



UNLEARNING SUSTAINABILITY

**Decolonial paradigm shifts towards plural knowledge ecologies,
reflexive learning, and collective design communities**

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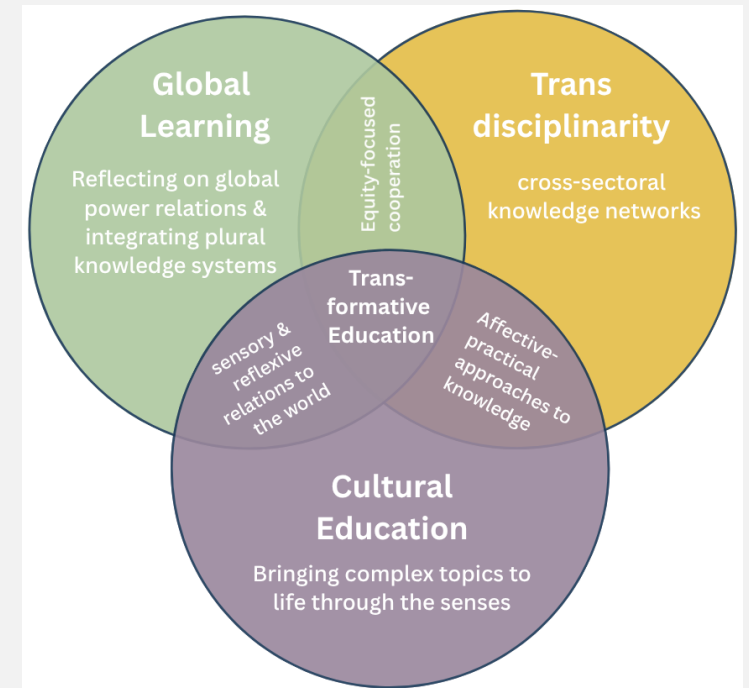
TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION

Traditional, discipline-based models of knowledge are not adequate for addressing complex global challenges

- Transformative learning addresses **institutional and societal change processes** and focuses on the connection between knowledge, attitudes, and practical skills
(Bergmüller & Singer-Brodowski, 2023)
- **Creating spaces** to analyze and experiment with other forms of seeing/thinking and being/relating to one another
(Andreotti, 2006)
- Support through **connecting approaches** such as global education concepts, transdisciplinarity and cultural education, to foster transformative higher education
(Stiegel & Dettlof, 2026)

CONNECTING APPROACHES

- **Global education concepts** are linked to an interest in global social justice and an understanding of worldwide challenges (Gaudelli, 2003; Bentall et al., 2014)
- **Transdisciplinarity** integrates academic, practical, and experience-based knowledge to collaboratively address real-world problems through co-productive processes (Lang et al., 2012)
- **Cultural education** creates spaces for resonance by combining perception, reflection, and creativity, thereby fostering a new quality of engagement with the world (Rosa, 2024)



(Stiegel & Dettlof 2026)

WHAT MIGHT WE NEED TO UNLEARN?

Educational interventions should emphasize “unlearning”
(Spivak, 2004)

- **ONE WAY OF KNOWING**

Who decides what counts as legitimate knowledge?

- **ONE WAY OF LEARNING**

Is sustainability mainly something we need to *know*?

- **ONE WAY OF SOLVING**

Who defines the problems — and who designs the solutions?

INTERDISCIPLINARY DIALOGUE



Ecology, Global Learning, Higher Education



Pedagogy, Cultural Science, Artistic Practice

Literature-based conceptual synthesis:

- Transformative Education/ ESD
- Global education approaches
- Transdisciplinarity
- Cultural education

Three paradigm shifts

Conceptual framework — not yet empirically validated or broadly co-created

THE FRAMEWORK AT A GLANCE

PARADIGM SHIFTS	FROM	TOWARDS
Who knows	One-dimensional knowledge orders	Plural knowledge ecologies
How do we learn	Cognitive knowledge transmission	Reflexive & experiential world relations
Who decides	Isolated institutional actors	Collective design communities

(Stiegel & Dettlof 2026)

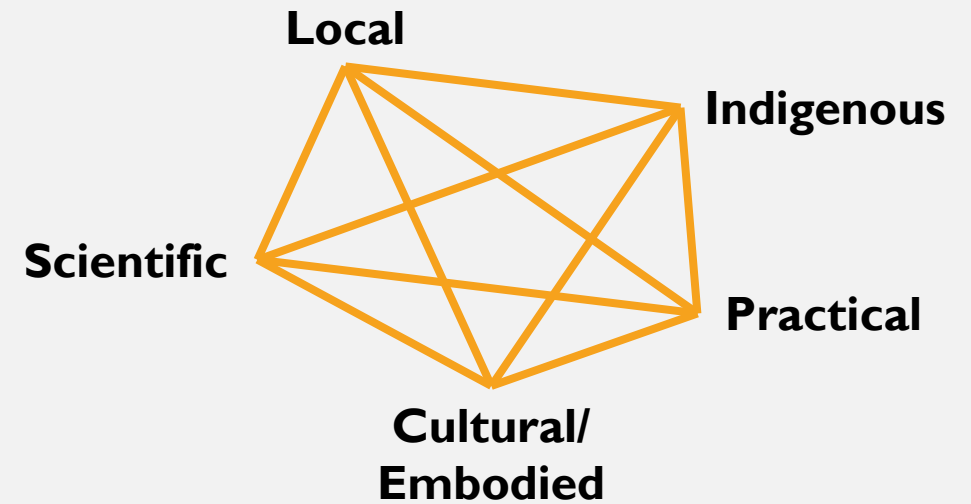
WHO KNOWS

From one-dimensional
knowledge orders



Plural knowledge
ecologies

Web of knowledge:



- ✓ Relational, dialogic, and context-sensitive forms of knowledge production

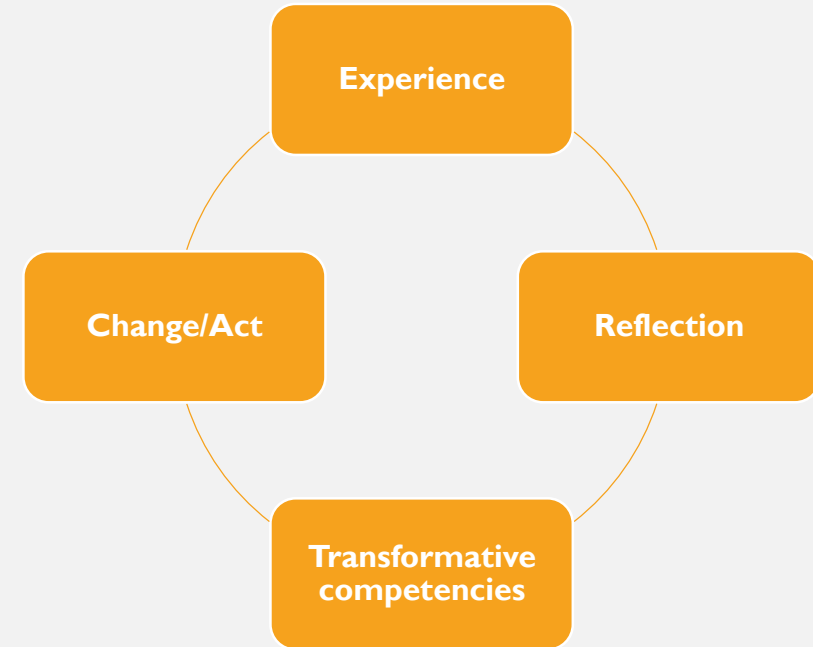
HOW DO WE LEARN

From cognitive
transmission



**Reflexive & experiential
world relations**

Transformative approach to education:



- ✓ Change of perspective, empathy, awareness of complexity, critical thinking, and cooperation are important for shaping sustainable futures

WHO DECIDES

From isolated
institutional actors



Collective design
communities

Aspects of the connecting transformative approaches:

Global Education

Inclusion of
marginalized
perspectives

Broadening
through various
future and natural
conditions

Trans- disciplinarity

Collaboration
between academia,
professional
community, and
civil society

Universities as
places for shaping
society's futures
together

Cultural Education

Creating co-
creative and
experimental
spaces for learning
and research

Collaborative
creation of
narratives and
visions of the
future

- ✓ Dialogic, diversity-oriented and participatory forms of collaboration

CO-CREATIVE REFLECTION

Ask yourself:

- 1) Whose knowledge is missing from your institution?
- 2) What do learners need to experience, encounter or question that they currently don't?
- 3) Who is missing from decisions about sustainability?

Particify



Then answer here:

What would need to change? What could this look like in your context?

WHOLE INSTITUTION APPROACH

Structural condition for
connecting the three
paradigm shifts



A whole institution approach integrates sustainability into all aspects of an organization.

DECOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES

TRANSDISCIPLINARITY

- Inclusive transdisciplinarity views knowledge production as a dialogic process that places local perspectives & indigenous knowledge systems at the center (de Sousa Santos 2014, Odora Hoppers 2019)
- Signs of a stronger link between transdisciplinary research and issues of institutional reform and global justice (Schneidewind 2016)

GLOBAL EDUCATION CONCEPTS

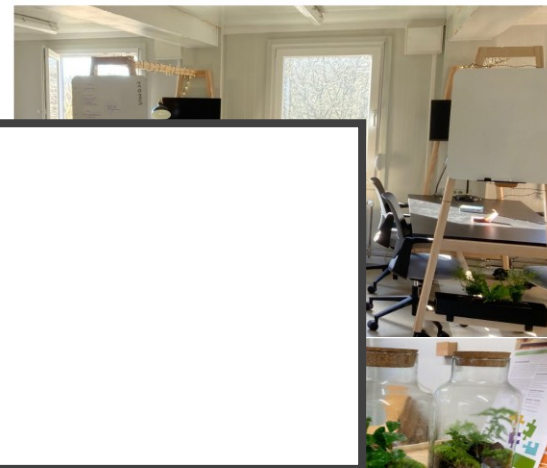
- Decolonization in education is only possible if partnerships between the North and the South are based on the equitable exchange of knowledge, ethical responsibility, and the production of local knowledge (Adu & Olowu 2022)
- Traditional South African values such as *Ubuntu*, community, and care already contain elements of Global Citizen Education (Biao 2024)

CULTURAL EDUCATION

- Less firmly embedded in the institutional framework in many countries of the Global South (UNESCO 2025)
- Vibrant tradition of community-based cultural work rooted in tradition (Culture2030Goal Campaign 2019)
- Need for context-specific, culturally sensitive educational approaches that respect and incorporate local traditions, ways of life, and needs (Bharucha & Siege 2013)

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