# Engaged Leaders Transforming Education

Transformative (T) learning in times of climate change

Heila Lotz-Sisitka (*h.lotz-sisitka@ru.ac.za*), Dylan McGarry, David Kronlid Injairu-Kulundu-Bolus, Gibson Mphepo, Sosten Chiota, Jane Burt, Anna James, Sarah van Borek, Mutizwa Mukute, Kuany Kir, Arjen Wals, Stefan Bengtson, Martha Chaves, Thomas McIntyre, Duc Tuan Tran, Million Belay and many more who have since joined the programme.
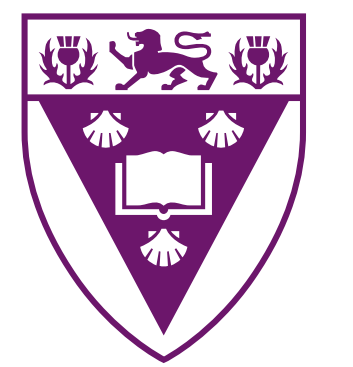
RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The need for more radical forms of learning-centred transformation is increasingly recognised in transformations to sustainability discourse. Yet these approaches to learning remain under-developed and undertheorised and limited research has been done on this type of learning, or on how such learning emerges or can be expanded to strengthen agency for sustainability transformations at multi-levels.

In 2016 the International Science Council called for projects to develop social scientific insights into Transformations to Sustainability, with the T-learning project being one of three funded (out of over 500 applications internationally). The programme is still ongoing.

RESEARCH PROGRAMME

Working with and across civil society, youth, academic, government and community partners across nine countries in diverse areas that are vulnerable to arising impacts at the climate-energy-food-water security and social justice nexus the project aimed to 1) initiate, 2) frame and 3) investigate expansive, transgressive approaches to learning in selected community sites in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. The project develops theory, methodology and practice, especially transgressive learning theory and practice and generative, interventionist, learning-centred research methodologies.

WHAT DID THIS PROGRAMME ACHIEVE?

Local learning actions, and networked learning actions formed the focus of two different types of case studies. Case sites are identified in consultation with participating communities and organisations, who work with T-learning researchers to co-define matters of concern, 2) identify potentially catalytic focus areas or practices for further expansive learning within collaborating communities of co-researchers, 3) develop situated T-learning methodologies for learning-led change, and 4) undertake reflexive reviews of these processes of learning with emphasis on observing and commenting on power relations, contextually relevant debates around T-learning (e.g. pluralism, decolonial sensibilities, complexity etc.) and emerging sustainability outcomes emerging in practice. Theoretical and methodological reflections are captured in a number of publications, pointing to the need for expanding metaphors of learning from acquisition and participation to expansion and learning 'what is not yet there'.

All case studies show evidence of practical outcomes for communities and sustainability, for example in the Mekong Delta networks of 'scientific farmers' emerged that are mobilising locally engaged and informed action for climate change adaptation. The projects overall evidence high levels of creative engagement with sustainability concerns, leaving a legacy of richly textured and interesting generative research initiatives that model research that can be critical and deeply reflexive, while also being co-engaged and transgressively transformative. In total, the project worked directly with approximately 3200 people in various co-engaged T-learning processes in the nine countries, attracting a large number of post-graduate and early career researchers (43) who were directly involved in contributing to the project outputs. Since the first phase of the project a further 40+ researchers have contributed knowledge to this project. The project website (www.transgressivelearning.org) offers a public report and ongoing archive of this work.

A refined framing of T-learning articulating dynamics of transformative, transgressive, transdisciplinary and together learning has been developed, with application value for curriculum and learning programmes emerging. Initial programme insights are being taken forward in a four-year UKRI programme on 'Transforming Education for Sustainable Futures' developed in partnership with the University of Bristol (UK) and research hubs in South Africa, Rwanda, India and Somalia. The results of this latter phase are currently in development (www.tesf.org).

The work on transformative learning in times of climate change continues, with a book currently in development.

Transformative learning in transformations to sustainability involves expansions that are transgressive, transdisciplinary and together

transformative
encourage cognitive and emotional perspective shifts that potentially lead to political/social-ecological/eco-cultural relational change necessary for care, protection and affirmation of species being on our planet
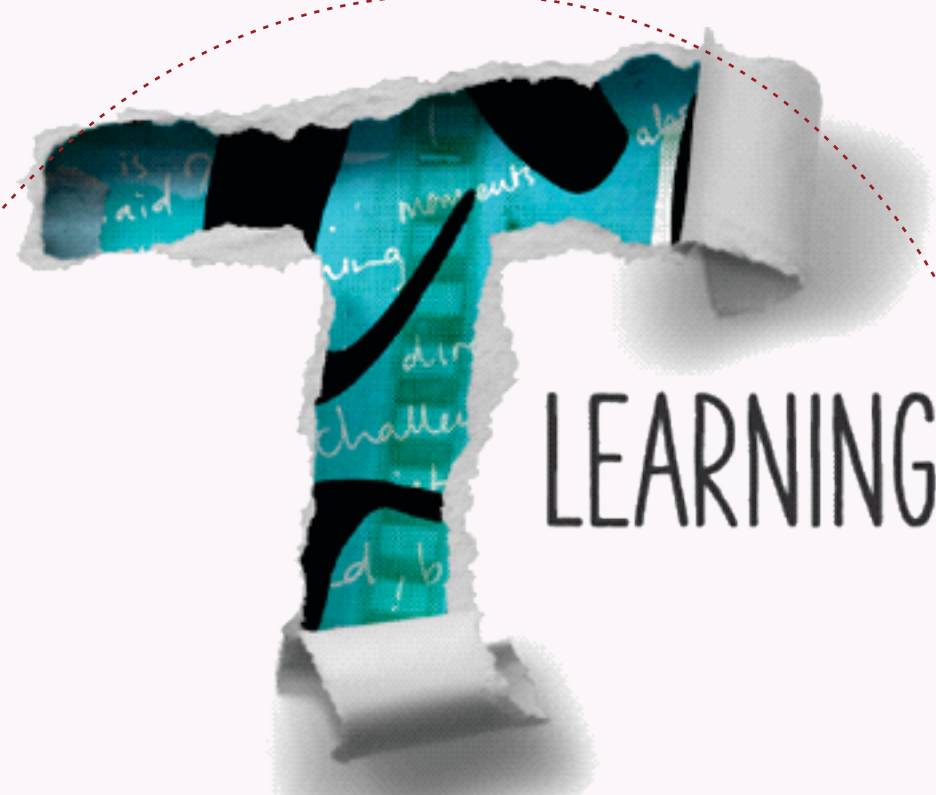
transgressive
explicitly challenge taken for granted normalised practices, activity, cultures, views and systems that have become oppressive, discriminatory and unsustainable with critique, empathy, care, possibility knowledge, reflexivity and regenerative sensibilities

transdisciplinary
crossing boundaries to co-create new concepts and forms of human activity in iterative and collaborative ways at multiple levels; weaving inter-disciplinary synthesis back into reality via transformative praxis engagements

together
working with others to right and re-write the wrongs, strengthen collective emancipatory agency, ethico-political commitments to the common good, and system wide change

application to ALL learning systems, curricula, processes and praxis in context of transformations to sustainability

Source: Lotz-Sisitka (in press)

All reports, tools and resources, including the open access online course, can be accessed via the dedicated T-learning website

environmental learning research centre

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Transformations to Sustainability