



Shaping the future of higher education through positive and sustainable action learning frameworks

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SHAPING THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Positive and Sustainable
Frameworks for Navigating
Constant Change

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Thesis of book

For HE to be relevant, those working in it, whether teachers, researchers, management, administration, are best placed to bring about change. They need to constantly reflect on their values, paradigms and practice to identify and pursue ways to effectively navigate change towards positive and socially just outcomes.

How can we better support participatory and reflective approaches to teaching, research and administration in HE?



A global perspective on the 'ideal' HE system



Pathways to Higher Education 2050 and Beyond” (UNESCO, 2021), collected the views of a global public on possible futures of higher education (HE) and how it can contribute to attaining the sustainable development goals (SDG)

- **Finding #1:** HE should be inclusive and financially and epistemologically accessible for students from all levels of society.
- **Finding #2:** The curriculum should be student-centred and value-based to best prepare graduates for modern life.
- **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
- **Finding #4:** The university should make meaningful contributions towards solving complex problems such as the planet’s eco crisis.



Turning the vision into reality



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 independent 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. (United Nations University, 2023, p. 1)



What is our understanding of positive change?



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)
- (3) flexibility (to embrace and deal constructively with change as an institution).

We 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.





Action learning as theory of change



- The most effective way of achieving constant, transformational, and sustainable is a bottom-up approach to improving practice by the people at the coalface of knowledge creation and acquisition through research, teaching, and learning. 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*.
- 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.
- Aim to change “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).
- People become action leaders, able to bring about change within their spheres of influence.



Questions to 8 contributors



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

- What role do you play in higher education (HE)?
- What paradigm/worldview do you ascribe to? What theories have influenced you?

Ideas (responses to the questions posed)

- What is your major concern(s) 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'?



- Chapter 2: Shaping Society for Tomorrow: The Role of Higher Education in Bringing About Positive Change
Carolyn Evans, Vice Chancellor, Griffith University
- Chapter 3: The Failure of Public Higher Education Reform in North America and Western Europe: The Need for a New Beginning, *Davydd Greenwood*
- Chapter 4: Greenlighting the University: Re-envisioning the Role of Higher Education in Tackling the Climate Crisis Through Action Research, *Mary Brydon-Miller*
- Chapter 5: Indigenous Knowledge for Sustainable Change in Higher Education: An Opportunity Not to Be Missed for Humankind, *Doris Santos*
- Chapter 6: Systemic Approaches to Transforming the University, *Danny Burns*
- Chapter 7: Mental Health Matters in Higher Education: A Duty of Care, *Rod R. Waddington*
- Chapter 8: Shaping Socially Responsible Higher Education Through Knowledge Democratisation, *Budd Hall*
- Chapter 9: Constructing an Artificial-Intelligence Higher Education Environment: A Blueprint for the Future, *Elma Marais et al.*

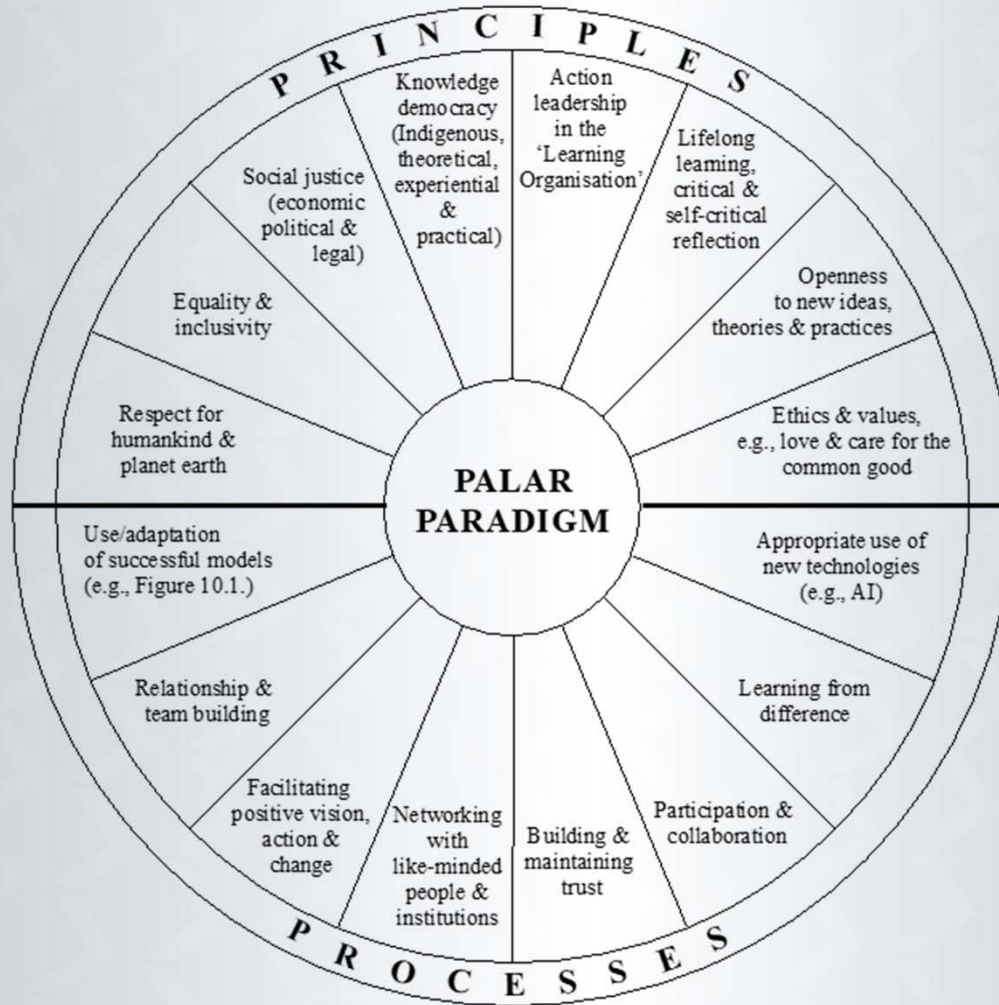


Cross-cutting themes from chapters



- Rethinking of ideas, norms, assumptions and practices to work towards a complete ethical repair and renewal of HE
- Future knowledge must be relevant, useful, inclusive of Indigenous knowledges, generated democratically and translated into strategies
- Teaching and learning must enable students to develop inclusive epistemologies and transversal skills
- Human development, rather than just employment, must underpin internal institutional structures and processes to prevent dehumanisation of the academy.
- Cognitive justice can be attained only when all voices are included
- All engaged in HE should become aware of the risks and benefits of AI and technology and ensure that such benefits can be harnessed, while minimising the risks.

A Consolidated Framework for Actioning Positive and Sustainable Change in Higher Education





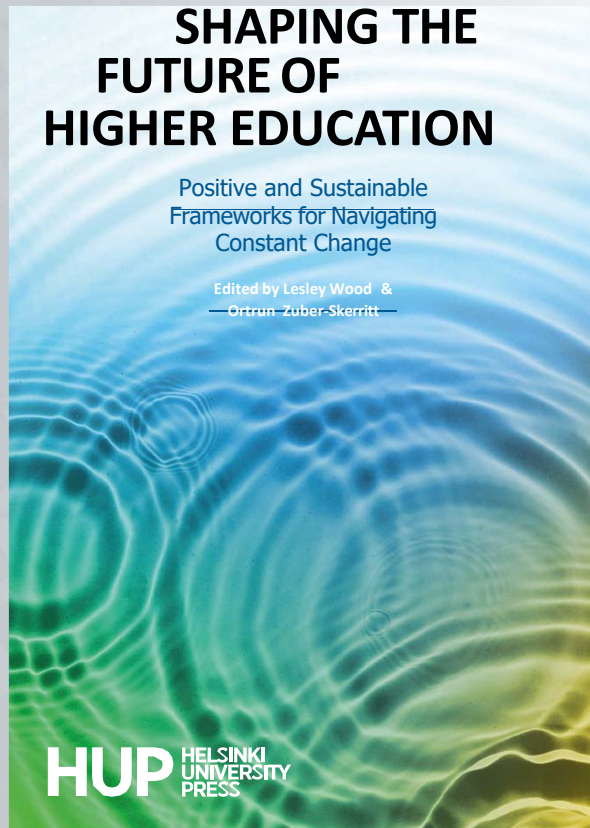
What are your ideas?



- 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 in relation to your particular role, argument, ideas and suggestions?
- 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



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Shaping the Future of Higher Education presents a selection of ideas from internationally renowned researchers in higher education about how to move from just coping with change to proactively actioning it. Through the framework of participatory action learning and action research, the volume aims to enable researchers, teachers and leadership in Higher Education to learn how to positively embrace constant change through innovative, collaborative, systemic, critical and creative thinking and action.