

## 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

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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,<sup>1</sup> international aid agencies, and other government support/grants.

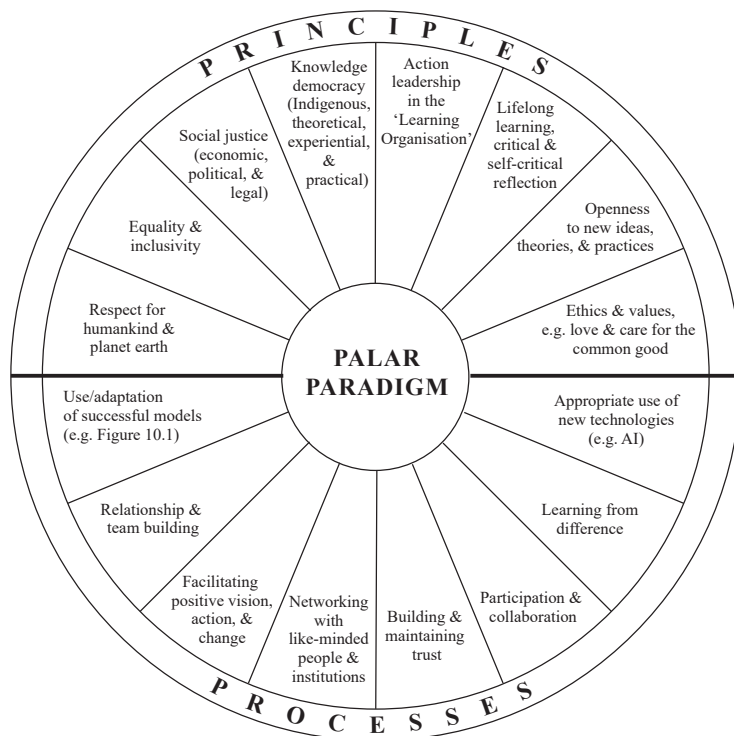
### **Building a framework**

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.<sup>2</sup>

### **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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## **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 stated values; 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.