Book Review

When fighting the good fight becomes increasingly hailed but evermore elusive

Amidst a political climate of genocide/scholasticide, and an education sector fraught with epistemic violence and tainted by injustice, "hope" and "for good" have become intangible, impossible, and almost inconceivable. The timely publication of *Higher Education for Good: Teaching and Learning Futures (HE4Good)* brought with it the courage to dream and/or to not fall into a trap of despair. The book has become what Beetham (2024: np) calls 'the desperate throw of a lifeline or the hopeful throw of a dream … towards better alternatives'. The five book sections are skilfully crafted to give the sense that progression from abstract thoughts to sensemaking and to active change is possible, even at a systemic level. Why then has 'HE4Good' become so elusive?

We cannot help but ask ourselves …How have universities become complicit? How have we become unwilling to focus on the 'common good' (see the Preface, by Carolina Guzmán-Valenzuela)? Is it because we lack the collective will, reject the careful thought, strategic planning, key partnerships, and innovative initiatives needed to do this work? Or is it that we must/could do something else and not this? We have seen how progression has been slow. Often bad is disguised as good. Good gets shattered/shoved and seen as an uncomfortable truth that very few have time for. We offer a relational review, distinct from the multiple reviews already published focusing on our respective perspectives and roles.

Fatima - A future unfolding... Fraught with complexity

As a practitioner of learning technologies at a university currently exploring online learning to not only promote access and inclusion but also as an economic imperative, I find the pluralistic perspectives in this book timely and crucial to unpack. The book ranges from deeply theoretical discourses (Wittel, Chapter 7; Belluigi, Chapter 5) to pragmatically sound approaches (Molley, et al., Chapter 17). The variegated lens, through which to interrogate the complexities in the HE terrain, specifically the potential aporia between the market driven imperatives and ethical aspirations to promote social equity, holds much value especially in its generative appeal for further discussion as complexities arise.

Aimed at harnessing the considered potential of learning technologies and safeguarding against its ills, the book offers plausible predictions. These range from a critique of historic and

current extractive practises that include data mining and the platformisation of learning, forewarning the potential collusion- if left unchecked and principles of care unembraced (Chan, et al., Chapter 4), to offerings of nuanced hope through critical data literacies (Kuhn, et al., Chapter 21). Together with the promise of ethical, digital transformative practises requiring a healthy dose of reflexivity (Fawns, et al., Chapter 23) whilst cautioning against algorithmic biases, surveillance and over- reliance on AI (Childs, et al., Chapter 13), these musings resonate with the current challenges encountered. A case in point is privileging scalable, market-driven online courses, tailored for accelerated and purely asynchronous learning modes.

There is no doubt about the potential monetary viability of these ventures and possibly its contribution to the labour market and associated employment (though its worth for employability is contested by Vally and Motala (2014) and echoed in Fawns, et al., Chapter 23). However, it is the guise of marketing it as promoting social equity, that needs to be examined. It is precisely this uncertainty, these unquestioned lauded claims, that the voluminous work presented here attempts to address through first priming the reader with stirrings of discontent, evident in the opening sections 1 and 11 that invite questioning the status quo and naming the nameless.   The fracturing through naming then allows for light to slowly filter through by offering alternative visions and pragmatic options as seen in Section III and IV.

The ongoing genocide in Palestine, live-streamed on our screens with the devasting hallmark of scholasticide, has been met with either deafening silence by universities and/or complicity through investments in the Military Industrial Complex (Listek, 2024) fuelling the genocide. This awful atrocity is immediately brought to mind with Bowles' reflection (Chapter 15) where she highlights the enmeshed entanglements within the higher education terrain and its broader societal context. Through the lens of relational ontology, a framework is provided to make explicit the hidden power dynamics underpinning universities responses to global crises. Her summoning of Maria Puig de la Bellacasa's concepts *of thinking-with* and *dissenting-within* to allow for a critical and ethical engagement of entrenched systems of colonial legacies does however present a glimmer of hope that is ultimately the weave that pulls through all these chapters.

Najma – An indifferent world

From a geopolitical lens, the world/HE seems indifferent to injustice, with only pockets of resistance from those in HE and the public at large. With a focus on curriculum, I have witnessed what Jansen (Foreword) calls that ensemble of rules, regulations, values, and processes that keep official knowledge sheltered in place, I have witnessed how students have increasingly become consumers, and learning has become transactional (De Rosa, Chapter 1). In my context (Centre for Learning, Teaching and Development) we are simply not paying enough attention to decolonising the curriculum (Belluigi, Chapter 5), nor do we see the epistemic urgency thereof as suggested by Akbar (2024). We are too focused on "thin inclusion" (Chan, et al., Chapter 4). I question whether it is because we have become indifferent to HE4Good. Or is it that we see the

"good" happening in the distant future only, with the present blinding us to what could be (Makoe, Chapter 12).

What the book brings to the fore is that awareness and action (notwithstanding a caring heart and critical eye) is not enough. The editors Catherine Cronin and Laura Czerniewicz offer, very useful strategies such as:

1. Naming/analysing the troubles

2. Challenging assumptions and resisting hegemonies

3. Making claims for just/humane/globally sustainable HE

4. Courageously imagining/ sharing fresh possibilities, and

5. Making positive changes, here and now?

In my experience, the tension of offering strategies without moving to action too quickly (Amiel & Diniz, Chapter 18) is disorienting, debilitating and distressing to navigate. If "common good' is just rhetoric, forming alliances/partnerships/communities of practice - premised on the idea that we are all in this together - then could we honestly expect any good to come out of such? What could CLTD care more about and do more/less of? What holds us back? One proposition is to fight the "good" fight- present in resistance, resilience and reimagination as suggested by Arora (see The Last Word). Fighting the indifference to injustice and inhumaneness – requires contextual **r**elevance, representative action and relational hope (all common threads running through the book). At CLTD, we realise that apathy is real, our inward focus is holding us back from paying closer attention to wider systemic challenges. Nevertheless, it is not about the solution, but in Toni Morrison's words, it is about *being fearless and surviving in part, under impossible circumstances* (see [Black liturgies on Instagram](#)). It is about finding light in the darkness (Koo, Chapter 3).

Conclusion

The book HE4Good is a generous gift to the globe, and specifically to Learning and Teaching Centres in HE. It is a book of a shocking truth, guided by hope (from the image on the cover to the last word). Much like the book editors and all authors, we at CLTD look forward to "taking a journey of radical hope. We look forward to moving beyond ourselves, and out of our heads, to embrace the journey ahead. We realise that when despair triumphs and hope become elusive, the good we do needs community contribution, collective courage and critical care. May the force be with us!

References

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Reviewed by

Najma Agherdien and Fatima Rahiman, University of the Witwatersrand