

CHAPTER 8

Shaping Socially Responsible Higher Education Through Knowledge Democratisation¹

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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),

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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 Columbia. 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 WSÁNEĆ First Nations in the city of Victoria, British Columbia. Since relocating to British Columbia, 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 Education² 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 human-kind 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

- Inuit Tapriit Kanatami. (2018). *National Inuit strategy on research*. Iqaluit: ITK.
- Machado de Oliveira, V. (2021). *Hospicing modernity*. North Atlantic Books.

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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