

STORIES OF HOPE

REIMAGINING EDUCATION

EDITED BY
SANDRA ABEGGLEN, TOM BURNS,
RICHARD HELLER, RAJAN MADHOK,
FABIAN NEUHAUS, JOHN SANDARS,
SANDRA SINFIELD, AND UPASANA GITANJALI SINGH





<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

©2025 Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns, Richard Heller, Rajan Madhok, Fabian Neuhaus,
John Sandars, Sandra Sinfield, and Upasana Gitanjali Singh
Copyright of individual chapters is maintained by the chapter authors



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0). This license allows you to share, copy, distribute and transmit the text; to adapt the text for non-commercial purposes of the text providing attribution is made to the authors (but not in any way that suggests that they endorse you or your use of the work). Attribution should include the following information:

Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns, Richard Heller, Rajan Madhok, Fabian Neuhaus, John Sandars, Sandra Sinfield, and Upasana Gitanjali Singh (eds), *Stories of Hope: Reimagining Education*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2025, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0462>

Further details about CC BY-NC licenses are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Copyright and permissions for the reuse of many of the images included in this publication differ from the above. This information is provided in the captions and in the list of illustrations. Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>

Digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0462#resources>

Information about any revised edition of this work will be provided at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0462>

ISBN Paperback 978-1-80511-571-7

ISBN Hardback 978-1-80511-572-4

ISBN PDF 978-1-80511-573-1

ISBN HTML 978-1-80511-575-5

ISBN EPUB 978-1-80511-574-8

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0462

Cover concept and image by Rachel Denbina, CC BY-NC

Cover design by Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

Imaginative collaboration and co-creation: Introduction

*Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns, and
Sandra Sinfield*

As one of the author collectives included in this section states, “We are standing at a crossroads and need to shift our mindsets to create the new now”. This collection of case studies on “collaboration and co-creation” underscores that there is hope, through community and co-creation. Yet, this hope is sometimes hard to find in a competitive, marketised, and isolating Higher Education environment. However, when “coming together”, as a collective, more positive things are possible. The case studies included highlight the communal dialogues and practices that allow for an “educational imagination” (Eisner, 2001) to emerge: new “Communities of Practice” (Lave & Wenger, 1991), new ways of seeing and doing, a new ecology of collaborative practice (Abegglen et al., 2023). Rather than falling back on the “familiar” tools and ways of thinking, the innovative models and methods presented by the authors allow us to reimagine how we can work with each other, with diverse students, and with other educational professionals to change educational practice—and the educational system.

Bringing different theories, approaches and people together allows for boundary crossing, positive transgressive behaviour (Abegglen et al., 2021a, 2021b): across teams; across disciplines; across disciplinary, institutional, and national boundaries; and across staff/student boundaries: working together with each other, as partners. Working together in academia provides an opportunity for both a recognition of the self—and others—as we strive to co-create a humane university.

Humans are social, interdependent beings and collaboration in Higher Education creates opportunities not just for “best practices” but for the emergence of new threshold concepts of academia itself (Meyer & Land, 2003), not competitive individualism but collegiality and partnership. An ecology of collaborative university practice for a hopeful social justice education.

The section begins with a centring look at how we speak with each other, teasing out how to harness non-violent communication in staff and student dialogues. This progresses to a radical exploration of how we can “better work together” to bring about change. Peer Review of Teaching (PRT) showcases how we can help each other improve our own practice and the curriculum and education *per se*. The next chapter provides an insight into a classroom practice example that adopts a form of “the community is the curriculum” approach where staff and students co-create a curriculum of hope and action (Honeychurch et al., 2016). The section closes with a chapter that focuses on the ‘ground up’ development of a professional development course for staff on the topic of inclusive assessment to change classroom practice and make it more welcoming.

Chapter overview

“Embracing compassion: Nonviolent communication for transformative teaching and learning in Higher Education” by Anna Troisi sets the tone for this section. The starting premise of this piece is that the traditional view of “students versus educators” needs to be transformed into a more communal opportunity to work together harmoniously. The author celebrates a holistic approach, drawing inspiration from Marshall Rosenberg’s Nonviolent Communication (NVC) framework. Students and staff were coached in NVC techniques for communication and feedback, fostering authentic expression and compassionate listening. This helped transcend traditional educational boundaries, equipping participants with vital interpersonal skills. The chapter offers practical examples and serves as a guide for those seeking to centre communication and compassion in their own teaching practice.

In “*Better Together: Towards a new organising principle and mindset for co-creation*”, Nikita Asnani, Inca Hide-Wright, Jess Humphreys, Bo

Kelestyn, and Jean Mutton propose *Better Together* as a non-hierarchical, slightly anarchical organising principle towards education change. In their poetic piece they implicitly critique more staid and safe innovation processes as they take us on a journey illuminating the opportunities created by this radical way of thinking through the developments we might want to make. Design thinking (DT)-led innovation processes, they argue, will allow all of us (staff and students) to move through tumultuous innovation journeys with more confidence. DT changes the innovator and their understanding of the problem, co-creating *with* and not just *for* the intended audiences.

“Peer review: No crime, no punishment” explores the barriers to transforming Science, Technology, Engineering, and, in Debbie Holley’s (the author) context, medical education from a transmissive passive pedagogy to something collegiate, innovative, and humane: a curriculum that is driven by open collaboration, creativity, and exciting exchange. Peer Review of Teaching (PRT) is cited as a vehicle that in their radical case nurtured the growth of the individual as well as contributing to developing the skills, attributes, and capacities of a whole teaching team. Although PRT inherently possesses an evaluation element, it involves making value judgements about the quality of teaching practice, and this case study shows that PRT can be something positive and hopeful. The author draws on a model from the practice of medicine, the huddle, to bring humanising values and a supportive and collaborative culture even, to the often-feared peer review process. She goes on to give examples of innovative practice that were encouraged through this celebratory and positive process, outlining how a hopeful culture of learning and support can be created in the academy.

In “Co-creating networks of hope in an interdisciplinary degree for mature students the tutor” and student authors—Catherine Bates, Tracy Campbell, Colin Webb, and Lucy Yeboa—tell the stories of their radical lifelong learning course. In the process, they discover the networks of hope—explored and co-created through workshops where personal experiences are shared and juxtaposed with relevant and relatable examples from popular culture. The chapter showcases how the “outside” was brought into the classroom, exploring ontology and epistemology in intersectional, embodied, active, and empowering ways. Through political analysis, this process reveals opportunities for hope,

transforming a passive present into an active future. The classroom as a springboard for radical acts of hope—a root-level transformation of people and praxis.

“A quiet hope: Enhancing institution-wide inclusive assessment practices” by Siobhán O’Neill and Laura Lee focuses on the establishment of a professional development course for staff on the topic of inclusive assessment. To initiate authentic, embraced change, the team undertook extensive research and collected experiences and voices from staff and students on assessment, especially those at the margins of teaching and learning. Based on this, they developed a Digital Badge course for staff to enhance their understanding of inclusive assessment practice—and eventually change their classroom practice. The course harnessed concepts of Universal Design and Universal Design for Learning as an educational framework that aims to improve and optimise teaching and learning for all students. The course itself was evaluated, and based on the feedback received revised and updated, creating a hopeful cycle of changing educational teaching and learning practice to something more inclusive. This was not a top-down initiative but a positive flourishing of an interest in, and a commitment to, better outcomes for those students previously placed at the periphery of education.

The section closes with a case study outlining a ground-up staff development programme that uses playful and creative practice to collectively un-school and de-school participants and tutors alike—and reimagine education. In “The moongazers: A creative vision of Higher Education”, we, Sandra Abegglen, Tom Burns, and Sandra Sinfield, the editors and authors, describe what we call a staff development programme like no other: not dry and dusty theory, although of course theory is there, but a course as a “third space”, seeding collaborative encounters that provoke agentic engagement with teaching, learning, and assessment—moving beyond what is already a collective development of something different, more positive, holistic, and playful. One of the most difficult tasks is to imagine differently, and imagining education and its practices differently can be the most difficult of all. We are all inscribed with reductive educational narratives from nursery or kindergarten up to university, “schooled” and “conformed”. Yet, we believe it is possible, and necessary, to take down the hostile and impenetrable towers of Higher Education, to tear down the watchtowers,

remove the gatekeepers—and welcome people in. With our practice we endeavour to build a village of learners and educators that have equal participation and an equal say in the process of making liberatory practice a reality.

Key learnings

1. Educational transformation through shared power and radical inclusion

Collaboration across roles, disciplines, and institutions helps dismantle traditional hierarchies, replacing them with relational, participatory approaches. Co-creation—with, not just for—students and staff generates a shared sense of ownership, enabling collective action and transformative learning experiences.

2. Compassionate communication helps building humane learning communities

Drawing on frameworks like Nonviolent Communication, educators and students can cultivate environments rooted in empathy, authentic dialogue, and mutual respect—creating the conditions for deep learning, trust, and social justice to flourish.

3. Unlocking new educational possibilities through creativity, play, and interdisciplinary practice

Innovative pedagogies—from poetic design thinking and embodied learning to playful staff development—disrupt the status quo, inspire imagination, and empower both educators and learners to envision and build more liberatory forms of education.

4. Grassroots initiatives can drive institutional change from the margins

Case studies demonstrate that bottom-up staff development, peer-led teaching review, and student-staff curriculum design can lead to

meaningful shifts in practice. These micro-level interventions model inclusive, hopeful approaches to reimagining assessment, curriculum, and academic culture.

Together, these learnings highlight how collaborative, compassionate, and creative approaches can reframe Higher Education as a space of possibility—where hope is not only imagined but actively practiced: together.

References

- Abegglen, S., Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (Eds.) (2021a). Collaboration in higher education: Partnering with students, colleagues and external stakeholders. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* [special issue], 18(7). <https://open-publishing.org/journals/index.php/jutlp/issue/view/61>
- Abegglen, S., Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (2021b). Editorial: Collaboration in higher education: Partnering with students, colleagues and external stakeholders. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 18(7), 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.53761/1.18.7.1>
- Abegglen, S., Burns, T., & Sinfield, S. (Eds.) (2023). *Collaboration in Higher Education: A new ecology of practice*. Bloomsbury. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350334083>
- Eisner, W. (2001). *The educational imagination: On the design and evaluation of school programs* (3rd ed.). Pearson.
- Honeychurch, S., Stewart, B., Bali, M., Hogue, R. J., & Cormier, D. (2016). How the community became more than the curriculum: participant experiences in #RHIZO14. *Current Issues in Emerging eLearning*, 3(1). <https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/118837/>
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Meyer J. H. F., & Land R. (2003). Threshold concepts and troublesome knowledge: Linkages to ways of thinking and practising. In C. Rust (Ed.), *Improving student learning—ten years on* (pp. 412–424). OCSLD, Oxford.