Higher Education for Good

Teaching and Learning Futures

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12. Visioning futures of higher education for the common good

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The process of thinking about the future is vital. It encourages us to critically examine our assumptions of higher education to identify features that may assist us in developing a desirable higher education for the future. This chapter describes how a group of higher education experts and policymakers used a visioning process to construct images of a desirable higher education system. The systematic use of a visioning process resulted in "common good" as a visionary lens. Although it may be difficult to change higher education practices, systems and structures for the students who will be studying in 2050, it is achievable if we start with the aim of the common good. It is important that the higher education sector, not only universities, think and act strategically to address the outcomes that they want to achieve for the benefit of future generations. Higher education that is committed to the common good can cultivate human capacities to solve social, economic, environment, and development challenges, especially in developing countries such as South Africa.

Introduction

The fundamental aim of higher education is to prepare citizens to contribute to society through knowledge, understanding, critical thinking, and innovative ideas — developing and advancing society as a community. As a result, higher education institutions need to continually engage in thinking about how to ensure that they achieve this aim. Toffler (1974) argued that "unless we understand the powerful

psychological role played by images of the future for a resilient higher education sector, we cannot effectively overhaul our schools, colleges or universities, no matter what innovation we introduce" (p. 19). It is crucial that higher education policymakers, researchers, and academics engage in a visioning process. Without this engagement, higher education institutions risk being "the Cinderella sector of the technology world — constantly receiving the hand-me-downs from the business, defence and leisure industries and then trying to repurpose them for educational goals" (Daanen & Facer, 2007, p. 4).

Higher education has been disrupted in many ways in recent years, e.g. the pervasiveness of technology, the high demand for access to higher education, astronomical growth of unemployment rates and global inequality. The higher education sector is challenged now more than ever to proactively shape more just and inclusive futures (UNESCO, 2021). It is important that higher education is viewed as central to human rights and human dignity. Higher education promotes the full development of human capability, fosters self-reliance, facilitates economic growth, and shapes the culture that enables the world to be a better place for all. Globally, people look to higher education to address issues such as poverty, health, climate change, job creation, social cohesion, and other social and political challenges. Supporting the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* must be foundational: higher education must be "available, accessible and adaptable" to all groups irrespective of their background (UNESCO, 2015). In this chapter, higher education institutions refer not only to universities, but to all institutions of higher learning including technical and vocational education training, research institutes, and formal learning networks.

In recent years, higher education has been criticised for failing to address its colonial and apartheid past. Legacies of this past persist and have led to deep dissatisfaction amongst higher education students and those that cannot find employment after graduating. Higher education students in South Africa, for example, took to the streets to register their frustrations in protests against a colonised education system that does not adequately prepare them for the future. Colonialist narratives of education have been used to relegate Indigenous cultures and traditions to a subservient space. African people did not have authority to claim their identity over the education system that was handed down to them.

Higher education in South Africa, as in most African countries, was introduced by colonisers with a clear "imperial mission" of providing education to the colonial administrators and later to Indigenous people who were able to speak and write in English (Tait, 2008). Colonial higher education was created with a clear vision "to serve the Empire with its oppression of people all around the world" (Tait, 2008, p. 86). The Afrikaner government, which ascended to power in 1946, used education to drive their vision of a racially compartmentalised society, ensuring that white people had preferential access to higher education while black people received an education that limited their potential (Cross, 1986). Despite numerous post-colonial and post-apartheid education policies that were meant to address this unequal education system, these core values remain embedded in South African higher education systems. What is urgently needed is a transformed higher education system based on the social justice principles of equity, access, and inclusivity.

Thus, it is critical to think about how higher education can ensure that all people have equitable access to quality education in the future. The process of thinking about the future helps people to critically examine their assumptions, to reject what stands in the way of progress, and to strengthen what needs to be taken forward. To study the future is to analyse potential change that is likely to make a systemic or fundamental difference over the next 30 years or more, and to empower stakeholders to function in the future (Inayatullah, 2013). It is on these bases that this chapter describes how a futures research method was used for visioning the desired futures of higher education. Visions of the future are powerful rhetorical devices, enabling us to work on problems that current systems cannot address (Facer & Sandford, 2010; Vlasman, Quist & Van Mansvelt, 2004). The intentional use of the plural words such as "futures" and "knowledges" challenge the assumption of a single predictable future (UNESCO, 2021). The aim is to validate multiple plausible and desirable images that enable the higher education sector the freedom to choose what works best in their context.

Visioning HE futures

Futures research provides a set of methodologies, from a range of disciplines, to identify and understand a range of possible futures — whether desirable or not (Bell, 1997; Dator, 2009; Inayatullah, 2008; Puglisi, 2001). Some futures research methods use mapping processes (futures triangle, futures wheel), anticipation (emerging issues analysis, trends analysis), creating alternatives (scenarios, Delphi), and transformative methods (visioning, causal layered analysis, backcasting) (Inayatullah, 2013, 2018; Puglisi, 2001). The purpose is to imagine futures to create new policies and strategies that will enable us to operate effectively when the new futures emerge (Dator, 2009). Daanen and Facer (2007) commented: "It is not possible to make decisions about the future of education in a vacuum" (p. 29). We need to systematically provide knowledge about possible and desired futures that could be used by different stakeholders in the education sector. This process needs clear values that underpin the visions it is presenting (Masini, 1999).

Visioning is a methodology that focuses on images that draw society towards a goal meant to overcome current crises. The aim of visioning is not to predict or anticipate the future, but to imagine desirable futures (Gümüsay & Reinecke, 2022). Through the visioning process, individuals' aspirations and hopes are merged into a vision, making wishes for the future explicit (Bell, 1997; Puglisi, 2001). Visioning assists the process of thinking through the consequences of the "what-if" to "decide upon more desirable pathways that make communities work" (Gümüsay & Reinecke, 2022, p. 240). Visioning can enhance the imagination to build images of a desirable and ideal higher education, i.e. improving, overcoming, and radically transforming the current situation.

In July 2021, 25 policy makers and experts in higher education participated at a virtual workshop commissioned for the 2022 UNESCO World Higher Education Conference (WHEC) (Makoe, 2022). Participants with skills and expertise in higher education policy environments were asked to "imagine what communities and higher education will look like in 2050" and then asked to consider the steps needed to reach these desirable futures. More than half of the participants

came from the Global South, while less than 40% came from the Global North. Most world regions were represented except the Middle East. The aim of the workshop was to bring together higher education experts and policymakers to engage in constructing images of the desirable higher education of 2050.

The process of visioning was organised in four phases: identify present problem/s, recognise past successes, explore wishes of the future, and construct images of desirable futures. Below are the outcomes of this process as generated by the participants in the UNESCO (WHEC) workshop.

1. Identify present problems

The first phase of the visioning process was to identify the complex problems and challenges of the current higher education sector. According to workshop participants, these include inadequate funding from the state, growing demand for high level qualifications, curriculum that does not adequately address the job market, high numbers of unemployed graduates, and more. Participants were also concerned about financialisation and neoliberalisation practices which lead to privileging certain types of knowledges, degrees and jobs that continue to preserve inequalities. In some countries, the government has silenced the voices of academics by taking over the governance structures of higher education. Many emphasised the need to include higher education leaders and staff members, as well as students in decision making processes. In this exercise, one participant described universities as mirrors, which reflect the current problems in society. All of these challenges need to be addressed if we are to transform higher education.

The lack of investment in higher education from both the public and private sector is the root cause of many problems as identified in the workshop. In most countries in Africa and many elsewhere, higher education institutions receive insufficient funds from their respective governments. To survive, universities have had to appeal for funding from the private sector, pushing universities to prioritise cost-cutting and fundraising measures. Those who tend to benefit from this system are students who are financially well-off, leaving behind thousands of

students who are poor: "treat[ing] education as just another service to be delivered to those who can afford to buy it" (Ochwa-Echel, 2013, p. 3). What this illustrates is that the public good approach that assumes that the state's role is to represent the interest of all its citizens is no longer credible. Many governments, especially in developing countries, have been unable to meet the education demands and needs of their citizens (Quilligan, 2012).

2. Recognise past successes

Recognising past successes enables us to strengthen them as we visualise the future. Despite the myriad challenges faced by higher education, participants expressed the need to celebrate the transformations adopted during the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e. development of skills such as global citizenship, empathy, critical thinking, technological skills and others that assist people with functioning in a highly digitalised world. The increased use of digitalisation has made it possible for communities to form connections, which enhances collaboration amongst students, researchers, instructors, academics, and other learning communities.

This higher education role of servicing a public is grounded on an understanding of interconnectedness between and amongst humans, their relationship with one another, the lived beings in the planet and the knowledges of those worlds (Barnett, 2021; Razak, 2020). This deeply social view of working together for the common purpose is embodied in humanising education that reflects social and cultural practices that engender participation, cooperation, reciprocity, and empathy (Locatelli, 2018; Ng, 2009). After all, the nature of education is sharing. Therefore, higher education should cease to elevate one type of knowledge over the others and focus on "developing imagination and creativity to restore cultural values and knowledge drawn from Indigenous wisdom and experiences seriously" (Razak, 2020, p. 410). These Indigenous-inspired values have deep roots which are still valuable today. It is important to strengthen these values as we visualise the futures of higher education.

3. Explore wishes for the future

In responding to the question on the futures of higher education, participants expressed the need for tangible actions to be taken as steps towards achieving the "higher education we want" in 2050. What higher education needs in 2050 is an education that prepares students not only for livelihood but also teaches them to be ethical moral human beings who work together for the good of the community and the planet. This need requires higher education to reinvent itself, not merely focusing on disciplinary knowledge, but on other knowledges that develop capacities for integrity, diligence and resilience for responsibility and service (Razak, 2020; Sarango, 2021). These values will go a long way in addressing some of the challenges faced by higher education. Teaching about values and articulating ideals of recognising one's responsibilities to the community and the planet is key to education (Barnett, 2021; Sarango, 2021). Higher education institutions are expected to take this role seriously and help develop capacities for integrity, morality and resiliency to serve others with a sense of higher purpose (Boyadjieva & Ilieva-Trichkova, 2019; Mino, 2020; Ng, 2009).

The workshop participants determined that higher education should aim to produce humanised innovators, leaders, and citizens —noting that one area that has been ignored by higher education has been the nurturing of the human that begins with the heart instead of the head (Razak, 2021). The aim of humanising education can be traced back to many Indigenous knowledge systems. Values such as Ubuntu are based on one's relation to others: *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* — "I am what I am because of others". Applying the principles of cooperation and sharing amongst people can motivate higher education institutions to collaborate and work together in the same way that African communities have done when raising and educating children, hence the saying: "a child is raised by a village". This concept of communing is not unique to African contexts; some of its principles can also be found in other cultures. For example, the foundation of the education paradigm in the Abya Yala continent (known as America) is that "human beings (both men and women) learn, in fulfilling themselves in community, from life, with life, and for life" (Sarango, 2014, in Sarango, 2021).

Many participants imagined connected communities of people living together, learning, and sharing knowledge in a communal environment. In their imaginations, they saw an environmentally friendly world where the planet and the people co-exist. In this world, higher education was envisaged as more open, diverse, flexible, inclusive, and accessible to many including those with limited financial resources. In their vision, the 2050 higher education is trusted by stakeholders and seen as relevant to the communities it serves.

Overall, the visions identified by policymakers were rooted in communities working together to develop education systems that address the needs of a common society. Better futures are only achievable if we start by creating a different type of higher education that humanises education and embraces the concept of common good by encouraging the co-construction of knowledges foregrounded in relational and collective aspects of teaching and learning (Sarango, 2021).

The "common good" concept positions education at the centre of collective societal endeavour. Through common good, education is considered as part of the domain of the public where transparent and participatory processes can take place and human beings can benefit from education which is centred around people and their connections (Deneulin & Townsend, 2006; Locatelli, 2018). The difference between common good and public good is that the former requires some form of collectivity in terms of how they are produced and shared, while the latter can be enjoyed as individual goods (Locatelli, 2018). It is common good when the resources are produced by the community for the benefit of all, and it is public good if the state manages the public resources (Quilligan, 2013). What this means is that one can use the goods or services that are made available by the government without directly contributing to its provision (Deneulin & Townsend, 2006). While the recipients of public good may remain passive, common good requires active participants (Locatelli, 2018). Although the characterisation of both public and common goods may be different, they are both bound by the principles of human rights that promote accessible education to all groups irrespective of their background. Gilchrist (2018) explained that "to deny someone with capacity access to higher education is to deny them their potential as human beings"

(p. 647). Visioning education as a common good will enable us to have a shared vision of the community that will be supported by higher education of the future.

4. Construct desirable images of futures

The last phase of the visioning process was to construct desirable images of futures, i.e. images that can draw us forward as higher education stakeholders. Participants determined that nations cannot continue with higher education systems that exclude people based on their financial status or their home address, but rather, should ensure that every citizen has unimpeded access to education. Acknowledging that education is a human right, requires the state to continue financing, delivering, monitoring, and regulating higher education (Locatelli, 2018). Likewise, higher education leaders must continue to define and create different types of higher education that will ensure that no one is left behind.

The images identified by policy makers were in line with the common good principles based on communities working together. It is not only the "good life" of an individual that matters (Deneulin & Townsend, 2007), but the good of the world in which humans live. This vision is based on the values that need to be reinforced to create an education system guided by the common good principles of solidarity towards a shared vision of the community. Visions such as this "inspire us by stating what we are striving to become, why we do what we do, and what higher contribution flows from our efforts" (Bezold, 2009, p. 84). These visions can motivate us to take action towards better futures.

Higher education for the common good

Using common good as a foundational principle can enable policymakers and leaders to design context-specific scenarios of higher education in 2050. Higher education that is committed to the common good can be an environment that cultivates human capacities to solve social, economic, environmental and development issues, especially in developing countries. According to the policy makers in the workshop, the aim should be to design a development-driven higher education system that is based on the common good principles of bringing different players

together to share ideas and use home grown Indigenous knowledge systems that will address the needs of communities and societies (Makoe, 2022). This approach addresses the social justice mandate of higher education — closely linked with common good principles that support accessible, inclusive and affordable higher education that gives every person a chance to develop to their full potential in a community. To address social injustices that have been fuelled by past and present practices, higher education must address maldistribution of resources and economic inequality to enable access to education in an equitable way. Redistributive justice directly addresses access issues, especially for people who have not had access to higher education resources in the past. (Lambert, 2018). However, access without success is not an opportunity, and therefore not a common good.

Institutionalised hierarchies that prioritise the cultural values of dominant groups have denied other cultures from participating fully in the higher education sector. Redistributive justice recognises that people's cultures and practices should be valued and respected, regardless of their status (Hodgkinson-William & Trotter, 2018). In countries that were formally colonised, such as South Africa, western-oriented epistemic perspectives feature prominently in the curriculum (Adefila et al., 2021). Framing knowledge in this way excludes many people who are participating in higher education: "when people do not have a voice they also do not have an opportunity to decide what is really important educationally in order to avoid becoming an "object of charity or non-persons with respect to justice" (Hodgkinson-William & Trotter, 2018, p. 208). Students need to be given tools and capabilities to question the knowledge provided to them. The knowledge base acquired in higher education should not only be about finding a job; it should also provide the ground to access new knowledges, to understand, to develop as a person with a solid value base, and to acquire intercultural knowledge, including valuing others. Common good encourages students to reflect on their moral beliefs as well as enabling them to understand the real-world implications of those values (Ford, 2016). According to UNESCO (2015), the "common good, encompassing ethical and political concerns, provides a principle to rethink the purpose of education" (p. 80).

Conclusion

A visioning process helped us to construct images of futures that can influence human behaviour in the present, thus helping to contribute to shaping the futures to which we aspire (Bell, 1997). This method is not meant to imply the identification of one's actual future, but to build images of an ideal world in a systematic way. In the example described in this chapter, the different phases of the visioning process provided a systematic way of identifying "common good" as a visionary lens for higher education in 2050. The vision of a common good represents a compelling expression of the image of a desired future that is equitable and just. The principle of common good provides a powerful lens to imagine communities in 2050 and to co-create the higher education required to serve it. By so doing, policymakers and leaders will be able to design, strategise, plan, and develop pathways towards higher education in 2050. Although it will be difficult to change higher education practices, systems, and structures, it is achievable if we work to commit to the principles of common good. The entire higher education sector, not only universities, should think and act strategically to address the outcomes that will benefit all students and future generations.

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