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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