

# BRIDGING THE PRACTICE-THEORY DIVIDE IN HIGHER EDUCATION USING ACTION RESEARCH:

## INTEGRATING COMMUNITY AND UNIVERSITY KNOWLEDGES FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

**Tuesday, 12 November 2024**

**Time: 2pm - 4pm**

**Venue: Social Sciences Building M10 5.04, Mt Gravatt Campus**

As communities and universities seek to shift the dial on complex social issues, they are increasingly encouraged and funded to collaborate. Ideally this 'should' provide the diversity of perspectives to inform context specific and purpose driven actions. This is not necessarily the case for everyone, with communities regularly feeling 'done to'. While collaboration between communities and universities can result in transformational sustainable change, it takes a focus on relationships and an understanding of power relations, which takes time.

This workshop will explore how action research can assist community members and university researchers to come together in true equal partnership to address complex community issues. It is designed to appeal to community members and leaders; primary, secondary and tertiary educators; community practitioners, policymakers, organisational leaders, researchers, and funders.

**Following the workshop presentations, we will launch the book *Shaping the Future of Higher Education: Positive and Sustainable Frameworks for Navigating Constant Change* – Edited by Lesley Wood and Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt**



## Workshop Design

**Professor Lesley Wood** will begin the workshop with a brief explanation of the need to engage in community-university research relationships on an equitable basis. This will be followed by discussion of the challenges that Higher Education faces in bridging the practice-theory divide. Workshop participants will then engage in an interactive exercise to determine how they construct, validate and value knowledge(s), to identify the differences between their philosophical assumptions and those of their community partners. The usefulness of action research (and action learning) to address this problem will then be highlighted in the next section of the workshop presented by **Professor Eileen Piggot-Irvine**.

Eileen will present a practical example of how we can integrate community and university knowledges for positive change. Her presentation outlines an action research project with teachers in the 'alternative education' sector (a learning environment designed for high school students excluded from traditional schooling). In this project university researchers engaged teachers in high levels of decision making, selection and implementation of data collection tools, and analysis of findings. University researchers, as part of this project, were dedicated to bridging the community-academic divide by leading in such a way that teacher ownership and empowerment were the priority.

Finally, **Dr Sara Branch** will introduce you to a new role designed to act as a bridge between practice and theory. As the amount of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity increases in society the role of individuals who are flexible, adaptable and process orientated is growing. The Collective Change Facilitator role was developed in part due to calls over recent years for different stakeholders to come together and create transformational change within communities or organisations. While this might sound easy, the reality is much harder, with facilitators, leaders and individuals often left wondering 'how to' start collaborating, let alone create community or organizational-wide positive sustainable change.

## Book Launch

### Shaping the Future of Higher Education: Positive and Sustainable Frameworks for Navigating Constant Change – Edited by Lesley Wood and Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt

Join us to celebrate the launch of this recently published book on the future of Higher Education, edited by Lesley and colleague Adjunct Professor Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, Griffith University and Extraordinary Professor at NWU, South Africa. Bill Synnot from Bill Synnot & Associates (BSA) will comment on this exciting and innovative book following the workshop presentations, as will Ortrun.

#### Presenters

**Professor Lesley Wood** D.Ed, is an extraordinary Professor in the Faculty of Education and founding Director of the research entity Community-Based Educational Research at North-West University (NWU), South Africa. She is a rated researcher of the National Research Foundation, a member of the Academy of Science, South Africa and the Academy of Community Engaged Scholarship, USA. Both her and Ortrun's interests lie in researching participatory ways to facilitate holistic wellness within diverse educational contexts.

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Find out more: [Lesley Wood Google Scholar](#)

[Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt - Griffith Experts](#)



**Professor Eileen Piggot-Irvine** is an Adjunct Professor at Royal Roads University in Canada and a Professor of Leadership at Auckland University of Technology. Eileen has over 25 years of highly successful experience in research, consultancy, facilitation, and leadership development work with an extensive range of organisations. In this work she draws upon strong experience as a national and international award-winning researcher and author specialising in applied, practical, improvement oriented, research i.e. action research.

**Dr Sara Branch** is a 'Pracademic' and Senior Research Fellow within the Griffith Criminology Institute and Pathways in Place Project at Griffith University. She has a background in Organisational Psychology and an interest in Workplace Conflict (focus on Workplace Bullying) and Change Management with a broad interest in Social Justice. Her current work focuses on applying organisational theory to enhance processes for collective.

Find out more: [Griffith Experts](#)



**Bill Synnot** is the founding director of Bill Synnot & Associates (BSA) and is widely recognised as a leading consultant specialising in the field of change management. BSA is recognised as one of the top 10 change management organisations in APAC (2019 & 2021) & 'Best Specialist Change Management Consultancy 2020 - Australia'. BSA embodies the virtual organisational concept with 700+ clients and over 200,000 followers world-wide. He regularly partners with universities and travels overseas to work with clients.

Find out more: [Bill Synnot and Associates](#)

Registration for the event : [Click here](#)

If you have any questions or issues with registration, please contact Kelsey O'Brien at [GIER@griffith.edu.au](mailto:GIER@griffith.edu.au)

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