



Locks & keys: Re-thinking (higher) education

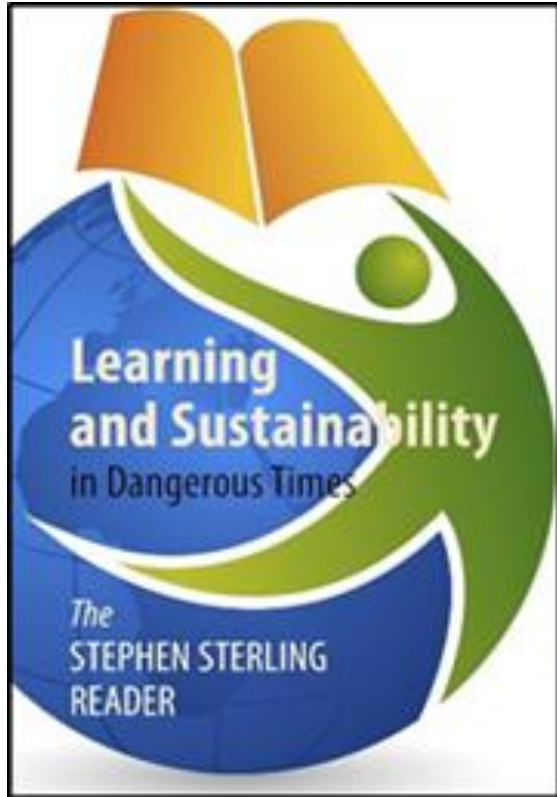
- inspiring transformation for a more sustainable future

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Learning and Sustainability in Dangerous Times



‘Aims to contribute a cogent perspective on how learning and education can make a decisive difference to securing the future in an increasingly uncertain and threatened world.’

‘...as timely as any book can ever be’

- Prof David Orr

<https://www.agendapub.com/page/detail/learning-and-sustainability-in-dangerous-times/?k=9781788216913>

This presentation also draws on my paper:

*‘Truly transformative? Why ESD falls short in epochal times’, *Journal of Education for Sustainable Development* (currently in review).*

Key question

How should—and how can—education and learning be re-thought and re-configured...

...to make a significant and central contribution to achieving a more sustainable and just world?



Same issue – *but viewed from a deeper level*

What is the nature of the change of consciousness that appears necessary to achieving a safe, more ecologically sustainable and liveable society – which can both survive and thrive?

What changes may be required in the way we view and practise education and learning if they are to contribute fundamentally to such a change of consciousness?



And a question for HE...

‘How can universities urgently transform their ethos, policies and practices to function in service of the survival and wellbeing of humanity and the planet, at a time of growing instability and existential threat?’

Sterling, S. (2021), ‘Concern, Conception, and Consequence: Re-thinking the Paradigm of Higher Education in Dangerous Times’.

Front. Sustain. 2:743806. doi: 10.3389/frsus.2021.743806



International Commission on the Futures of Education



REPORT FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION ON THE FUTURES OF EDUCATION

‘A global initiative to reimagine how knowledge and learning can shape the future of humanity and the planet’.

‘...to shape peaceful, just and sustainable futures, education must itself be transformed’. (p.6).

*‘...education systems often reproduce and perpetuate the very conditions that threaten our shared futures....limiting education’s potential to be **truly transformative**’ (p.11)*

ICFE, (2021) *Reimagining our futures together: A new social contract for education*, International Commission on the Futures of Education, November 2021, UNESCO <file:///F:/UNESCO%202022/Futures%20of%20ed%20rep%20summary%20Nov21.pdf>



*'We face an existential choice between continuing on an unsustainable path or radically changing course....
Education is crucial to this change of course....Yet education itself must be transformed.'*

- UNESCO (2024), Concept Note, 'Renewing Education to Transform the Future', UNESCO.

https://www.unesco.org/sites/default/files/medias/fichiers/2024/07/ROK%20Forum%20-Concept%20Note_8July24.pdf

UNEP Statement to the Plenary of the Summit of the Future 23 Sept 24

‘As environmental, technological and societal change join forces to disrupt human, planetary and economic health, we must not just prepare for the future. We must shape it...’

<https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/statements/unep-statement-plenary-summit-future>



Locks & keys – issue 1



1) Threatened futures

Artwork: Designed by Freepik
<https://www.freepik.com/>



Recognise:

the urgent existential threat to liveability and survival, and the possibility of systemic breakdown

Key: Embrace context in purpose, policy and practice - particularly with regard to planetary boundaries



Locks & keys – issue 2



2) Worldview blindness

Recognise:

the roots of the cultural paradigm(s) that affect educational thinking, purpose, policy and practice

Key: Explore and embrace systemic/relational/ecological perspectives, ideas and practices



Locks & keys – issue 3



3) Labels and boundaries

Recognise:

the limits and constraints of labels and boundaries

Key: Explore inter- and trans-disciplinarity, multiple knowledges appropriate to complexity and rapid socio-ecological change – and engage with social movements



Locks & keys – issue 4



4) Instrumentalism

Recognise:

the limits and affects of educational purposes that stress outcome and product over sound process

Key: achieve synergy and balance between intrinsic and instrumental educational values



Locks & keys – issue 5

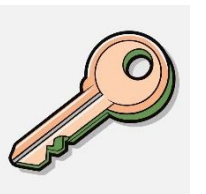


5) Transformation misconstrued

Recognise:

-that transformation means transformation, i.e. deep learning and change, not reformation!

Key: explore the meaning and implications and processes of transformative learning (second and third order learning) in ed systems and learners



Locks & keys – issue 6



6) Accommodation and compromise

Recognise:

that ‘embedding ESD’ needs to be regarded as the precursor of deeper systemic change. It should be a potent catalyst rather than a stabilising and neutral force

Key: explore organisational learning and systemic change as an ongoing inquiry - to build a positive and transformative whole institutional response to the (un) sustainability challenge



Locks & keys – issue 7



7) Ambivalence: is the agenda ESD, or whole system change?

Recognise:

– that whole system change is required, and that ESD can either be an important vector, or a diversion from the greater challenge

Key: embed and operationalise ESD as a catalyst towards systemic change based on a relational paradigm



Locks & keys – issue 8



8) Individualistic focus

Recognise:

–that the emphasis on the competitive individual learner is woefully inadequate given the urgent need for societal change and social learning

Key: embrace co-inquiry, collaborative learning, critical learning systems...



Locks & keys – issue 9



9) The development model

Recognise:

–that the dominant development model based on endless material growth and extraction is having a catastrophic degenerative effect on people, communities and planet.

Key: critique ‘sustainable development’ where its co-opted and compromised. Explore and engage in building regenerative and resilient economies, ecologies and communities



Locks & keys – issue 10



10) Purpose and the Great Leap

Recognise that:

the purpose of education must now be intentionally and ethically aligned towards avoiding socio-ecological breakdown through helping ensure breakthrough, by means both of critique and positive regenerative practice particularly at local and regional level

Key: urgently align purpose, policy and practice towards societal learning for surviving and thriving – the ‘Great Leap’ or ‘Great Transition’...the common good.

Stephen Sterling:

'Re-thinking education for a more sustainable world'

<https://www.sustainableeducation.co.uk>

