to constant change and current crises. It needs the PALAR framework to introduce, develop, learn about, and understand the paradigm and put into practice the principles and processes of PALAR in students' learning, academic teaching, and scientific as well as action research.	Critical rethinking of the mission, purpose, and needs of HE on a continuous basis.	Action leaders and concerned PALAR participants in collaboration with like-minded communities and colleagues in industry, government, and business organisations, as well as with people of different backgrounds, cultures, and knowledge.	By applying the principles and processes of PALAR, as suggested in this book and compressed in Figure 10.1.

We now turn to Figure 10.1. Here we focus on the PALAR paradigm, principles, and processes for achieving positive and transitional change in HE. Figure 10.1 is a new conceptualisation of the main message of this book, which summarises the main principles and processes of the PALAR framework that we identified in the chapters of this book and have confirmed through our personal and professional experience with PALAR programmes for positive and sustainable change. We hope readers may find this model useful to adopt or adapt in their own practice and in their particular circumstances. Indeed, some readers may be stimulated to create their own frameworks through their own change projects and new contributions to original knowledge for the immediate future in HE.

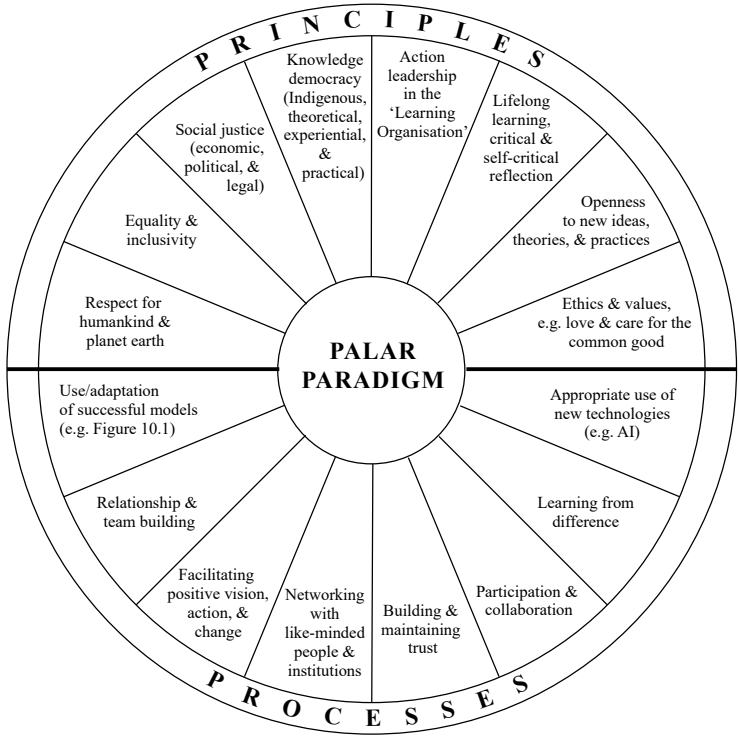

Figure 10.1: Framework for the principles and processes of the PALAR paradigm (designed by Katie Dvorak for this chapter).

The PALAR paradigm

The starting point for being able to action positive and sustainable change in HE is our paradigm, that is, how we think about knowledge (epistemology) and how we understand reality (ontology). We argue that if each person, from the novice academic to the higher echelons of leadership, was required to think deeply about their role in and contribution to HE in relation to these aspects, and to dialogue around such issues at different forums, then the university would begin to reclaim its original role as a place for thinking, for solving complex problems, and for innovation. A participatory paradigm emphasises inclusivity, values the

knowledge of all, and creates space for critical, reflexive dialogue. In a participatory paradigm, people make sense of their world through relationships, listening to understand the perspectives of others, particularly those of marginalised and dissenting groups. This paradigm is based on an ethic of care and creates a humane and humanising environment.

PALAR principles

'Respect for humanity and planet earth' is urgent and fundamental for all education, including HE. Over the last few decades, this respect has been eroded by preoccupation with neoliberal values that undermine the foundational purpose of education to cultivate active, engaged learning and capacity for critical thinking, instead favouring financial priorities, managerialism, and profit-making by a few, at the expense of the common good. The chapters in this book make clear why education institutions at all levels need to help their members understand and return to humanitarian values to help prevent violence, wars, increasing inequality, and disasters from the changing climate, and at worst, the possible end of the earth's capacity to sustain human and most other life.

Our shared plea for a return to humanitarian values is facilitated by general acceptance that everyone is 'equal and included' in communities and society, as a value and world view for 'social justice', as well as 'knowledge democracy', that is, for all to contribute to problem-solving and innovative change from one's own personal, cultural (Indigenous), theoretical, and/or practical knowledge. However, this insight and wisdom requires teachers, mentors, and 'action leaders' to not just lecture or try to 'fill a barrel'. Instead, they need to 'ignite a flame in others' through their own experiential and lifelong action learning, and through 'critical and self-critical reflection' on their own learning and that of others in communities and in HE, locally and globally. These new teachers in HE (who usually have had no training in educational development) need help in 'action leadership' and 'openness to new ideas, theories, and practices' of teaching in the future. The

principles of PALAR as identified in Figure 10.1 can be operationalised if role players in HE adopt an action leadership, as defined briefly by Zuber-Skerritt (2011, back cover):

> *Action Leadership* is a creative, innovative, collaborative and self-developed way to lead. It eschews the hierarchical structure usually associated with leadership and is based instead on the democratic values of freedom, equality, inclusion and self-realisation. It takes responsibility for, not control over, people through networking and orchestrating human energy towards a holistic outcome that benefits the common interest.

HE teachers in the future also need to identify and learn through discussion and critical reflection what their 'ethics and values' are, especially 'love and care for the common good', rather than self-concern and striving for one's own individual advancement and wealth. The former is much more complicated, but essential for really understanding the paradigm and principles of PALAR. We, Lesley and Ortrun, recognise that leadership, academic, and professional staff development are very important—or essential—for shaping the future of HE. It could be introduced and facilitated by experienced action leaders as a voluntary 'Leadership Development Programme in HE' (or as an incentive for a diploma/master's degree in HE) using our framework or any other model for designing AL and AR programmes (e.g. Zuber-Skerritt, 2002).

PALAR processes

Such a PALAR Academic Staff or Leadership Development Programme would demonstrate the processes teachers (as action leaders) would learn, experience, discuss, critically reflect on, and consequently, change/adapt to their own teaching and research.

Therefore, returning to Figure 10.1, these processes include the 'use/adaptation of successful models' in the past and present, 'relationship and team building' as a most important process in any change project/programme, and 'facilitating a positive vision, action, and change'.

Apart from these development/change projects/programmes, 'networking with like-minded people and institutions' is very important. For example, we recommend conference/congress attendance, through which we had learned a great deal about process facilitation (see Zuber-Skerritt, 2017).

'Building and maintaining trust' and 'relationship and team building' are usually achieved in a *Start-up Workshop* and enforced throughout the programme. Similarly, 'participation and collaboration' are extremely important principles and processes in a PALAR change project/programme, because teachers come to appreciate through experience, discussion, and critical reflection that they learn most effectively from and with fellow participants who are different, and who think differently, from themselves, i.e. 'learning from difference', not only from like-minded people.

Finally, 'appropriate use of new technologies' is a big issue at present and will be in the future because of the fast development of new innovative technologies, e.g. AI. So, it's very important for action leadership and academics—and teachers/researchers generally—to be informed, ethically responsible, and actively discussing and reflecting on the appropriateness of using new technologies.

Reflections on Figure 10.1

If HE operates within an ethic of care, explained by Gilligan (1993, p. 62) as a relational activity "of seeing and responding to need, taking care of the world by sustaining the web of connection so that no one is left alone", then each person will feel more valued, and thus more likely to want to engage with others to learn and develop towards the ideals of HE as portrayed in this volume. Life-enhancing values are those that are universally accepted to promote the common good, such as respect, compassion, integrity, inclusivity, peace, and equity.

If these aspects as discussed above are recognised as desirable, then structures, processes, and policies can be developed to operationalise them. Hierarchical and siloed structures can be

dismantled, and safe dialogic spaces can be created to promote transdisciplinary and engaged research-informed teaching. The institution can then model participatory, inclusive processes across departments and disciplines, at different levels, which would in turn create a learning organisation that is more flexible to respond to constant change (Zuber-Skerritt, 2002). People would be able to make decisions and change their practice, deal with issues as they arise, and proactively innovate to stay relevant, and responsive, to current and future needs. Of course, we realise that this is an ideal, and will be realised only through the actions and efforts of many over a prolonged period of time. But change starts with one person, and we hope that the readers of this book will be convinced that they should be the person to start it within their specific sphere of influence.[2]

Contributions of this book

This book makes a number of worthwhile contributions, particularly to the field of HE research and practice. It offers a global perspective by leading HE scholars on the value of a participatory, inclusive, and transformational paradigm for navigating the constant and far-reaching change that is characteristic of our lives today. It presents deep theoretical insights into what needs to be changed in the present system and why, and therefore adds significantly to the literature on transformative change in HE. However, it does not stop there, but goes on to provide cutting-edge ideas on how to take action to bring about this much-needed change. Since the authors have drawn from their very wide-ranging experiences and roles in HE, the knowledge generated through this volume will be useful to readers with diverse disciplinary backgrounds in HE research, teaching, and leadership. We hope that the rich understandings and ideas, and conceptual and practical contributions presented across this volume will help to develop fuller understanding of why positive sustainable change is not just valuable but vital. Here we have collectively offered constructive ideas about what form this change should take to action a more

positive and sustainable future for HE—and therefore, ultimately, for humankind. In that spirit we offer this book as both testament to, and model of, taking useful PALAR action to achieve sustainable well-being for the common interest.

Conclusion

Positive, sustainable change always requires collective effort and endurance. As the core idea running through this book makes clear, each of us has responsibility to embody the values and to be the change that we want to embed in HE. Plato, Mahatma Ghandi, Nelson Mandela, Mother Teresa, Margaret Mead, J. F. Kennedy, and many more icons across history and across the globe have all urged individuals to be the change they want to see, and to start that change wherever they are and however they can. The biblical phrase stating that nothing under the sun is new always rings true. But perhaps the time is especially ripe for cultivating and actioning ideas about collaborative, collective action for the common good, especially while increasing global conflict, extreme natural disasters, and a shift towards nationalistic thinking deepen racial, class, religious, and other divisions within the world. We recognise that these divisions highlight the need for a HE system that cultivates appreciation of and capacity for critical thinking, as prerequisite to practical and other capability. The very word 'university' derives from mediaeval Latin (*universitatem*) meaning 'whole', which bespeaks the holistic, inclusive PALAR approach that we advocate in this book for positively changing and hopefully healing the HE institutions that should exist to enrich the life of all humankind. An observation commonly attributed to Plato from around 2000 years ago is that "reality is created by the mind; we can change our reality by changing our mind". From our time and experience, we argue for the need to add collective action to the mix, so that together we create the conditions for positive and sustainable futures, in HE and beyond.

Critical questions emerging from this project

1. How can you, in your respective role in HE or as an interested stakeholder, bring about or help to bring about change in your sphere of influence?
2. How can you contribute to the 'critical mass' of theory and practice that currently supports the ideas presented in this book?
3. What other ideas do you have for reshaping HE for a more inclusive, positive, and sustainable future?

Notes

1 See http://gullonline.org/.
2 Many resources explain how to put these PALAR principles and processes into practice, e.g. Bob Dick's Action Research Resources in https://www.aral.com.au/resources/ and Ortrun's "Resources for Learning, Teaching and Research" in https://tinyurl.com/OrtrunResources – or if this does not work, try: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lPo0svwMUcogYkd9AagNtGsr0nuQhOeuGtawBvI6Abc/edit.These resources indicate the evolution of PALAR over the past 30+ years, illustrating the continuing utility, adaptability, and application of the basic principles/values of AL and AR.

Recommended reading

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Zuber-Skerritt, O. (2002). A model for designing action learning and action research programs. *The Learning Organisation, 9*(4), 143–149. Retrieved from http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/abs/10.1108/09696470210428868

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Appendix 10.1: Summary of answers to questions derived from the UNESCO findings discussed in Chapter 1

Question 1: How can HE be made more inclusive, and financially and epistemologically accessible for students from all levels of society, taking into consideration its systemic complexities and the opportunities continually opening up by technological advancements?

Ch.2: Increase inclusion of marginalised groups through scholarships, mentoring, culturally sensitive curricula. Set up institutions with a specific focus and fund them according to their needs rather than competitive funding based on research outputs.

Ch.3: Create transdisciplinary groups representing various perspectives, to find ways to make the university a learning organisation.

Ch.4: Plan and act to address climate change, including IKS, marginalised groups, and scientific knowledge.

Ch.5: Create intercultural communication spaces for dialogue as praxis; actively embrace and incorporate IK; diversify decision-making processes; and foster authentic partnerships with diverse communities.

Ch.6: Build inclusive practices into institutions' own operations and model them to students and external partners.

Ch.7: Include lower-level staff in identifying and addressing issues that affect them, to increase ownership and feelings of belonging through various inclusive techniques.

Ch.8: Include multiple forms of knowledge generation and representation through transdisciplinary partnerships with community.

Ch.9: Include previously marginalised students via personalised learning plans, helping them understand and navigate texts in languages other than their first language.

Question 2: How can we adapt curricula in HE to ensure teaching remains relevant to the times, upholds appreciation of the common interest, and draws on the positives of change, while minimising possible negative impact?

Ch.2: Reflect the values of the university in curricula based on inclusive and socially just outcomes.

Ch.3: Oppose the modifying of curricula to conform to neoliberal ideologies of radical individualism and blindness to history, class, race–ethnicity, and gender inequalities.

Ch.4: Integrate climate change and environmental education throughout curriculum; engage students in green initiatives.

Ch.5: Create curricula with students through PAR and inclusive of IKS.

Ch.6: Integrate in curricula existential questions and debates around AI.

Ch.7: Emphasise the need to include staff in setting agendas to address issues that impact on them.

Ch.8: Contextualise rather than universalise curriculum; include IKS.

Ch.9: Use AI appropriately/ethically to make learning and teaching more accessible.

Question 3: How can those who shape HE overthrow the 'expert' authoritative mindset that has so long sustained HE, so all who participate in HE can learn and benefit from engaging with local knowledge and values?

Ch.2: Acknowledge the validity of local knowledge in research and teaching; normalise non-text-based ways of generating and representing knowledge.

Ch.3: In terms of internal processes, flatten the hierarchy; create space for all to put forward ideas and take part in discussion and contribute to decision-making.

Ch.4: Engage community in knowledge creation around serious issues that affect them.

Ch.9: Move to learning that is contextualised and not universal. AI-generated and other knowledge can be challenged by local/ Indigenous knowledge holders.

Question 4: How can meaningful contributions towards solving complex societal problems be actioned?

Ch.2: Make more effort to actively engage with and involve policymakers in addressing issues based on contextual understandings of the situation; use management tools (e.g. key performance indicators, budget allocation) to support transformational change in line with statedvalues; promote collaboration between disciplines and departments; decentralise decision-making power to increase ability of institutions to respond flexibly to changes.

Ch 3: Promote general systems thinking; foster transdisciplinary learning communities; and explore alternative organisational models for HE that are not optional but are the only way forward.

Ch.4: Suggest and support collaboration involving community engagement, action research, and other innovative ways of knowledge creation for utopian thinking. Suggest universities can recre-

ate themselves in non-traditional ways as Green, to address climate crisis on local and global level.

Ch.5: Propose school–university partnerships, rooted in intercultural education and guided by principles like PAR, to initiate and sustain meaningful change. These partnerships aim to preserve Indigenous cultural identities, support student transitions, and promote intercultural HE for the benefit of society at large.

Ch.6: Model participatory practice through robust and ethical approaches; draw from the existing critical mass to demonstrate the effectiveness of participatory approaches. Change institutions through understanding system dynamics. Embed participatory approaches within the institution's own learning and change processes. Promote the development of skills for participation, inclusion, collaboration, critical thinking, democratic processes, recognition of multiple knowledge sources, and other characteristics of systemic action research.

Ch.7: Use dialogical organisational development approach to address matters of concern, promote well-being, and foster a culture of care and growth. Train staff in these techniques. Promote humanism and staff well-being through training and development to create an atmosphere where all participants collectively seek and contribute to positive change.

Ch.8: Encourage all stakeholders to contribute to positive change through their decisions and actions, whether through their choice of learning materials, supporting diversity of student recruitment, and creating structures that facilitate community-engaged scholarship.

Ch.9: Start cross-disciplinary dialogue with professionals from various fields, to encourage the exchange of ideas and debates about ethical and philosophical concerns related to AI. Develop well-informed governance around how AI is used; change methods of assessments to reduce chance of plagiarism. Integrate digital literacy and ethics into all curricula and staff development programmes.

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Note: 'n' after a page reference indicates the number of a note on that page. Page references in italic indicate figures.

Subjects

Persons