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## **Book Review of Creative Universities: Reimagining Education for Global Challenges and Alternative Futures**

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### **1. Introduction**

Anke Schwittay is a Senior Lecturer in Anthropology and Global Development at the University of Sussex. In the last years, she has centred her research in creative forms of education for global challenges. Her wide experience in teaching at different universities, and her interest in sustainable development, has merged into this work titled ***Creative Universities: Reimagining Education for Global Challenges and Alternative Futures***. As an extension of this work, she has launched a website where she keeps elaborating in some of the aspects covered in her book and providing educators with resources and examples ([Home | Creative Universities](#)).

This book is a must read for any professional working in education, especially for those working in honours education, as this learning environments usually go deeper in challenging students to deal with complex societal issues. The book of Anke Schwittay is refreshing, revealing and for those working on sustainable development and global challenges, a call for hope and rethinking the pedagogical approach to our teaching. Working with higher education students in the era of eco-grief and conflict, dominated by a new cold war ambiance in the geopolitical scenario, is challenging. How do we maintain hope at the same time we avoid sugar coating reality? Schwittay shares her experiences and proposes a pedagogy of hope: **critical-creative pedagogy**. Rescuing the concept of *radical hope* proposed by one of the most known fathers of critical pedagogy, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997), Schwittay outlines a new approach which more than critical is regenerative and inspire students to rebuild and imagine new scenarios. This book is not only a great contribution to the field of education, but also to the field of futures studies and

futures research. For academics, the insights of this work could be containing key elements of how higher education can be leading the transition to the Imagination Age. For lecturers searching for inspiration and resources, the book portrays several examples of how critical-creative pedagogy can guide new forms of educating sustainable development and can also help in the path towards curriculum decolonisation.

## 2. Critical-creative pedagogy

Universities around the world require from their teachers to get pedagogical training and certifications. Most of the time, these pedagogical trainings are mostly based in cover the nitty gritty of the lecturers profession: how to construct good exams and fair grading systems, how to organise lessons and structure learning paths of their students. Nothing is mentioned about forms of pedagogy that help us understand how we learn what and in which ways. This is probably why a lot of lecturers struggle to embed sustainable development and topics related to sustainability to their lessons. Mostly thinking from the discipline oriented mind only, the pedagogical savvy lecturer is becoming part of the scarce species in higher education. The pedagogical approach proposed by Schwittay is helpful not only for those lecturers already working on sustainable development related topics, but a great framework of pedagogical construction for those who are wondering how to start touching upon sustainability through their lessons on different topics. Today's higher education students, mostly Generation Z, are confronted with anxiety and sadness created by the climate change crisis and biodiversity loss (eco-grief). At the same time, they are overwhelmed with the responsibility of fixing the big challenges of today. All these, immersed in a sense of disbelief and hopelessness, mostly sustained by failed experiences, a world constructed in colonised practices and profound identity worldviews crisis. Furthermore, in the context of a more complex and incomprehensible world, Schwittay discusses how important it is to create learning spaces to help our students deal with uncertainty and ambiguity.

In this setting, a critical-creative pedagogy guides education professionals to create learning environments that:

- Integrate the whole person learning approach (embodying experiences in the classroom, by bringing not only their cognitive mind, but their feelings and senses in the classroom: full presence);
- Encourage critical hope (not as empty optimism, but generating activism and the sense that another world is possible);
- Imagine by using arts and design;
- Generate new praxis who are explorative and expansive (understanding global challenges)

The model in thoroughly described in the book, arguing that could help educators to create an alternative to traditional forms of pedagogy that suit more problem solving oriented learning. This model allows students to experiment and create, feeling more comfortable while embracing ambiguity.

### 3. Imagination Age and Futures Alternatives

The book of Anke Schwittay is an invitation to explore futures alternatives and scenarios. Instead of showing students what has happened until now and did not work, it encourages them to create and imagine, using their creativity, new experiences and new worldviews that can lead to regenerative learning experiences. The author defends moving away from solutionism to creative approaches that engage student's imagination. Schwittay is critical with the neoliberal concept of the students as clients, which situates them in a passive receiver role. She sees the students as producers with a great capacity to learn by doing and engaging in the creation of new scenarios.

Education should be focusing not only in educating younger generations for the challenges of today, but should as well provide the soil for students to grow and experiment with their capacity to create the future. Not only exploring the given possibilities already determined or designed by others, but really opening students to take ownership of their own creation and experimentation with alternative futures, by using art and design techniques. In order to illustrate this, she proposes and describes in the book alternative interventions which are radical and unorthodox, drawing in the work of Colombian-American anthropologist Arturo Escobar, who is known for this research in political ecology, anti-globalisation movements and post development theory. Escobar's research on pluriverse alternatives can also be a path for decolonising western perspectives on alternative futures.

### 4. Decolonising western universities

Anke Schwittay is critical with the neoliberal structures and mental models of western universities and the role that these universities have had in contributing to create and maintain colonisation structures through Eurocentric knowledge production. More than serving society, by leading in a diverse and interdisciplinary debate, universities in the western world, have become the servers of the market, producing standardized products that maintain the mental models promoted by the industry and sustained by the university. Critical-creative pedagogy is based in embracing diversity and creating the space for different worldviews that can challenge the *status quo* of today's society and structures. In this sense, it can become a useful tool to decolonise the western higher education curricula. The university should foster and embrace polyphony of knowledge and practices that engage in struggles for social and economic justice, and therefore environmental justice. She explores the work of Portuguese economist Boaventura de Sousa Santos, and specially his concept "Epistemologies of the South" (Sousa Santos, 2006; 2004), where he promotes the struggle for global cognitive justice, defending the role of researchers who understand the world beyond western perspectives. Schwittay invites western universities to look at Latin American educational alternatives, which have been the result of challenging colonialism and coloniality.

### 5. The role of educators

The author defends that the role of the educators is fundamental in the transition to this new pedagogical practices. Educators must bring as well their experiences to the classroom

and also challenge their own worldviews and perspectives. We have seen around Europe how more and more lecturers, especially in honours education settings embedding Education for Sustainable Development, are questioning their readings lists, mostly containing western produced knowledge. Schwittay calls educators to abandon their comfort zones, appealing to their humility and courage. Schwittay encourages educators to, citing Freire (1993, p.98), refuse “to bureaucratize the mind, to understand and to live as a process -live to become”. Therefore she warns that using critical-creative pedagogy can be a discovery but also a discomfort for the educator, as it will be a journey where we will be confronting our own worldviews and pre-constructions of knowledge. Educators should be constantly reflecting in their teaching experiences and practices, and the impact these have in their students. The book provides clear examples of teaching activities that can inspire educators to use critical-creative pedagogy to design learning activities of all kinds.

Anke Schwittay is not only drawing a new pedagogical approach for Education for Sustainable Development; she is also laying the foundations to help us reimagine universities. She opens up our minds to start imagine a new form of higher education that fosters scenarios for hope through dealing with the struggle of unjust social practices. She provides with ideas for the development of educational settings, materials and learning spaces which start fostering this new critical-creative universities.

### **Book details**

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