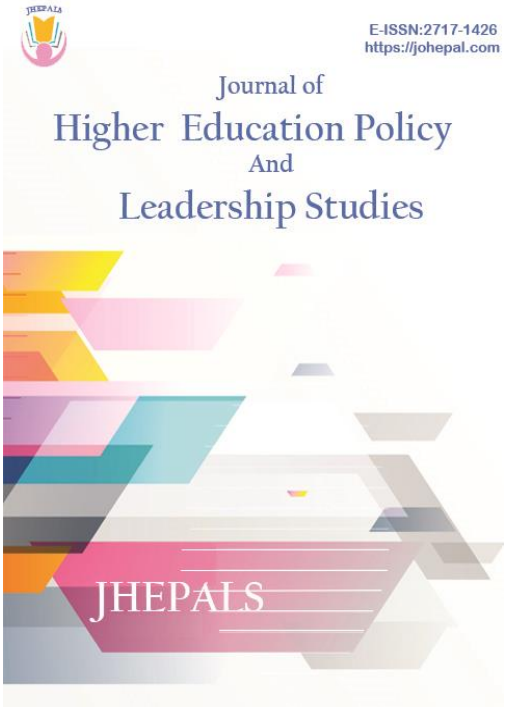
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Book Review: **Higher Education for Good: Teaching and Learning Futures**

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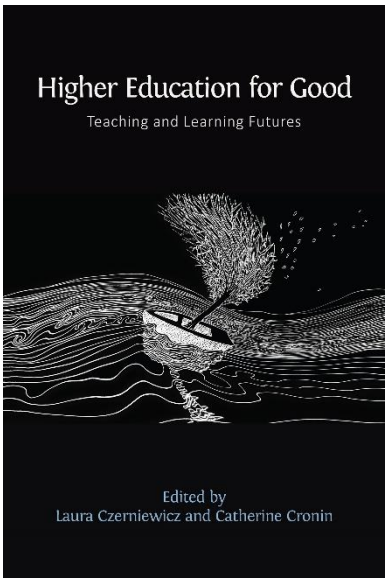
Book Review

Higher Education for Good: Teaching and Learning Futures

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Higher Education for Good: Teaching and Learning Futures (Cronin & Czerniewicz, 2023) is an ambitious and deeply reflective collective manifesto that reimagines higher education as a site of justice, care, and collective flourishing in an era of profound uncertainty. Bringing together seventy-one contributors—scholars, practitioners, artists, and students—from across continents and disciplines, the volume resists the narrowing effects of neoliberalism that increasingly commodify, surveil, and fragment academic life. Across its 27 chapters,

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presented through a rich mix of essays, speculative fiction, poetry, and visual works, the book advances a radically plural and hopeful vision of teaching and learning futures. Rather than accepting dominant metrics of productivity, competition, and performativity, the contributors foreground relationality, openness, decolonization, data justice, ecological responsibility, and ethics of care as foundational principles for higher education. In doing so, the volume offers a powerful counter-discourse to what Connell (2019) describes as the "corporate university," reclaiming higher education as a public good grounded in democratic values and collective responsibility. Its open-access availability further enacts its political commitment to knowledge as a shared, accessible resource. Both scholarly and activist in orientation, *Higher Education for Good* functions as a creative and intellectual blueprint for reimagining universities not merely as sites of credentialing, but as humane, ethical, and future-facing institutions capable of nurturing hope, solidarity, and sustainable learning in turbulent times.

Theoretical and Contextual Foundations

The Foreword by Jonathan Jansen situates the project within the long struggle between critique and institutional inertia. He warns that "the neoliberal university, managerialism, and academic capitalism" have colonized the language of higher education, reducing learning to metrics and teaching to transactions (p. 27). Yet Jansen's reflection on "pockets of freedom" (p. 29) sets the tone for the book's dialectical stance—recognizing the structural weight of neoliberalism while seeking cracks through which transformative light may enter. The editors extend this metaphor in their opening essay, drawing on Leonard Cohen's lyric that "there is a crack in everything; that's how the light gets in" (p. 37). This framing establishes hope not as naive optimism but as what Paulo Freire (1994) called "an ontological need," a praxis that binds critique to imagination.

The Preface by Carolina Guzmán-Valenzuela deepens this orientation by foregrounding the global asymmetries that shape higher education: "ecological and climate crises, the COVID-19 pandemic, wars, and armed conflicts" that exacerbate inequalities between the Global North and South (p. 31). She notes that universities have become "complicit" in reproducing marketized narratives (p. 33) and calls for "a new set of values" centered on generosity, democracy, and reparation (p. 34). This perspective aligns with the argument of Ilieva-Trichkova et al., (2024), who contend that reclaiming higher education as a global common good necessitates dismantling epistemic hierarchies and foregrounding relational ethics across diverse contexts.

Methodological and Stylistic Innovations

Methodologically, the book rejects the homogenizing tendencies of academic publishing. Instead of imposing a singular theoretical orthodoxy, it embraces plural epistemologies, genres, and aesthetics. Several chapters employ autoethnography, speculative fiction, or poetic reflection to unsettle academic convention. For example, Jess Auerbach Jahajeeah's "A Meditation on Global Further Education, in Haiku Form" (p. 199) collapses disciplinary boundaries through poetic brevity, while Macgilchrist and Costello's "Imagination and

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Justice" (p. 445) uses Africanfuturist fiction to teach futures thinking. These creative interventions are not ornamental; they exemplify what Bell Hook (1994) termed *engaged pedagogy*—a process of knowing that is both affective and political.

The editors' methodological pluralism also reflects a *design justice* sensibility (p. 373), particularly in chapters such as Ramparsad Banwari et al.'s "A Design Justice Approach to Universal Design for Learning" (p. 373) and Kuhn et al.'s "Critical Data Literacies for Good" (p. 491). These contributions foreground participatory epistemologies and data ethics from the Global South, challenging the Eurocentric bias of educational technology research. The methodological richness thus becomes an ethical statement: form mirrors purpose, and diversity of method enacts epistemic justice.

Key Themes and Arguments

Across its five sections, the book develops three interlocking themes—decolonial re-imagination, pedagogies of care, and technological ethics—that collectively re-articulate the meaning of "good" in higher education.

Decolonial and Commons-Based Futures

Several essays interrogate the colonial residues of knowledge production and propose alternative imaginaries. Dina Zoe Belluigi's "Why Decolonising 'Knowledge' Matters" insists that decolonization cannot be reduced to content diversification but must involve "deliberations for educators on that made fragile" (p. 137)—that is, the epistemic vulnerabilities produced by colonial modernity. Similarly, Jim Luke's "Closing the Factory" envisions universities as "commons" rather than "factories," reclaiming education as collective stewardship (p. 161). These chapters signal a move from property-based to relational epistemologies, resonating with Andreotti et al. (2021), who emphasize that envisioning decolonial futures requires nurturing humility, interdependence, and relational accountability.

Pedagogies of Care and Hope

Another recurrent motif is *care*—not as sentimentality but as a radical pedagogical stance. Chan, Ghali, and Prinsloo's "Imagining Higher Education as Infrastructures of Care" (p. 111) reframes universities as "ecologies of interdependence," aligning with Tronto's (2013) ethic of care as public responsibility. Likewise, Hordatt Gentles' "One-One Coco Full Basket" (p. 473) draws on Caribbean traditions of communal learning to articulate a "critical pedagogy of caring." These chapters resist the depersonalization of academic life by re-embedding learning within relationships of empathy, vulnerability, and reciprocity.

The affective dimension is further amplified in Spelic's "Counters to Despair" (p. 81), which narrates micro-acts of resistance that sustain educators' well-being. Her call for "small hope-building practices" (p. 83) complements Bowles's reflection on vulnerability in "The Good Future for Australian Higher Education" (p. 353). Together, they present care not as peripheral emotion but as epistemic infrastructure—a condition for knowledge creation itself.

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Technological Ethics and Data Justice

Given the accelerating platformization of education, the book's treatment of technology is remarkably nuanced. Pechenkina's "Artificial Intelligence for Good?" (p. 239) interrogates AI through a *data justice* lens, exposing how algorithmic decision-making reproduces inequities even as it promises personalization. Kuhn, Pete, and Raffaghelli (p. 491) extend this critique by outlining "critical data literacies" that empower educators and students to interrogate datafication. These chapters resonate with Williamson and Piattoeva's (2019) caution that data infrastructures are not neutral but "govern educational futures through prediction and control." By foregrounding agency and ethics, *Higher Education for Good* refuses the technological determinism that pervades ed-tech discourse.

Dialogues with Existing Scholarship

Cronin and Czerniewicz's editorial philosophy situates the book within the expanding corpus of *critical higher education futures* literature, alongside works such as *The Good University* (Connell, 2019) and *Resisting Neoliberalism in Higher Education* (Bottrell & Manathunga, 2019). Yet, what distinguishes this volume is its intersectional, global, and creative plurality. Unlike earlier critiques that focus predominantly on Anglo-American contexts, this book foregrounds perspectives from Africa, Latin America, and Asia. The inclusion of authors such as Mpine Makoe (p. 303) and Patricia Arinto (p. 557) diversifies epistemic geographies, offering what Khoo (p. 91) calls "public goods in the neoliberal twilight zone." This cross-continental dialogue operationalizes the editors' commitment to "context and intersectionality" (p. 37). Moreover, the book's epistemological stance parallels Freire's (1994) notion of *radical hope*—hope as an act of resistance against dehumanization. Many chapters explicitly invoke hope not as escapism but as praxis. Cronin and Czerniewicz define it as "light" that emerges through cracks of structural despair (p. 37). This metaphorical and conceptual anchoring gives the collection coherence despite its diversity.

Critical Appraisal: Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

The book's foremost strength lies in its *polyphony*: seventy-one contributors across twenty-seven chapters construct a mosaic of theory, praxis, and art. The open-access format (CC BY-NC 4.0) democratizes knowledge dissemination, embodying the very ethics of openness it advocates. The inclusion of artists' reflections—such as George Sfougaras's *Hope* (p. 35)—underscores that affective and aesthetic dimensions are integral to educational futures. The editors' transparent peer-review process, documented across pages 23–25, models scholarly ethics. Pedagogically, the book advances a "human-centered" model of learning design (p. 397) that resists both neoliberal instrumentalism and techno-utopianism. The *Design Justice* chapter (p. 373) and the *Collaboratively Reimagining Teaching and Learning* consortium (p. 509) provide empirically grounded exemplars of participatory reform. Furthermore, the inclusion of student voices in "Vibrant, Open and Accessible" (p. 335) ensures that learners are not merely subjects of study but co-creators of educational futures.

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Limitations

Nevertheless, the very inclusivity that enriches the book also poses challenges. The heterogeneity of forms occasionally dilutes conceptual cohesion. While the editors celebrate multiplicity, the absence of a synthesizing theoretical conclusion may leave some readers searching for a clearer framework linking care, decolonization, and data justice. The *Afterword* by Raewyn Connell (p. 623) gestures toward such synthesis but remains more exhortative than analytical. Additionally, while the book proclaims a Global South orientation, much of its production remains anchored in Anglophone academic infrastructures—a paradox that mirrors the asymmetries it critiques. From a methodological standpoint, empirical evidence varies in depth. Some chapters, such as DeRosa's "Writing from the Wreckage" (p. 53), offer ethnographic texture, while others rely more on reflective narrative. A stronger integration of quantitative or mixed-method studies could have bolstered claims about institutional change. Yet this critique must be tempered by the editors' stated intent: to privilege *imaginative scholarship* over positivist generalization.

Ethical and Political Implications

The book's political stance is unapologetically activist. It envisions higher education as a moral and ecological project rather than an economic sector. Chapters like "Who Cares about Procurement?" (p. 603) expose the hidden politics of institutional bureaucracy, arguing that even administrative decisions carry ethical weight. Similarly, Trowler's "It's about Transforming Lives!" (p. 591) re-centers students' lived experiences in post-pandemic recovery. These interventions expand the moral vocabulary of higher education beyond access and excellence to include *care, justice,* and *sustainability*. This orientation aligns with the broader movement toward *futures literacy* in education (Miller, 2018), which encourages institutions to anticipate multiple, just futures rather than extrapolate current inequities. *Higher Education for Good* contributes to this paradigm by translating critical theory into pedagogical practice—what Costello (p. 445) calls "teaching the future(s)" through speculative methods. In this sense, the book not only critiques but performs the future it envisions.

Reflection on Scholarly and Pedagogical Significance

In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, the question "good for whom?"—posed repeatedly across chapters—becomes both ethical and existential. The book insists that higher education cannot claim moral legitimacy unless it serves the marginalized, the displaced, and the digitally excluded. Its call for "infrastructures of care" (p. 111) and "open knowledge institutions" (p. 575) offers a roadmap for policymakers seeking to align university missions with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Quality Education).

For educators, the text models reflective praxis: to teach *for good* is to teach *with humility, solidarity,* and *imagination.* For researchers, it demonstrates that methodological innovation—haiku, quilt, dialogue—can coexist with rigorous critique. For policymakers, it warns against metrics-fetishism and advocates evidence-informed, values-driven reform.

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And for students, it validates agency: their contributions are not appendices but epistemic interventions.

Ultimately, the book's greatest contribution lies in reframing *hope* as method. Against the pervasive fatalism of neoliberal academia, *Higher Education for Good* cultivates what Arundhati Roy once described as "another world [that] is not only possible, she is on her way." The editors and contributors illuminate that path not through grand manifestos but through everyday gestures—care, collaboration, creativity—that make transformation conceivable.

Concluding Note

Higher Education for Good stands as a landmark in post-pandemic higher education scholarship—a collective act of intellectual defiance and imaginative reconstruction. It bridges critique and creation, theory and practice, global and local, human and technological. While it does not (and perhaps cannot) offer a unified blueprint, its strength lies in plurality—the recognition that justice, care, and openness must be continually negotiated. As Raewyn Connell (2019) concludes, universities "can change because of their capacity for challenge, critique, invention and intellectual growth… but it has to be fought for" (p. 30). This book equips educators, scholars, and policymakers for that fight—not with dogma, but with stories, solidarities, and speculative courage. Its vision of *Higher Education for Good* is both an ethical imperative and an imaginative invitation: to reclaim universities as spaces where light enters through the cracks, where learning becomes an act of love, and where the future of knowledge is inseparable from the future of humanity.

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