

Please quote as:

Hampson, G. P., Assenza, G., & Gregor, K. (in press - 2013). 21st Century work requires 21st Century education: Toward a 'University for the Future'. In A. Papmehl & H. J. Tümmers (Eds), *Die Arbeitswelt im 21. Jahrhundert: Herausforderungen und Perspektiven für Wirtschaft, Wissenschaft und Gesellschaft*. Wiesbaden: Springer Gabler.

21st Century work requires 21st Century education: Toward a “University for the Future”

Gary P. Hampson, Gaudenz B. Assenza & Kamil Gregor

Introduction

The chapter¹ provides some initial thoughts regarding a new type of higher education system which resonates with the requirements of work, life and purpose in the 21st Century. In terms of work, its basic premise is that new forms of employment in the 21st Century require concomitant new forms of education. The chapter specifically explores *higher* education via the notion of a “University for the Future” (U4F).

U4F would integrate existing leading-edge theories and practices with new ideas to expand the horizons of higher education. The ambition would be not to build a great university *of* the world, but rather a great university *for* the world. Likewise, it would not be a university *of* the future so much as a university *for* the future.²

As general context, three paradigms regarding the purpose of higher education can be identified. Currently, the two dominant perspectives on higher education can be understood as (i) the process of accumulation and dissemination of knowledge for its own sake independent of societal or environmental functionality; and (ii) a machine-like process of “downloading” skills and knowledge into students to increase their employability, overcome skill shortages in the labour market, and stimulate competitiveness and growth of national economy. We offer the possibility of a third, namely, higher education on behalf of human potential, social well-being (inclusive of social justice and economic benefits) and ecological resilience or sustainability.

With respect to the first paradigm, we recognise that benefits regarding address of knowledge for its own sake includes (i) such a notion as potentially a path to wisdom (human potential); and also the possibility of it (ii) leading to long-term benefits of understanding and thus potentially to social well-being and ecological resilience. However, the process toward such normative goals is indirect. Whilst this indirectness has its merits, it also has disbenefits particularly in times of urgency such as is (from many perspectives) the case of the contemporary situation.

¹ The chapter is oriented by two unpublished documents, namely, (i) Assenza, G. B. (2009) “University for the Future: A Blueprint” and (ii) Hampson, G. P. & Assenza, G. B. (2012) “Transformative Higher Education for Humanity and Biosphere: Introductory Document”.

² We owe this idea to the Danish educational initiative, *KAOSPilot*.

With respect to the second paradigm, we recognise that benefits regarding address of such relations between higher education and the current system of work includes (i) address of an important aspect of individual being, thus potentially contributing to human potential, and (ii) contributions to social well-being arising from economic productivity. However, disbenefits also arise from this paradigm's partiality – both in terms of other aspects of human potential that are de-emphasised by this direction, and also in terms of social and ecological disbenefits arising from “business-as-usual” motifs.

The second paradigm is questionable even from a purely economic point of view (Harvey, 1999). Even if the process of analysing the labour market and predicting the range of skills and knowledge necessary to boost competitiveness produced successful predictions – which has not always been the case – it would take many years after effecting higher education reform to observe significant outcomes. In a rapidly changing world, the very requirements of the labour market would have changed. It is more appropriate to help create an educated, flexible, empowered population (Harvey, 1999) consisting of developed individuals who have integrity not only in relation to the extrinsic needs of the labour market but more importantly who have integrity as a whole people, including the ability to adequately reflect upon their own thoughts and actions.

The chapter is organised as follows. It first addresses various conceptual and structural considerations regarding research in U4F (these have implications not only for the domain of research, but for teaching and learning, and, indeed, for the educational system as a whole). The chapter's attention then turns to various conceptual and structural considerations regarding U4F teaching and learning. An exploration of particular work-education relationships then ensues. The chapter ends on exploring various scenarios for implementation.

Research

U4F research is firstly discussed in terms of new conceptual orientations. Various structural considerations are then explored.

Conceptual considerations

U4F research would include the prioritisation of the address of global challenges (see, e.g. UCL, 2012a). Such transformative higher education would see its purpose beyond mere economic instrumentalism (Hampson, 2010a); rather, it would have “concern for the long-term well-being of individuals, society and biosphere” (Hampson, 2011, p. 310). Such a *higher* education would seek to honour notions of human potential in conjunction with advanced goals for research and teaching, ones which place planetary issues such as the ecological crisis and social injustice centre place. Through addressing such dimensions of learning as understanding, possible solutions and skill-building in relation to these, it would connect theory to practice at a all scales. In short, it would conduct a form of “wisdom inquiry” (Maxwell, 2007) addressing a “wisdom agenda” (UCL, 2012b).

This normative orientation can be understood as integrative in a non-reductionist sense (non-reductionist in the sense that several levels of understanding are necessary

for explanation – in contrast to the due quest of physics, for example). The orientation can be signified through a cluster of notions including *complex integration* (Hampson, 2011) – interpreting *the scholarship of integration* (Boyer, 1990) in light of paradigmatic complexity (Morin, 2007) – *eco-logics* (Hampson, 2012), *postformal integral* (Hampson, 2007, 2010b); and *integral pluralism* (Molz, 2009). Historically contextualised as part of a genealogy of integral thought including that regarding education (Hampson, 2010c; Molz and Hampson, 2010), complex integration embraces such understandings as transdisciplinarity (Nicolescu & Voss, 2002), meta-theory (Edwards, Molz & Kuepers, In Press), and vertical integration (Ferrel, Romero & Albareda, 2005). It can be adequately “underlaboured” by critical realism (Bhaskar, 1998) as its philosophy of science, one which has dedication to both a deep interpretation of reality and to emancipation as critical purpose at individual, social and “meta-reality” levels. Complex integration enables a rich “open” systemic approach to be employed in relation not only to curriculum design and teaching approach, but also in relation to the higher education system as a whole (Hampson, 2011). It would be oriented by a transformative approach to human identity (Hampson, 2005).

Embedded in this paradigm, researchers would explore challenging topics, such as: (i) problems that have clear questions but not clear answers, (ii) issues that have fuzzy questions, (iii) issues that cannot be resolved within discrete disciplines e.g. climate change and cultural change, (iv) topics lacking abundance of empirical data and/or prior research, which are now in “grey areas” of science, (v) questions that go against dominant paradigms and assumptions (e.g. in economic theory), (vi) exploring futures in addition to exploring the past. This would not be to *negate* mainstream research, but rather to empower underrepresented forms of scholarship including transdisciplinary research, action research, integral research, philosophies of science, and connections there between.

Structural considerations

There are numerous ways in which the institutionalisation of transformative research could be framed (e.g. Cockcroft, 1965; Leydesdorff 2001; Bhattacharya & Guriev, 2004). Given the basis of U4F as a new worldview, one framing could be research as *Worldview Transformation Lab*. This could be one set held within a larger schema involving two additional overlapping sets, namely those of the *Personal Transformation Lab* (in-house teaching/learning) and the *Social Transformation Lab* (cross-sectoral learning – as discussed below), respectively (Assenza, Hampson & Molz, 2012). Another framing could be research as a new form of independent “think tank” – one addressing global issues for the benefit of humanity and planet.

Numerous structural implications arise from the conceptual orientation of research indicated above. The strong call of transdisciplinarity, for example, would reduce the influence of disciplinary departments in favour of transdisciplinary centres. In the desired paradigm, research would be strongly problem-oriented rather than discipline-oriented, value-driven rather than value-neutral, and employed in the service of community (both local and global) and planet rather than in seeking knowledge for its own sake (although in certain contexts the latter would be understood as having long-term benefits to assist in problem-solving). Social innovative research would not only produce strictly academic outputs but also bridge the gap between academia and

practice through such media as policy proposals as well as new business models and investment plans.

Living a cloistered life, the traditional academic department can sometimes be an obstacle to interdisciplinary learning and productive problem-solving. Rather than a rigid hierarchical system of departments, the Worldview Transformation Lab could be composed of a network of centres organized with minimal bureaucratic structure. Gathering researchers together to address specific societal, ecological or other problems facing the local or global community and planet, the centres would context and circumnavigate the artificial barriers between disciplines. Through the intersection of multiple perspectives and approaches, new theoretical insights and unanticipated practical solutions could be expected to emerge.

The number of these units could fluctuate according to the changing nature of problems. At the same time, a permanent coordinating centre would be in place to address long-term challenges, prevent fragmentation of research, and avoid duplication of work. Care would be taken about the manner of assessment, especially avoiding a purely quantitative assessment of how many articles published, how many conferences attended, etc.

Instead of creating and participating in projects mainly for the purpose of securing income (which often leads to quality being compromised), researchers who meet quality criteria would be guaranteed certain basic revenue (e.g. tenured positions) based on tailor-made output agreements that ensure a match between talents and personal inclinations on the one hand and the actual academic activities on the other hand. This arrangement would prevent the situation of researchers constantly seeking ad-hoc involvement in short-term projects simply to maintain their standard of living. At the same time, it would create an environment suitable for in-depth, long-term, creative research independent of undue economic pressure.

As indicated above, one of the applications of research would be to help orient teaching and learning.

Teaching and learning

U4F teaching and learning is firstly explored with respect to conceptual orientations. Various structural considerations are then discussed.

Conceptual considerations

Numerous integral or complex integrative approaches can be useful with respect to teaching and learning. These include regenerations of under-utilised understandings from classical philosophy, as well as novel approaches.

An example of a useful classical understanding here is that of Aristotle's (350 BCE/2002) identification of five aspects of intellectual virtue, namely, *sophia* (theoretical wisdom), *phronesis* (practical judgment), *nous* (intuitive intellect), *episteme* (scientific knowledge) and *techne* (art/craft), respectively.

An example of a novel approach is that the following four dimensions of learning

could be included in higher education curricula: (i) problem analysis, (ii) future scenario analysis, (iii) practical skills development, and (iv) character development. The first forms part of conventional approaches, whilst the last three tend to be significantly under-enacted: futures studies does still not have sufficient institutional traction as an academic field, skill development (such as found in apprenticeships) is often divorced from theoretical wisdom, whilst character development – a goal of liberal arts education – is increasingly marginalised in favour of more measurable outcomes. U4F would seek to rectify these imbalances.

Through its person-centred and normative character, the identity of transformative teaching thus begins to resonate more strongly with coaching, therapy, and other approaches that happen mostly outside academia and need to be brought in. All act as catalysts for transformation (albeit at different levels and in different contexts).

Structural considerations

A possible structural tool regarding contexts of learning would be to take the notion of a modular system (Williams & Fry, 1994) and add an integrative dimension. This would resolve the possibility of arbitrariness (see, e.g. Bridges 2000). The integration could be effected by a mentor who (i) at the beginning of study helps facilitate meaning-making in the student through bringing together the student's particular set of interests with an integrative notion of coordinating the prospective courses, (ii) acts as a mentor-supervisor throughout the student's study, and (iii) at the end of study, acts as supervisor for a final – “transversal” – course for the student (unique to each) for which the intention would be to bring together understandings arising from all the modules in which the student has engaged.

The general idea of integrative educational contracts between an individual student and a teacher is that it would seek to find connection between the student's own interests and preferences and the assurance of quality in the educational process. The educational contracts could be evaluated and reformulated regularly by students and teachers to reflect changing preferences of the students and the university. The flexibility of an integrative modular system would be particularly suitable for address of community issues and other types of focus in which there are quickly changing issues.

Regarding quality of engagement, the current system of higher education tends toward an experience of “information overload” for many students where quantity of information is valued over quality of information or depth of learning. Often teachers are aware only of the teaching load in their own courses and are insufficiently aware of the *overall* reading load of students across the curriculum (Kember, 2004). A solution to the above situation could be that there are fewer readings than conventionally held. There could be instituted a maximum reading load per study day coordinated university-wide. This could be facilitated by a “student learning optimizer” who could take responsibility for regulating and controlling the assignment load across the curriculum. Accordingly, there could be a shift from shallow learning to deep learning. Currently, conventional mores hold that students are not required to rewrite things that they have written. Comments might be added but continued learning on the same material is not facilitated. In contrast, the new situation would be that students would be requested to continually edit and re-work

their texts. This would both improve the quality and style of writing and also facilitate deeper engagement with the content.

With respect to type of examination, conventional assessment tends to only cover a narrow range of skills. (Wiggins, 1993; Gronlund, 1998). U4F could offer far richer assessment methods, such as multi-source assessment methods (evaluation by self, peers, teachers etc.), and “reverse examinations” in which students ask teachers questions. Assessments could also be more integrated – both “spatially” (across the curriculum) and longitudinally.

A crowdsourcing cost reduction system could be introduced to implement improvements of financial and bureaucratic procedures suggested by students and employees. This idea is equivalent to kaizen, the Japanese concept of continual improvement and reduction of inefficiencies. In U4F, the emphasis would be on the bottom-up process – on the assumption that students and employees might often know the best how to make the educational process more effective.

An inseparable part of the curriculum would be a systematic and intensive involvement of students in *research* – in accordance with their skills and knowledge level so that time and work invested into teaching and learning would produce outputs that are valuable beyond the confines of the classroom.

Work-education relationships

Work-education relationships involving U4F can be exemplified through two different dimensions: cross-sectoral learning and the idea of “job-education swops.”

Cross-sectoral learning: “Social transformation labs”

Cross-sectoral learning refers to the gamut of facilitated learning situations beyond the confines of higher educational institutions. Examples include: transformative community learning, engagement between researchers and leader-practitioners, and the facilitation of transformative learning in contexts which specifically bring together different societal sectors, such as that between education and community, business and government.

U4F would place a high value on this form of service to community (addressing ecological resilience, social well-being and human potential) because it would recognise that there is generally an under-regard for such learning contexts. In contrast, we believe that significant social transformation can occur through empowering deep learning in these in-between contexts.

The cross-sectoral learning environment would also be modular in that it would have the ability to be flexible and adapt quickly to changing circumstances and opportunities. It would also have the ability to propagate ways of working that have proved to be successful in eliciting transformative change. As with research and in-house teaching, this domain could operate at any scale. A suitable term for such cross-sectoral learning spaces might be “social transformation labs.”

The orientation of U4F toward servicing the community and planet would be

systematically reflected in its curriculum. Students would be encouraged to think of and implement practical applications of their growing skill sets so that their effort is not wasted but channelled into solving local and global problems.

Practical examples of such involvement could be economics students helping to establish small businesses or improving fundraising strategies of civil society organizations, ecology students exploring ways to reduce the ecological footprint of the community, politics students engaging in watchdog activities, and IT students advancing digitization of state administration.

Cross-sectoral curricula would include forms of participatory education that enable harvesting students' potential, e.g. service learning, clinical learning, internships in business and civil society organizations. Apart from their immediate value, these activities could have a significant transformative aspect as well, namely, to show students that they are able to effect change in the outer world by altering the ways in which they process the world internally.

Last but not least, the aforementioned modularisation has the potential to "tailor" the curriculum to fit the needs of university's business partners by putting together various elements from existing educational structures (Bridges, 2000).

"Job/education swops"

The basic idea of "job/education swops" (JES) would be that employees who would otherwise become unemployed would be offered educational packages lasting up to one year (certificate), one to two years (MA), or three years (PhD). The JES could be structured with or without a guarantee of return to the employer. With guarantee, it would work like a sabbatical or corporate training; without guarantee, the JES would "soften the layoff" by providing an alternative to unemployment. The decision of whether to accept a JES or take a severance package would rest with the employees.

In traditional Executive Education programs, the decision makers for the purchase of programs are usually mid-to-upper level managers. They tend to buy programs that promise a direct and short-term impact on the bottom line. In the case of JES the decision makers buying the programs would be the to-be-laid off employees, many of which have more personal and long-term interests.

JES would also represent an opportunity to position the university as a responsible provider, offering a solution to socio-economic problems both to corporate clients and to their employees through benefits that can be defined on a client-to-client and program-to-program basis. The JES programs would be alliances with businesses, which would increase the likelihood that students would choose programs at that particular university, especially if some discounts or other benefits would be offered and if the timing and process of admissions are flexible.

JES could have positive effects for corporations such as (a) improving internal productivity and motivation; (b) reducing productivity-undermining dynamics in downsizing processes such as fear, frustration, paralysis, unhealthy competition and sabotage; (c) enhancing external reputation as a responsible employer; and (d) reducing costs of legal challenges. Already today, many professionals are using their

savings or severance package for further education. JES would offer this option already at the level of the company, thus avoiding unemployment status and, if possible, ensuring a continued association with the company. Additionally, the advantage for taxpayers would be to avoid pay-out of unemployment benefits in case that the company does not sever its ties with the employee.

Implementation scenarios

There could be two general scenarios for implementing U4F: (i) a greenfield project entailing establishing a new institution and (ii) a brownfield project applying U4F ideas in an existing higher education institution. The former scenario could be considered the ideal situation. However, it would involve substantive infrastructure investment. The new university could be funded through grants and soft loans. At the same time, its operations should be essentially independent of political and private interests. An autonomous legal form might therefore be a suitable way forward.

There are two general aspects we consider important. Firstly, the infrastructure should be designed using ecological principles. The CIRS building in The University of British Columbia, Vancouver, indicates what is possible in this regard. Secondly, it should aesthetically reflect an artistic, organic character. The infrastructure could be built with natural materials, harmoniously integrated into the landscape, working with the conditions and materials given by the local ecosystem, and combining ancient design principles with thoroughgoing ecologically-informed design. All facilities should elicit a comfortable feeling and have imaginative interior design; they should also enable due sociability and privacy. There would be no undue polluting traffic. Gardens, arts and sports facilities, and the theming of spaces would be emphasised; in contrast, there would be a minimisation of soulless rectilinearity. A task for architects and interior designers would be to foster creativity in the users of the spaces through such means as offering “good vibe” designs. The overarching principle is that there should be a correspondence between outer architecture and the “inner architecture” of transformative educational philosophy, including notions of “meta-design” which facilitate *currere* – co-evolving curriculum (see, e.g. Giaccardi & Fischer, 2008)

Ideally, the U4F would be a core of even broader project of a “Community for the Future” that would integrate best practice of eco-villages and other self-sufficient communities around the world. Such a community could connect a number of institutions, including kindergarten, school, old age home, organic farm, and innovative businesses as well as private homes.

In a brownfield scenario, U4F ideas could be systematically implemented by all units of an existing university in a strategy akin to a corporate change initiative. This could be called a macro scale variation of the brownfield scenario. This would eliminate the need to establish a new education institution and thus reduce the costs of the endeavour. An experimental (meso scale) approach would be to create a new unit within an existing university rather than reforming the whole institution. This could be a new faculty, department, institute or centre, which would explore the concept before applying it more broadly across the institution. Finally, the suggestions contained in this chapter could be launched on a micro (incremental) scale.

Ends-in-view

The above thoughts regarding U4F as a new type of higher education system – one suitable for work, life and purpose in the 21st Century – indicate the salience of establishing a dedicated research focus regarding such transformative potential. This could be complemented by other forms of discursive output – notably documentation for funding – to enable such ideas to coalesce into actual manifestation. It is hoped that the exploration above indicates a sense of vision, both conceptually and structurally, with respect to this prospect.

As a seed project intended to nurture such a prospect, the three-year (2011-13) EU-funded School for Transformative Leadership (currently located at Palacky University, Czech Republic) is, at the time of writing, a lifeworld case study of an attempt to implement such an alternative higher education system (Phase One of the U4F initiative). The authors hope that the second phase of the U4F initiative builds upon the successes and learns from the challenges the current phase.

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