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Learning and teaching participation: exploring the role of Higher Learning Institutions as agents of development and social change

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Summary

This paper explores the potential of Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) as agents of social, institutional and individual change. It argues that while HLIs have a clear role in building the capacity of individuals and organisations to undertake key development initiatives and to practice participation, they are often restricted by internal and external constraints. Perceptions of HLIs as experiencing hierarchical power systems, structural rigidities, traditional elitism, and research which is disassociated from local realities imply that a paradigm shift in the learning and research approaches of HLIs is greatly needed. In response to some of these concerns, a wide range of initiatives and innovations are promoting learning of participation and participatory teaching and learning. These are helping to challenge different constraints and are enhancing the developmental potential of HLIs.

In April 2002 a global dialogue on Learning and Teaching Participation (LTP) was launched at IDS with the purpose of sharing innovations and experiences in order to make these stories and lessons learned more widely available, as well as helping to promote learning and teaching participation through a dialogue on strategies, methodologies, processes, practices and theories. This paper draws on the key issues and findings from the dialogue and related research to discuss practice and potentials of learning and teaching participation in HLIs. It concludes that significant achievements have been made in bridging theory and practice, linking HLIs and communities through collaborative research, and developing participatory methods for more effective learning. However, challenges still remain and further research is needed to address the contextual implications of learning and to develop appropriate participatory methodologies to support these ventures.

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Abbreviations

Action Research	AR
Community Based Research	CBR
Higher Learning Institutions	HLIs
Information Communication Technologies	ICTs
International Organisation	IO
Learning and Teaching Participation	LTP
Non-Governmental Organisation	NGO
Participatory Action Research	PAR
Participatory Learning and Action	PLA
Participatory Rural Appraisal	PRA
Practice Research Engagement	PRE

Introduction: learning and teaching participation in Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs)

How is participation learned and taught?

There is increasing global interest, by many actors engaged in development, in promoting the institutionalisation and spread of participation in society. From grassroots projects to voluntary organisations, and from governments to large funding agencies, "participation" has been embraced as a way to build greater voice, accountability and trust into relationships between people and institutions. Successful innovations and practice have resulted in participation being seen as a desirable end as well as a means, with the potential to reduce poverty and social injustice by strengthening citizen rights and voice, influencing policy-making, enhancing local governance, and improving the accountability and responsiveness of institutions.

Efforts are now being made to support organisational and institutional learning and change which will enhance the overall quality and impact of participation. Many development theorists and practitioners are concerned, however, that the momentum towards "scaling-up" of participation may lead to its "dumbing-down", where the principles and theory underpinning approaches such as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) and Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) are being diluted. There is a growing fear that lip-service is being paid to participation simply out of deference to fashion or the current jargon of development aid. In order to promote and increase participation effectively, and also ethically, there is a growing need for experienced and well-trained people who are active and open to its meaning, methods and practice. Many higher learning institutions (HLIs) (including universities, schools and colleges offering formal graduate and post-graduate programmes, as well as "non-formal", governmental or sectoral institutions offering specialised training programmes for experienced professionals) have a role in developing the capacity of institutions and individuals to understand and practice participation. But how can they ensure that they deepen the quality and sustainability of participation in their learning programmes, whilst avoiding the promotion of simply "more participation" of dubious quality? How may participation be *learned*, and how can institutions of higher learning facilitate this learning? These key questions form the basis for the focus of this paper.

The role of HLIs in capacity development for participation and social change

HLIs have an important role in strengthening the capacity of institutions[1] and individuals to undertake development initiatives and practice participation for the purpose of social change. HLIs have the potential to bridge the global with the local, providing a real opportunity to scale up local knowledge, needs and priorities for incorporation into international policy and research agendas. Through

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[1] The term "institution" may be interpreted in different ways (a body recognised by common processes, norms and sets of rules; or a physical location whose concern is the delivery of education or training programmes within which those norms and rules are embodied). The term "institution" will be used in this paper in both senses, and the particular meaning in each case made clear through the context in which it is used.

collaborative learning approaches which integrate participation by communities and practitioners into academic processes, more relevant and pragmatic research can be produced and used in both theory and practice. Other levels of education can also benefit from the institutional strengthening of HLIs, through teacher training, educational management, curriculum development programmes and other relevant courses. HLIs are also in a position to mobilise those elites at national and local level who have access to their services and can be agents of change in themselves.

HLIs are well positioned to develop capacity at a number of levels:

- in individuals and organisations through courses which are relevant to local realities and which emphasise skills of critical reflection and analysis, action and facilitation;
- in local communities through collaborative learning partnerships (including community-based research, service learning and community service);
- in other levels of education through programmes including teacher training and curriculum development that is congruent with the needs of local contexts;
- in research and policy arenas through support to the scaling-up of local needs, priorities and knowledge.

This paper proposes that the concept of participation and its fundamental principles and goals provide an arena within which HLIs can make a tremendous contribution. In reality, however, many constraints limit this potential to develop capacity, both internally (e.g. teacher-student interactions constrained by a lack of competences or incompatible sets of values, attitudes and beliefs) and externally (e.g. linkages, networking and collaborations in community-based activities inhibited by bureaucracy and power hierarchies, shortages of resources and capacity, and the absence of political will). Such constraints, coupled with high costs and limited access, have also been perceived as having negative impacts on effectiveness and efficiency of higher education. This has contributed to a shift in support away from HLIs towards basic education, particularly within the current framework of Education for All. Thus, if HLIs are to fulfil the vital role they might play in society as agents of change, it is essential to understand and unlock the potential of collaborative and participatory learning initiatives and processes. If institutionalised, participation may serve as a tool to enhance the capability of HLIs as true agents of change, by generating learning which is relevant and congruent with the reality of life in the wider community.

The Learning and Teaching Participation dialogue

Experiences gained through different networking initiatives convened by the Institute of Development Studies have demonstrated that examples of success and good practice in different contexts can provide an excellent opportunity for collaborative learning and sharing of stories. Innovations such as those provided in Box I1 below are emerging in HLIs throughout the world, in natural resource management, nutrition, literacy, social work, law, public administration, organisational development and other applied aspects of development. Many individuals and groups are engaged in initiatives grounded in participation

which seek to maximise the developmental potential of HLIs and to negotiate the constraints which they face (Laurillard 1993; Röling and Wagemakers 1998; Tierney 1999). HLIs have forged active and constructive links with communities, both local and distant. Some have incorporated curriculum components (topics, short courses, modules) which draw on participatory approaches and which teach both the conceptual and practical elements of participation. Experiential teaching and learning methods, materials and modes of assessment and evaluation are being developed and tested. Systemic and holistic approaches, sometimes based on action research, critical reflective enquiry or practitioner-research engagement, are affecting the learning process at different levels (in individuals, organisations, locally, globally).

Box I1 Innovations in participation in Higher Learning Institutions

- In **Mexico**, at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana in Chiapas, Mexico, a collaboration of teachers, students and graduates from different disciplines with communities, social organisations and non governmental organisations (NGOs) in different activities has brought about the Interdisciplinary Research Programme on Human Development in Chiapas. The programme emphasises reconciling academic and practitioner knowledge for the benefit of mutual learning and more effective development initiatives (Cortez Ruiz 2003).

- In **Vietnam**, the Social Forestry Support Programme, and the Localised Poverty Reduction in Vietnam Programme (both based, respectively on networks which included five universities) combined participatory curriculum development with community-based learning approaches. This enabled experiences gained by students, teachers, government officials and members of local communities to contribute to both community-based development activities and to curriculum development, thus benefiting all parties through improved learning programmes coupled with enhanced outreach and links with poor communities. (Taylor 2003; Scott and Chuyen 2003)

- In **Ethiopia**, Mekelle University, has introduced a "Practical Attachment" Programme whereby all students are attached for three months to different governmental and non-governmental organisations. This provides opportunities for students to realise the realities of the farming community through experiencing rural life and also enables social continuity between the university and local communities. Considerable attitudinal changes have been observed amongst students and their understanding of the realities, needs and demands of local communities is increased. Through re-entry workshops, stakeholders have a direct input into discussions about curriculum, and evaluation of learning, ensuring that the university better equips students to work with and assist local communities in solving their own problems. (Lemma and Haile 2003)

- In the **UK**, at Goldsmiths College, London, an MA in Community Education and Development provides a specialist route for professionals engaged in regeneration and development programmes. This course aims to respond to learning needs identified in the current contexts, particularly the learning needs of those who are being expected to work in new and more participative ways (Mayo 2003); and at the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex, a new MA in Participation, Development and Social Change, will provide an opportunity for development practitioners to integrate theoretical and practical learning through a course that utilises institutional learning as well as a nine month field placement (IDS 2004).

In turn, a wider sharing and exchange of experiences, grounded in research and practice from around the world, can have a powerful and positive effect on learning processes, encouraging individual and institutional reflection. In April 2002, an initiative began, hosted by the Participation Group of the Institute of Development Studies which aimed to facilitate such a collaborative learning process with a focus on learning and teaching participation in HLIs. The original purpose of the dialogue was, through the sharing of experiences, to enable HLIs to develop and deliver more effective education programmes and to contribute to a wider transformation of individuals and society. The Learning and Teaching Participation (LTP) dialogue has since gathered steadily in momentum, inviting contributions from around 300 participants through a series of e-fora, as well as an International Workshop in 2003. The initiative has become a substantial network of people (teachers, researchers, practitioners, facilitators, students) from around the world and in a wide range of institutional contexts, who are engaged and interested in learning and teaching participation. Throughout the dialogue there has been an active sharing of experiences and perspectives on initiatives, theories, methods and experiences of constraints faced in promoting participatory learning, underpinned by a range of critical questions. The outcomes of the dialogue thus far have made clear that participation is very much on the agenda in HLIs, although it is beset by many challenges (Taylor and Fransman 2003). A short list of IDS resources and links associated with the dialogue is included in the Appendix.

This paper draws on the experiences and discussion of the LTP dialogue to explore the potential of HLIs to promote development and social change through learning and teaching participation, as well as the constraints currently limiting this potential. It examines the use of participatory learning processes, integrated within a critical, systemic discourse, as a tool for challenging these constraints and maximising the potential of HLIs in promoting participation and pursuing change. Recognising that this discourse will continue, and that further dialogue around issues of learning and teaching participation are essential, the paper also suggests ways in which an exploration of this important issue may continue.

1 The sky's the limit? The role of Higher Learning Institutions as development agents

1.1 The relationship between learning and change in HLIs

As centres of training and knowledge production as well as transmission, HLIs are well positioned to link the local (through their proximity to neighbouring communities and socio-cultural particularities) and the global (through their association with transnational learning networks and research systems. This gives them considerable access to and influence over change processes in many societies, and enhances their potential to contribute to development and social change through the promotion and facilitation of participation within these processes. As Brennan and Lebeau (2002) state, their role has been seen to change over time from preservers of culturally revered forms of knowledge, through producers of skilled labour associated with a manpower planning approach, to a more recent perception of HLIs as agents of social change and development:

> Universities have frequently been regarded as key institutions in processes of social change and development. The most explicit role they have been allocated is the production of highly skilled labour and research output to meet perceived economic needs. But during periods of social transformation – which may certainly have at their heart far-reaching changes in the economy – universities may play no less an important role in helping to build new institutions of civil society, in encouraging and facilitating new cultural values, and in training and socialising members of new social elites. This, at any rate, has frequently been the claim (2002: 2).

But external influences exert pressures on HLIs as well as creating opportunities, and many of these emerge as obstacles to the institutionalisation of innovations, such as learning or teaching participation and participatory learning. Although HLIs are often assumed to ignite change, they may also block it. Thus, contradictions are many. Brennan and Lebeau comment:

> One way of resolving these apparent contradictions is to acknowledge that universities play multiple roles, both reproductive and transformative. Within individual institutions, even within individual academic departments, roles played may be multiple and contradictory. At system levels, differentiation has become a key characteristic: non-university sectors, distance universities and private universities exist alongside traditional state universities in many countries, each type playing distinctive roles . . . All of this points to the importance of an empirical approach to the question of the roles played by universities in the transformation of societies. An approach is required which can accommodate complexities and ambiguities and, above all, can acknowledge differences, both between countries and between individual institutions (2002: 3).

Conceptions of the role of higher education range also in a continuum from "broad" to "narrow", as indicated by the different ends of this range in the table below (Development Education Association 2003).

Table 1.1 Broad and narrow conceptions of the role of higher education

	Product	Task	Research	Knowledge society
Narrow conceptions of HE	The specialised and knowledgeable individual equipped to play an economic role in society	Production of a skilled workforce to attain economic goals	"Cutting edge" research to gain sectoral or national competitive advantage	Higher education as an exportable commodity; a contributor towards economic goals
Broad conceptions of HE	The reflective and adaptive team player equipped to respond creatively to all forms of change	Contributor to the lifelong development of "responsible global citizens"	International collaboration in research and information sharing	Higher education's "role of service" to society; multiple partnerships to facilitate knowledge distribution

(AUT/DEA 1999; cited in DEA 2003)

Taking the "broad" view, education at all levels plays a critical role as transmitter, reproducer or resistor of a complex weave of knowledge and power relations. But in recent times, education is itself becoming transformed through changes in its purposes and priorities according to new global standards and the transfer of policies, curricula and methods of assessment between countries. HLIs are, by nature, international in their outlook, and their role as producers as well as transmitters of knowledge has important repercussions in the context of globalisation, as well as in the national contexts in which they operate.

1.2 HLIs in a global context

With the intensifying of international competition, knowledge has become an increasingly important determinant of the wealth of nations and consequently, access to knowledge and the ability to disseminate it has become a major source of competitive advantage. This global knowledge economy has also served to exacerbate concern, however, that some academic institutions may be contributing to an *undemocratisation* of society, by discouraging questioning of meanings and building up ontological/epistemological assumptions which constrain or block open and reflective dialogue between individuals. Additionally, as HLIs play a particular role in training teachers and developing and updating school curricula, their increasing orientation towards the global knowledge-market may influence the value-system of basic education, having a much greater impact on development and society in the longer term.

HLIs, even in times of resource constraints, tend to attract greater resources per member of the population than other levels of the education system. They enjoy access to information and communication technologies (ICTs), an increasingly international and mobile academic workforce, particularly in the North, and the construction of a substantial proportion of academia around global research networks. With a history of universities in former colonies patterning themselves on those in the North, internationalisation of higher education through transfers from North to South have existed since the establishment of many Southern universities. Research has revealed that most university faculties in former colonies have at least one qualification from a university in the North; that the institutions with which they have the largest number of collaborative ventures and exchange programmes are located in the North; and that the curricula and programme structures of their degrees are not very different from those in Northern universities (Mohamedbhai 2002). But are these programmes contextually relevant and do they address local needs and priorities as well as the demands of the global knowledge economy?

In the face of globalisation, critics such as Johan Olsen have claimed that there is a deterioration of the relationship between HLIs and society, identifying Higher Education as a service-company, with society as its marketplace. The potential for HLIs to support and nurture development and social change, especially in the South where such an approach has been well understood in recent times, and in some cases practiced for centuries, is being eroded by constant shifts in policy and politics. Through the policy goals of efficiency, effectiveness, responsiveness and competition embodied in many HL reform programmes, 'national authorities transform their public higher education systems from national organisations with global social roles into global players mainly operating on the basis of economic considerations' (Olsen 2000: 374). Moreover, financial cutbacks by the state have hit HLIs hard and the institutions have counteracted by raising tuition fees, reducing programmes and staff positions, increasing faculty teaching loads and the numbers of part-time faculty and making alliances with corporations. This situation withdraws autonomy from faculty, and tends to subordinate humanities and social sciences to disciplines related to technosciences. This raises the possibility of HLIs becoming increasingly alienated from poor and socially excluded communities and local concerns, even where the courses they teach and the research they undertake is in the name of "development".

Yet as the globalising process accelerates, innovative individuals from around the world are continuing to discover ways of challenging this disassociation by linking universities with local communities in mutually beneficial collaborations. These endeavours, which continue to build on collaborations forged over very many years by HLIs in both the North and the South, combine the benefits of more relevant and locally prioritised research with the opportunities created by the globalisation of learning networks (sharing of experiences, collective development of strategies, and scaling-up of local concerns, priorities, knowledge and values to permeate global research agendas). HLIs are thus extremely well-positioned to support the institutionalisation of initiatives that promote learning and teaching participation, even in the presence of internal rigidities that restrict their efficiency.

During the late 1980s and the 1990s there has been an increasing interest by many HLIs, often driven by pressure associated with greater external scrutiny, in developing a more systematic approach to change

management (Taylor 2000). In order to achieve this, some HLIs have drawn extensively upon organisational and institutional development theory, with a key focus on quality. These approaches stress the importance of comprehending the very nature of change. Some go so far as to advocate the importance of observation and reflection upon the behaviour which organisations demonstrate in response to change, leading to "organisational learning". The nature of "organisational learning" has been explored by a number of writers. Schön (1983), beginning with the individual, describes a person who has mastered the art of learning as a "reflective practitioner", whilst Brookfield (1995) places particular prominence on strategies for the improvement of learning through reflection in education institutions. The concept of reflective practice is linked closely with the experiential learning cycle developed by Kolb (1984), who proposes that learning is a cyclic process, of acting, reflecting, thinking, deciding, and again acting. This idea has been developed further by considering different levels of learning, or learning loops (Argyris and Schön 1974; Burgoyne 1992). During the 1990s, much attention has also been given by a wide range of organisations to the concept of the "learning organisation" (Senge 1990). From this perspective, organisations should not merely respond to change, but also bring about change, both within their own boundaries and the broader context in which they are situated, through a process of reflection, understanding and action. By increasing their capacity to learn, learning organisations become more creative, and thus should also function more effectively and improve their chances of survival in a competitive world. As Senge writes, a learning organisation 'is an organisation that is continually expanding to create its future' (1990: 14). According to Burgoyne (1992), the manner in which an organisation learns will determine its "learningfulness". The main challenge to be dealt with by the organisation is to learn how to learn.

While much of the thinking has emerged from the private sector and is applied mainly to the North at present, national and international development organisations have widely embraced the concepts and practices of the learning organisation (Roper, Pettit and Eade 2003). Applied to development and the diverse and complex realities of Southern institutions, the concept is particularly useful for its grounding in a set of values somewhat akin to those of participation:

- valuing different kinds of knowledge and learning styles and creating a "learning environment" so that each organisational member can realise his/her full potential;
- encouraging dialogue and the exploration of different perspectives and experiences to generate creative thinking;
- working collectively and breaking down traditional barriers within organisations so as to release creative potential;
- fostering leadership potential throughout the organisation and reducing distinctions, such as those between management and staff, between strategists and implementers, between support and professional staff.

The attraction of development NGOs to the concept of the learning organisation is clear (Roper and Pettit 2002) although some have criticised it as a management fad or a toolbox borrowed from the Northern private sector (Kelleher 2002). With the absence though of alternative conceptual approaches from the South, most authors conclude that the participatory and transformative properties of the learning organisation and related systems can contribute to a more critical and participatory development and may even facilitate the emergence of alternative Southern approaches to learning that are rooted in their own experience and historical context (Padaki 2002; Bloch and Borges 2002).

Since it may be assumed, by definition, that a learning organisation has learned how to learn, it is perhaps strange that many universities and other HLIs, whose business is to encourage the learning of others, fail to show that they themselves have developed or implemented strategies for effective learning. HLIs face a real challenge in trying to bring about organisational change in the face of restructuring and the threat of withdrawn or withheld resources, whilst at the same time ensuring that the quality of the education they provide is maintained or even improved. At the front line of this battlefield are the teachers and lecturers themselves, many of whom seem conscious that as professional demands upon them increase, their power within the organisation to make critical decisions diminishes. Teachers in HLIs throughout the world face new challenges and constraints almost on a daily basis, but how effectively do they conceptualise and manage the change process? And what are the potentials for HLIs to make a real contribution to development and social change?

2 Potential contributions of HLIs to development and social change

2.1 Potentials of HLIs

HLIs play a critical role in capacity development of institutions and individuals at a number of levels. "Capacity development" is a term that is interpreted in many different ways, however, and may involve a continuum of understandings that move from simple training to a far more complex level of critical, systemic discourse through action research (Bawden, pers. comm. 2003). Bawden advocates that a new paradigm is required: '(a) the development of a new, systemic discourse as the basis for responsible, sustainable, and inclusive well-being; and (b) the engagement of the academy with both "the citizenry", and with all other relevant institutions of society (from commerce to governance) in discourse to that end'.

Such an approach goes far beyond many conventional views of the contribution of HLIs to society and social change. A critical, systemic discourse, achieved in part by establishing the bridge between theory and practice through a process of critical reflection and action, is a challenge for all HLIs. But by providing space and an enabling environment in which teaching and research become integral and valued through participatory processes, and perceiving participation itself as a desirable outcome in order to

challenge established power relations, HLIs have the real potential to become key actors in promoting not only transformative learning at an individual level, but also wider social, institutional and discursive change.

A key question, then, is how to bring the learning of participation and participatory teaching and learning from the margins to the mainstream within the context of HLIs? What innovations can bring this movement about? A number of innovations and actions, some associated with specific aspects of the environment that enable them, have been highlighted through the Learning and Teaching Participation dialogue, as shown in Box 2.1 below.

Box 2.1 Innovations which support learning and teaching participation

- an institution or a group (even an individual) having relative autonomy and freedom to innovate
- encouragement and support of a range of diverse responses to a context of complex problems
- an enabling external environment provided, for example by a larger social movement, or the availability of resources for support to change processes (the latter presents an inherent risk, discussed intensively, that the resources may be "tied" to the expectations or requirements of one particular group; concerns were raised also over the disparity of resources available to different groups involved in collaboration, for example university teachers and farmers, and over the fear that ultimately, availability of resources becomes the be-all and end-all of institutional change processes)
- innovators gaining control over some elements of the reward system of higher education, e.g. tenures and promotions, professional recognition of participatory methods and innovations, appointment to edit or author prestigious literature
- introduction and promotion of experiential learning (reflection and action), as an essential element of change processes
- key structural and philosophical changes within institutions which enhance the integration of participatory approaches
- creation of a "critical mass" of activists (including teachers, administrators, students) within an institution, which 'shares and practises activist goals for social transformation, both within the institution and the larger social context'; they bring with them the diversity and the energy necessary to be both responsive and proactive to complex problematic situations
- building broader networks or communities of activists supporting participatory approaches across a range of institutions, which can then impact on intransigent institutions and hierarchies
- the identification of individuals who can perform the role of "champions" of change and act as "innovators, advocates and mentors"
- willingness to allow sufficient time for change processes to occur

(Source: Learning and Teaching Participation Dialogue 2003)

While enabling actions such as those shown in Box 2.1 are undoubtedly important, they also require a strong, and well-articulated theoretical underpinning of learning and transformation, terms that are used very frequently, but are open to a multitude of interpretations and meanings. Theories of learning and

transformation are complex and constantly debated, and it is valuable to visit these briefly, in order to move further with the discussion of how HLIs may contribute more effectively to development and social change.

2.2 Theories of learning and transformation

2.2.1 Understanding transformation

Learning transcends borders and, as illustrated in the previous section, increasingly we do not live in relative isolation. Systemic perspectives on learning emphasise the vitality of integrating individual and collective interests. As agents of change, HLIs have the multilayered task of challenging power relations at a variety of levels and with a variety of goals. Transformative learning is by no means a straightforward concept, and has consequently been interpreted and described in many different ways. It may be distinguished from non-transformative learning, which can be either instrumental (use of tools, methods, facilitation techniques) or developmental (contributing to "sense-making"). Non-transformative learning is also critical in the overall learning process, but if it fails to be structured and maintained within the continuing process of change, the goals of transformative learning will not be achieved. Transformation is clearly a powerful and value-laden term and embraces a wide array of types of change. As well as institutional change (for example through organisational learning) other levels of transformation through learning processes include that of:

- *personal* (changes in values, assumptions, attitudes, behaviour, lifestyles etc.);
- *social* (recasting realities at household, community, regional, national or global level);
- *discursive* (challenging and opening for debate the underlying assumptions, values and world views behind knowledge and learning).

2.2.2 Personal transformation

Mezirow (1996) asserts that individuals can be transformed through a process of critical reflection, and that 'learning is understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or revised interpretation of the meaning of one's experience in order to guide future action' (Mezirow 1996: 162, cited in Taylor 1998: 5). Here the transformative element – "future action", refers to changes in subjective "meaning structures" (such as making a decision, revising a point of view, posing a problem or altering behaviour) which develop through one of two Habermassian domains of learning: *instrumental* and *communicative*. While the former focuses on "learning to do", the latter is concerned with understanding the meanings of communicated feelings, values, morals, ideals and conceptualisations.

Mezirow's theory of perspective transformation thus explains the process of how adults transform or revise these structures. Each meaning structure can be broken down into *meaning schemes* ('made up of specific knowledge, beliefs, value judgements, and feelings that constitute interpretations of experience' (Mezirow 1991: 5–6)) and the more rigid *meaning perspectives* (a collection of meaning schemes which

'provide us criteria for judging or evaluating right and wrong, bad and good, beautiful and ugly, true and false . . .' [ibid: 44] and 'mirror the way our culture and those individuals responsible for our socialisation happen to have defined various situations' [ibid: 131]). Mezirow maintains that the true goal of the educator should be to facilitate the mode of change which involves learning conducive to perspective transformation. This can occur through an accumulation of transformed meaning schemes or as the result of an heightened personal or social crisis, but is most commonly brought on by a *disorienting dilemma* which derives from a new distinct experience and simultaneous critical reappraisal of previous assumptions. Perspective transformation can be facilitated by an ongoing process of critical reflection and rational dialogue.

Critical reflection has been deemed by many educators as a key method for personal transformation. Robert Boyd, for example, (who builds on the psychoanalytical work of Carl Jung to propose 'transformation as individuation') replaces Mezirow's focus on cognitive conflicts experienced by the individual's relationship to *culture* with conflicts within the individual's *psyche*. Accordingly, Boyd defines transformation as 'a fundamental change in one's personality involving conjointly the resolution of a personal dilemma and the expansion of consciousness resulting in greater personal integration' (Boyd 1989: 459 cited in Taylor 1998: 13). Critical reflection into the psyche can facilitate this transformation.

Likewise, the critical pedagogical school of thought was constructed on the same assertion that critical thinking is pivotal to transformation. Differing only slightly from Mezirow's position, these thinkers tend to perceive transformative learning as a heightened awareness and understanding of power, and a new articulation of one's identity in relation to the world. Thus, critical pedagogies of learning have the ultimate aim of enabling learners to "give voice" to and to critically analyse their subjective experience, providing students with a "language of possibility" for re-imagining their realities. Critical learning is therefore emancipatory in that it enables students to locate their own voices (Freire 1985) frees them from "repressive needs" (Giroux 1993) and resuscitates repressed knowledge (McLaren 1994).

While Mezirow includes both individual and collective action as possible and even desirable outcomes of transformative learning, he upholds that collective social action is only a 'contingent and instrumental goal' (Mezirow 1989: 172). This inclination towards individualising and internalising transformation without accounting for social consequences through direct action has concerned critics such as Collard and Law (1989) Clark and Wilson (1991) and Tennant (1993). Many feel that Mezirow's theory fails to account for context, instead locating perspective transformation in the individual and basing it on a de-contextualised concept of rationality. Thus, it ignores the relationship between individuals and socio-cultural, political, and historical contexts (Clark and Wilson 1991).

2.2.3 Social and institutional transformation

In stark contrast, theories of transformative learning grounded in the sociology of education take as their starting point the relationship between processes of learning and wider society and tend to equate the transformative potential of education to the impact it can have on exerting social change. Of course, this approach to learning is by no means homogeneous. Functionalist and structuralist schools of thought

(Parsons 1959; Clark 1962; Durkheim 1972) perceive society as a system of interrelated parts with order and stability maintained by value consensus and the role of education as transmitting these values. Marxist and neo-Marxist approaches (Bowles and Gintis 1976; Apple 1978; Illich 1971) claim that in capitalist societies, education is controlled and manipulated by functionalists and used as a device to legitimate and reproduce social (class-based) inequalities. Identifying a political dimension in education, they question 'why certain social and cultural meanings and not others are distributed through schools' and suggest that 'the control of the knowledge preserving and producing institutions may be linked to the ideological dominance of powerful groups in a social collectivity' (Apple 1978: 369). Neo-Marxist sociologists such as Apple have also claimed that within the hierarchical arrangement of knowledges "high-status" knowledge is 'connected to the structure of corporate economies' (Apple 1978: 379).

Though grounded in different ideologies, both of these approaches are macroscopic in perspective. In contrast, the "new sociology of education" movement of the 1970s and 1980s (Ashley, Cohen and Slatter 1969; Gorbutt 1972; Young 1971; Keddie 1971; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) concentrated on a previously neglected aspect of education: the content of education and the nature of knowledge and power in relation to society. "New sociologists" argued that all types of formal and non-formal education play major roles in transmitting hegemonic powers and knowledge within our societies. Claiming that schools can and often do function as political "sorting machines", reproducing and legitimising social hierarchy they assert that processes of education help to produce, privilege and naturalise dominant forms of knowledge and subjectivity. From a poststructuralist perspective, Bourdieu recognises education as a particularly significant mechanism for the legitimating of *doxa* (subsystems of society with rules and purposes of their own, each accommodating a set of tools, knowledges and skills). Within institutions of learning the "pedagogic action" through the "pedagogic authority" serves to sustain hegemonic legitimacy by reproducing the social structures, the power relations and the cultural arbitraries at work outside of the institution (Bourdieu 1977).

Education, then, for all its recognition as a social good and significant contributor to development, is seen by many as potentially exploitative and manipulative. So, how to resist and challenge these exploitative practices of education? While Ivan Illich called for the "de-schooling" of society (in favour for wholly informal education), arguing that all formal educational institutions are legitimating devises of doxic societies and as a result can never in themselves be agents of change (Illich 1971) Bourdieu suggested that resistance to the doxa (or heterodoxy) *can* be achieved, provided it occurs through a crisis which exposes the "arbitrariness" of the doxa and the "symbolic violence" (Bourdieu 1977). Postman and Weingartner came to similar conclusions seeing the ultimate goal of formal education as heterodoxic with 'teaching as a subversive activity' for the purpose of social change (Postman and Weingartner 1969). It is perhaps due to the pervasive nature of the norms, rules and unyielding systems existing in HLIs that educators and learners within many institutions find it difficult to innovate or to support innovations that challenge prevailing paradigms for learning and teaching.

Others (Weiler 1991; Olsen 2000; Cloete 2002) claim that transforming the structures and principles of HLIs themselves is the key to social transformation and consequently, should be the first step. They

observe that faced by the infiltration of globalisation, faculty members can choose to challenge the hegemonic undertones of this process in two key ways. Firstly, from within their own institutions, staff can create networks informed by discourses of resistance that aim to address questions such as how to counteract the increasing power of globalisation over education, or how to keep universities as a space for fostering critical analysis of social issues. Secondly, as educators, faculty can locate pedagogies that 'are based on political commitment and identification with subordinate and oppressed groups' (Weiler 1991: 469). These two means of resistance are not so much alternative approaches, but rather intrinsically linked.

In reality education theorists and practitioners usually employ something of a cross-fertilisation of these visions for change. Indeed, there has been an increasing degree of correspondence between aspects of the macro and micro-perspectives described above. Paolo Freire, for example, adopted the notion of heterodoxy in a way similar to that of Bordiueu, asserting that educational practice which excludes different interpretations of the same reality reinforces the power of the teacher, produces a mythification of knowledge, and encourages non-critical analysis among students:

> There is another task to be fulfilled at the school in spite of hegemonic power – that of making clear a reality darkened by the dominant ideology. Obviously, this is the task progressive teachers have: not only to teach with competence curriculum contents, but also to unveil the world of oppression through their teaching.
>
> (Freire 1970: 56)

Similarly, according to Giroux, a truly critical pedagogy would help students and teachers 'be self-critical about both the positions they describe and the locations from which they speak' (Giroux 1993: 38), analysing 'the social and political discourses that construct . . . their individual and collective identities across and within different economic, cultural and social spheres' (Giroux 1993: 63). In the same vein, Freire asserted the need of the student

> to have full responsibility as an actor with knowledge and not as recipient of the teacher's discourse. In a final analysis this is the major political act of teaching. Among other elements this is the one which makes the progressive educator different from the reactionary educator.
>
> (Freire 1970: 47–8)

However, neo-structuralists such as Kathleen Lynch have disputed that critical education theory and methods have proved remarkably untransformative. She observes that this is largely to do with the narrow-minded perspective of many critical education theorists, who pin transformative potential solely on pedagogies of education, neglecting the structural relevance and interaction of other social processes: 'Bringing about change involves constant political manipulation and contestation. There is no single line of influence. Given this fact, it seems foolhardy to suggest that change could occur through one arena of contestation – namely pedagogy' (Lynch 1999: 49).

While many of these theories succeed in combining change at a personal, social and even institutional level, several critics have argued that learning cannot incite true transformation without the learning discourse itself being open for renegotiation and alteration.

2.2.4 Discursive transformation

Understanding of the reproduction of knowledge and power was substantially furthered by the work of the postmodernist school and largely through Michel Foucault's notion of "discourse". For Foucault, power is 'a multiplicity of force relations' (Foucault 1979: 92) that constitute social relationships. It exists only through action and is immanent in all spheres, rather than being exerted by one individual or group over another. Power and knowledge are inseparable. Knowledge gives way to meaning and accordingly, through regulating conduct it exercises power. In other words, knowledge creates a certain structure of meaning or reality or way of life with its own social rules and mechanisms by which power is legitimated and reproduced. "Discourse" is this set of rules (or a social structural dialogue) through which knowledge and power legitimate and reproduce each other (Foucault 1984: 93). Thus, action is influenced by knowledge, which solidifies "discursive practices" and reproduces discourse and knowledge. Discourse determines and reproduces what counts as valid knowledge, how communication and participation are differently structured as well as which voices and experiences are affirmed and which are silenced. Therefore, in the context of HLIs, the learning discourse which constitutes the production and transmission of knowledge is constructed by the power structures at play in a particular institution, geographical location, global knowledge economy and according global research system. Discourse permeates and characterises every social structure and is active at some level in every classroom, community and NGO. However, transformation of a dominant discourse can be brought about with the introduction of new knowledge into an institution. Participation is in this way an ideal transformer of discourse.

Employing Foucault's concepts, theorists such as Hayward have contributed further to the learning-for-transformation debate by arguing for "de-facing power" in education by reconceptualising it as 'a network of social boundaries that constrain and enable action for all actors' (2000: 2). For Hayward, shaping these boundaries is not enough in itself to bring about transformation. If power is shaped by discourse, then questions of how discourses are formed, and how they shape the fields of action, become critical for changing and effecting power relations. Moreover, this interpretation of transformative learning can encompass the personal, social and institutional domains as well as that of discourse. Through access to knowledge and participation in its production, use and dissemination, actors can affect the boundaries and indeed the conceptualisation of the possible, thus helping move beyond the paralysis of a purely structuralist view of power.

This discursive analysis has also accommodated many of the feminist critiques of critical education theory, who argue that in affirming a pedagogy of voice and social and self criticism, many critical education theorists have effectively obscured the power dynamics at work in the very pedagogic practices they promoted. Ellsworth (1989) for example, suggests that key terms in the literature, such as "critical", "dialogue", "voice", and "empowerment" obscure the politics of those who use them.

Brookfield (2000) believes however that critical pedagogies and discourse-transformation are not necessarily incompatible. Claiming that the primary focus of critical reflection should be on uncovering hidden power relationships and dynamics, he emphasises especially the power dynamics that permeate the practice of (adult) education itself. Brookfield recognises that power is omnipresent in adult education. It is evident

> in the processes of curriculum decision making and evaluation, in the teaching methods instinctively adopted, in the kinds of discourse allowed in learner speech and writing, even in the ways the chairs are set out. The flow of power . . . can never be denied or erased . . . Adult education classrooms are not limpid, tranquil eddies cut off from the river of social, cultural, and political life. They are contested arenas . . . No matter how we may protest our desire to be at one with the learners, there is often a predictable flow of attention focused on us . . .
>
> (Brookfield 2000: 136–7)

Transformative learning thus incorporates a plethora of visions of change which take place at a variety of different (and often overlapping) levels. These range from transformation at the personal or subjective level to visions of community, regional, national, global and even institutional change. They also include the all-important notion of discursive "re-mapping" within the educational discourse itself. Consequently, a legitimate and truly transformative pedagogy of learning must be able to:

- raise awareness of the dominant discourses of knowledge and power;
- incorporate a critical engagement with the subjective positions of learners and teachers alike;
- enable each learner to realise and to take responsibility for their knowledge; and
- allow for the transformation of its own discourse of education.

This paper argues that participation is a goal fully commensurate with a vision of transformative learning, and also that participatory processes facilitate more effective learning in HLIs, whether this means teaching and learning methodologies within the institution itself, or collaborative and participatory learning that goes on through partnerships with HLIs and other groups and organisations within their local communities. The next chapter addresses the issue of participation as process; and its potential for enabling HLIs to fulfil their roles as development agents.

3 Potentials of participation for the roles of HLIs – and some challenges faced

3.1 What participation offers HLIs in their roles as development agents

3.1.1 Participation, power and transformation

The position of this paper is that participation provides an arena for HLIs to explore and define their own contribution to development and social change. Learning creates the grounds for effective participation, and participation with its different functions is therefore a prerequisite for learning about learning. Currently there are notable shifts towards an understanding of participation as a vehicle to building greater voice, accountability and trust into relationships between people and institutions. Successful innovations and practice are resulting in the view of participation as a desirable end as well as a means, with the potential to reduce poverty and social injustice by strengthening citizen rights and voice, influencing policy-making, enhancing local governance, and improving the accountability and responsiveness of institutions (Cornwall and Gaventa 2001; Cornwall 2000). How then, do these principles of participation support and nourish the transformative potential of education?

There are three key areas where significant achievements have been made through support to collaborative initiatives with HLIs that promote greater participation in learning and teaching:

- Bridging theory and practice
- Linking universities and communities
- Participatory methods for more effective learning

3.1.2 Bridging theory and practice – experiential learning

Learning and teaching participation has implications for individual, social, institutional and discursive transformation, lending itself to interdisciplinary approaches within which theory and practice may be integrated, and rooted in local realities. A basic concept of participatory learning is that individuals participate in generating their own personal theories which are relevant to their own context. These emerge through the experience of practice, and then go on to inform further practice. The relationship between theory and practice seems to work best when a variety of stakeholders are able to participate at different levels of the process, especially through the use of experiential learning methods and activities.

It is evident that a strong theoretical base does exist to support the concept of HLIs becoming effective development agents, but to what extent are HLIs willing to embrace change, and acknowledge and build upon emergent organisational and educational strategies, processes and methodologies? There is a growing recognition of the vital role of attitudes, values, beliefs and even the spiritual dimension in both learning and participation. This is accompanied by the realisation that learning and participation are not

neutral or passive and that for either to be achieved, action and experience are vital, especially when accompanied by critical reflection. On the basis of these systemic assumptions, several lessons have been suggested for attempts by HLIs to act as development agents:

> The first is to focus on *collective praxis* (as the dialectic between experience in the world and theories that both inform and are informed by those experiences – while also accommodating values and emotions) and the centrality of, and the critical focus for, learning (at all three levels – learning, meta-learning and epistemic learning). Secondly ... the context needs to be on *phronesis* – on wise judgement for responsible actions (again both collective). Thirdly the major medium needs to be *critical discourse* for responsible and sustainable action, arrived at through the most consensual level of agreement possible under the circumstances that prevail (and having confronted power distorting issues as a key factor of the process).
>
> (Bawden, in LTP dialogue 2003)

Rather than participation and learning being "done to" people, the need is more widely recognised for individual commitment to change, for the development of a new relationship between the self and the "real world" as well as enhanced self-awareness. Educators such as bell hooks reaffirm this notion that learning for transformation must above all derive from a heartfelt desire to learn by the individual. This desire can be enabled and nurtured by a pleasurable learning experience:

> the classroom should be an exciting place, never boring. And if boredom should prevail, then pedagogical strategies were needed that would intervene, alter, even disrupt the atmosphere.
>
> (Hooks 1994: 7)

How then to assist this excitement of learning? Kolb provided a valuable and now well-known framework for experiential learning as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (Kolb 1984: 38). His learning cycle (see Figure 3.1) divides the learning experience into four key stages (concrete experience, observations and reflections, generalisation or the formulation of abstract concepts and testing), each of which incorporate a variety of methods depending on the approach taken.

While this cycle represents a "single-loop" learning process, by combining it with Mezirow's notion of the "disorienting dilemma" which provokes the transformation of a personal meaning perspective a "double-loop" learning cycle can be established (see Figure 3.2). This idea has been developed further by building on the work of Bateson (1973) and Argyris (1974) who consider different levels of learning, or learning loops (Swieringa and Wierdsma 1993; Burgoyne 1992). Learning loops may be envisaged in different ways: a simple formulation might conceive a first learning loop as dealing with observed problems and trying to solve them. A second learning loop would involve identifying the root causes of those problems, and reflecting on how we explore and identify them. A third loop would require engagement with the nature of that exploration, in terms of how we reflect, analyse and engage in critical discourse within our own contexts. In short, why we think as we do about what we do.

Figure 3.1 Kolb's experiential learning cycle

(Kolb 1984)
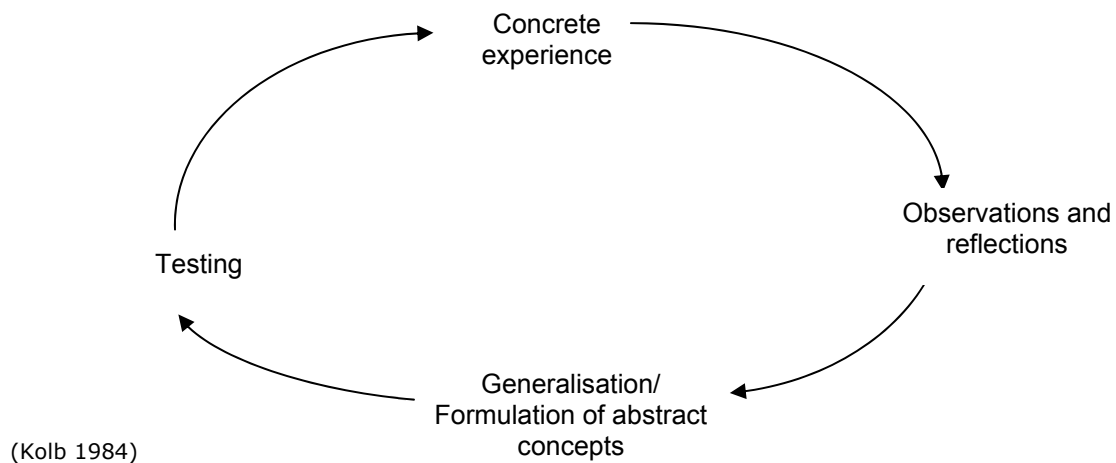
Figure 3.2 Double loop learning
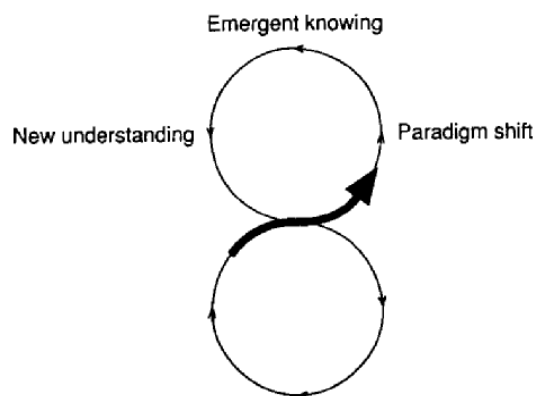
(Brockbank and McGill 1998: 45)

Many adult educators consequently assert that experiential, hands-on learning activities offer a powerful medium for promoting transformative learning (Taylor 1998) and bridging theory and practice. But such an approach may require an exploration of alternative approaches to the traditional classroom, such as the utilisation of drama-based activities or even moving the learning experience away from the HLI altogether and into the community. Community-based learning and AR methods can enable the participation of individual actors in generating their own personal and contextually relevant theories which are grounded in (as well as inform) practice. Freire's notion of *praxis,* broadly speaking, refers to the interaction of theory grounded in and leading to active practice facilitated by critical reflective engagement with the entire process. This helps learning move beyond the subjective, personal and even institutional realms of transformation to those of the "real world". Thus local realities of community experience become a crucial focus for bridging theory and practice.

Although experiential learning is seen by many educators as being extraordinarily powerful, its mainstreaming in HLIs seems especially problematic, and it appears often to be systematically ignored and marginalised. Many reasons have been provided for this (see Box 3.1) but the real underlying causes of this situation still remain unclear, and further analysis is still needed.

Box 3.1 Why is experiential learning not mainstreamed in all teaching programmes of HLIs?

- Teachers often teach as they themselves were taught
- Existing institutional cultures and power structures dictate (traditional) teaching practice and experiential and participatory teaching and learning approaches are perceived as challenging these
- Institutional and individual needs for experiential learning approaches are insufficiently articulated or absent
- Space where exposure of personal beliefs and feelings may occur non-fearfully is missing or inadequate
- Unwillingness of those engaged in experiential learning to challenge existing hierarchies and power structures, and failure of those within HLIs to make a stand when needed, based on agreed principles derived through experiential learning
- Difficulties in demonstrating accountability, publicly and privately, to those stakeholders with whom learners engage in experiential and participatory learning

(Source: LTP Dialogue 2003)

3.1.3 Linking universities and communities

A range of innovative practices including community-based research, action research, action learning and participatory action research have exposed new understandings of the transformative potential of experiential learning with social relevance. These diverse approaches to "community-based learning" add another category of learner-educator to the conventional student-teacher dichotomy and strengthen the relationship between traditionally elite institutions of HL and socially marginalised communities, while simultaneously aiding the connection between personal, institutional and social transformation.

Figure 3.3 illustrates some alternatives to the traditional university-based learning relationship (though this can be taken further still with the integration of additional internal or external actors into both teaching and learning roles). Conventional understandings of the nature of learning in HL institutions assume the participation of an academic who teaches and students who learn. However, the model shown in Figure 3.3 introduces an additional participant: the community practitioner. Like the academic and the student, the practitioner plays a valuable role as an educator as well as a learner. All three may engage in different spaces depending on the nature of the interaction between university and community. Currently, one of the most interesting, and broad, perceptions of this interaction is embodied in the emergence of Practice Research Engagement (PRE), which seeks to promote engagement among

civil society practitioners and researchers, thus making a contact between '"activist scholars" and "reflective activists" in the service of better understanding complex political, economic and social problems' (Brown 2002: 9).

Figure 3.3 Who participates? Learner–educator relations
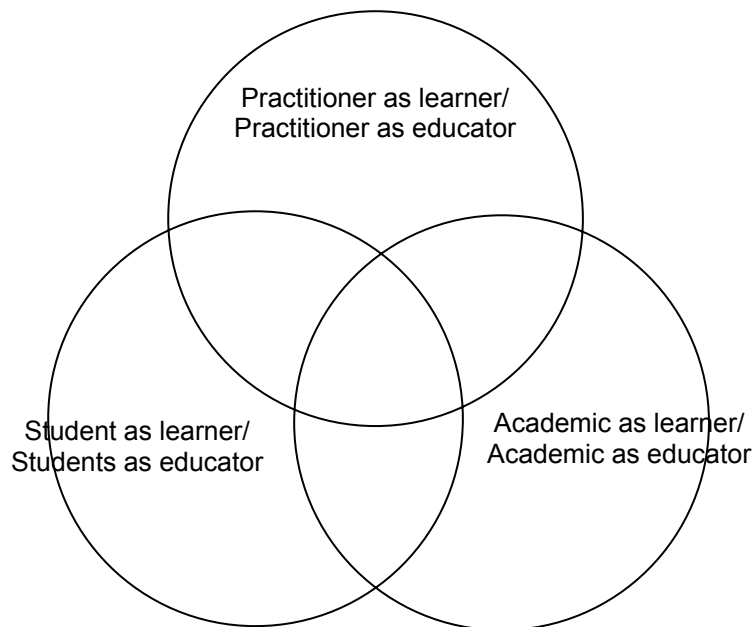
Theory that is developed from "the field" can have substantial advantages. Transformative participatory learning utilises pedagogies and methods which create opportunities for community-developers/mobilisers, field practitioners, academics and students to work together and learn from each other in order to become more effective jointly as "critical scholar-practitioners". In effect, they may become partners within a participatory research system.

Research can take place anywhere along a contextual continuum, at either end of which are the academic and the community settings. While it is most common for research into social transformation to be undertaken by students or faculty within the academic institution facilitated by occasional empirical ventures into the community realm, the phenomenon of community-based research (CBR) has also emerged. Drawing partly from the participatory development research tradition (Brown and Tandon 1983, cited in Stoecker 2003) CBR is rooted in non-academic traditions. In contrast to traditional forms of service learning, CBR is community-led. Research projects are defined and chosen through a community-based process, and ideally led by a community based group or organisation. Communities are seen as having strengths and resources as well as needs. Community-based forms of information and communication, such as oral and artistic traditions, are respected as legitimate knowledge. Most importantly, the goal of CBR is to support community-based social change efforts (Stoecker 2003).

3.1.4 Participatory methods for more effective learning

Participatory and collaborative learning fundamentally shifts the traditional dichotomies of the learner/teacher relationship in education. There is a diversity of degrees of participation, however. Taking as a starting point critical education theory, the assertion that "critical" or "transformative" intellectuals should work to transform social relations of power by empowering marginalised students implies quite a paternalistic engagement with educators in the transformation of learners. Indeed, the assumption that teachers can (or even should) be "transformative intellectuals", acting on behalf of the "other" and knowing and understanding their students to the extent that they can actively exert change has come under heavy fire from critics such as Lynch. Lynch asserts that 'students are not willing dough waiting to be kneaded into shape by their educators no matter how well-intentioned the latter might be' (Lynch 1999: 50) and points out that Freirean pedagogies may often be irrelevant to the priorities of students, especially in contexts devoid of militant political dissent.

Mezirow (1991) emphasises the role of the educator as a facilitator of subjective transformation, rather than as a transformative agent in her/him-self. Thus, the function of educators is to:

- help the learner focus on and examine the assumptions that underlie their beliefs, feelings and actions
- assess the consequences of these assumptions
- identify and explore alternative sets of assumptions
- test the validity of assumptions through effective participation in reflective dialogue.

Mezirow and many others (Boyd and Myers 1988; Saavedra 1996) recognise that an equally essential aspect of critical reflection is the educator's own learning process. Boyd goes one step further in insisting that to be truly transformative, the adult educator must practice two "virtues": seasoned guidance (the process of an experienced mentor reflecting on their own personal learning journey with the intent to help guide others) and compassionate criticisms (assisting students in questioning their own reality and facilitating the process of discernment, which 'ultimately reveals the present and creates a path for the future') (Boyd 1988: 282). Thus, in their different ways, both Boyd and Mezirow diverge from the critical education school in their eradication of the traditional student-teacher dichotomies. Teachers can (and should) learn through their teaching, but also from the students they teach as well. It is also, of course, up to teachers to establish an enabling environment for participation and contribute the design of experiences which may influence transformation in others. Transformation itself may occur much later; the educative process may in effect sow seeds which contribute to longer term processes. Thus, the establishing of a climate of patience, trust and respect, the awareness of space for participation by each individual and the nurturing of personal reflection and inner growth and change seem to be essential ingredients for learning participation. Also critical is the management of conflict and confrontation (both internally and externally between other participants in the learning experience) within the learning process. Although conflict is seen, frequently, as undesirable in many HLIs, it is argued that participation cannot be learned in its absence. Confrontational learning may indeed be decisive in changing visible power relations, which affect

all aspects of life and society, including the relationship between teacher and student. Non-confrontational learning may be equally important, however, in contributing to the sustainability and durability of changes in power relations.

A range of methodologies that support learning and teaching participation in HLIs have been identified during the LTP dialogue. A selection of these is included in Box 3.2.

Box 3.2 Examples of methodologies for teaching and facilitating participation

- begin a teaching programme by asking and giving space to learners to define what they want, and also what they can offer; then adapt the curriculum accordingly to demonstrate that what they can offer is valued
- use information as a means of challenging belief systems, as an opportunity to speak for "different reasons" and as a response to differences in knowledge and experience between individuals
- provide structured opportunities for immersion by learners in "real" situations and contexts; theory makes sense when combined with practice through a process of critical reflection and action
- alternate "formal" and "informal" exchanges, gradually increasing the group leadership and responsibility
- ask learners to define the way they see themselves in a particular context (e.g. their job, or position) in relation to the rest of the world
- help learners reach understanding of the goals (both individual and collective) of a programme, and provide a structure, with clear steps (but not the method) by which learners can achieve these goals. The teacher thus provides 'an initial envelope around the process and acts as guarantor of the safety of the participants', through a structured transfer of responsibility from teacher to students
- provide informal interaction with groups, and individual coaching when needed
- provide support to groups, building relations of trust, ground-rules and understandings which promote candidness, openness, acceptance and offering of constructive criticism, building confidence that "they" can do it
- avoid and break the habit of returning to the "master teacher" mode and the use of banking, from which most teachers are only "one lecture away"
- use and facilitate evaluation processes based on an action research approach, especially through the use of self and group evaluation techniques
- carry forward ideas and learnings from previous groups and classes to help, support and nurture new groups; at the same time, still allow each group its own "space" to learn through experience and reflection
- develop and demonstrate respect and trust creating a climate which affirms the value and self-worth of the learner.

(Source: LTP Dialogue 2003)

3.1.5 Challenges faced by HLIs in entering the arena of participation and development

There are many challenges facing the institutionalisation of learning and teaching participation. These are felt particularly by individuals and groups that seek to bring their initiatives from the margins to the centre of higher learning institutions. Many advocates and champions of such initiatives see themselves engaged, essentially, in a political battle. Key challenges include:

- how to support the evolution of learning organisations, by negotiating power relations and hierarchies, especially those involving teachers, learners and institutional managers?

- how to overcome structural constraints to learning and teaching participation, and promote and achieve an interdisciplinary approach to learning within institutions?

- how to change attitudes and behaviour, acknowledging that emotions and beliefs play a vital part in the learning process?

- how to establish assessment and evaluation systems that are well suited to innovative teaching and learning practices whilst assuring quality and rigour?

- how to ensure that the participatory concepts, approaches and methodologies used are relevant to the particular culture and context in which they are located?

- how to support and build capacity and competencies in the use of participatory teaching and learning methodologies such as PRA, action research and experiential learning?

Two very significant challenges have been highlighted during the ongoing LTP dialogue:

1) *Limits to teaching participation as an element of a programme or as a course in itself:* in HLIs, participation seems rarely to have been used as the basis for systemic learning through the development of an entire learning programme dedicated to participation, or used explicitly as an underlying and integrating principle for multidisciplinary learning programmes. With a few exceptions, participation has been given scant attention as a focus for curriculum development.

2) *Limits to participatory and collaborative teaching and learning:* even where participation is on the educational agenda, many teaching and training institutions seem not to facilitate learning effectively. Thousands of "qualified" development professionals emerge from education institutions annually and globally, having undergone a learning process where the prevailing paradigm is based on the belief that teaching and transmission of "one knowledge" brings about learning. Institutions have been given the authority to determine, approve and validate this knowledge, according to a set of predetermined standards and criteria which are then translated into a content-oriented course of teaching, delivered to passive learners. The context in which learning takes place is often ignored, as are the existing and emerging attitudes and beliefs of teachers, students and other stakeholders. In many institutions, subjects in the curriculum are not interconnected or integrated, whilst learning processes and outcomes are guided, interpreted and examined according to the dominant perception of what is "right", rather than what is "real". Students and teachers are rarely considered as co-learners in a joint and collaborative journey. "Practice", such as it occurs in many higher level courses, often involves extractive activities whereby students gather information from "informants" and may even be used as vehicles for extending information. Learners are rarely guided, consciously, to position new experiences systemically within a wider learning process in relation to their prior knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and values.

A range of other challenges to learning and teaching participation have been identified through experiences shared in the LTP dialogue, as shown in Box 3.3.

Box 3.3 Challenges to learning and teaching participation in Higher Learning Institutions

- The tendency of higher learning institutions to reduce diversity in the name of "efficiency", particularly in a context of increasing competition for resources with similar institutions. A link was mentioned also to the manifestation of strategies by institutions and individuals to gain resources through use of appropriate participation terminology appealing to donors, whilst failing to actually adopt participatory or experiential approaches in practice.
- Universities maintaining a reductionist, conservative view of education and research, supporting the use of discipline-based teaching programmes, and a continuation of traditional modes of teaching promoting rote-learning and memorisation of information. A culture of self-protection maintained especially by "academic" staff with little or no experience of collaboration with communities or groups outside their own institutions.
- Lack of pedagogic and methodological training of teachers within higher learning institutions. Apathy or resistance by teachers and students towards innovative, participatory and experiential methods of learning, seeing them as less worth and non-academic (described variously as 'a diversion from academic work' or as 'Mickey Mouse approaches'). Further constraints to innovative pedagogy related to physical attributes of the teaching/learning environment (inappropriate sizes of classes, rooms, fixed and inflexible facilities, etc.), as well as logistical challenges posed by standardised semester or term times that are unsynchronised with the natural flow and cycles of activities in local communities.
- Obsession by universities with the need for high research ratings, leading to the promotion of traditional research approaches particularly in the natural sciences. Coupled with this are enhanced promotion opportunities for those who win research awards and publish in prestigious journals, many of which are not open to accounts and findings of collaborative, participatory and community-based research.
- Community reservations about the role and potential contribution of the university in collaborative research programmes.
- Differences between stated and operational goals of institutions: 'participatory methods may conform exactly with the stated goals of community service, public involvement, student learning, etc. but conflict with operational goals of order thus respecting the entrenched defenders of the pattern of resource distribution – which includes faculty time and funding'.
- Haphazard change processes, associated with loss of innovators from institutions, removal, run-down or destruction of innovative programmes, and a heavy responsibility on the shoulders of individuals or small groups to promote change and participation.

(Source: LTP Dialogue 2003)

It is with challenges such as these in mind, that this paper now aims to take the question forward of how to enable HLIs to explore their potential as agents of development, and to address the constraints that they face.

4 A conceptual framework for exploring learning and teaching participation

4.1 The emergence of a framework

This paper has presented a number of complexities related to the role of HLIs as agents of development and social change, and to the way in which they may fulfil their potential as such agents through promoting and facilitating participation. Assuming that the constraints described earlier are indeed widespread, but that there are many individuals and some institutions that desire to achieve effective learning of participation and to develop appropriate participatory teaching and learning approaches, what may be done to facilitate a greater sharing of experience and mutual learning in these matters? It seems useful, therefore, to suggest some kind of framework within which HLIs may evaluate their institutional capacity to achieve and deliver learning and teaching participation. How may they approach this within their own institution, and also through their collaborations and partnerships with external groups and organisations? In particular, how may HLIs enhance the learning of participation and transformative learning, and what methodologies are required to facilitate this? In what ways may HLIs enhance the participation of traditionally excluded voices, knowledges and personal realities, realising that power-relations (and by implication, the prioritising of some positions over others) still permeate different agendas over the goal of HLIs, the role of individuals, and of teaching and learning in general?

There seem to be three central questions that should be addressed:

1) What is the critical approach to learning and teaching participation within an HLI? For example, are there individual endeavours within a single institution, or is there evidence of trans-institutional, regional or global strategy-building networks that promote and foster learning and teaching participation?

2) What are the key elements that inform this critical approach? In particular:
*   who participates in each initiative, in what way and to what extent?
*   what exactly changes and at which levels?
*   what methodologies are employed to facilitate this participation and transformation?

3) What form of action research approach may sustain this critical approach?

Bawden (2000) has described a systemic learning framework based on an interrelated "research system" of theory, action (or practice), context and values or beliefs. From this perspective, a learner (or learning network, or community, or institution, or discourse) at any point in time, has a set or sets of values, and also holds certain theories. Any action taken by the learner will be based on these theories and values, but also influenced by the context. Once an action has been taken, the values of the learner may shift, as a

result of the experience, enabling the emergence of new theories. At the same time, the context itself may well be changed as a result of the action.

Figure 4.1 presents a framework which may provide a means of addressing these three critical questions.

Figure 4.1 Framework for assessing the elements of learning and teaching participation
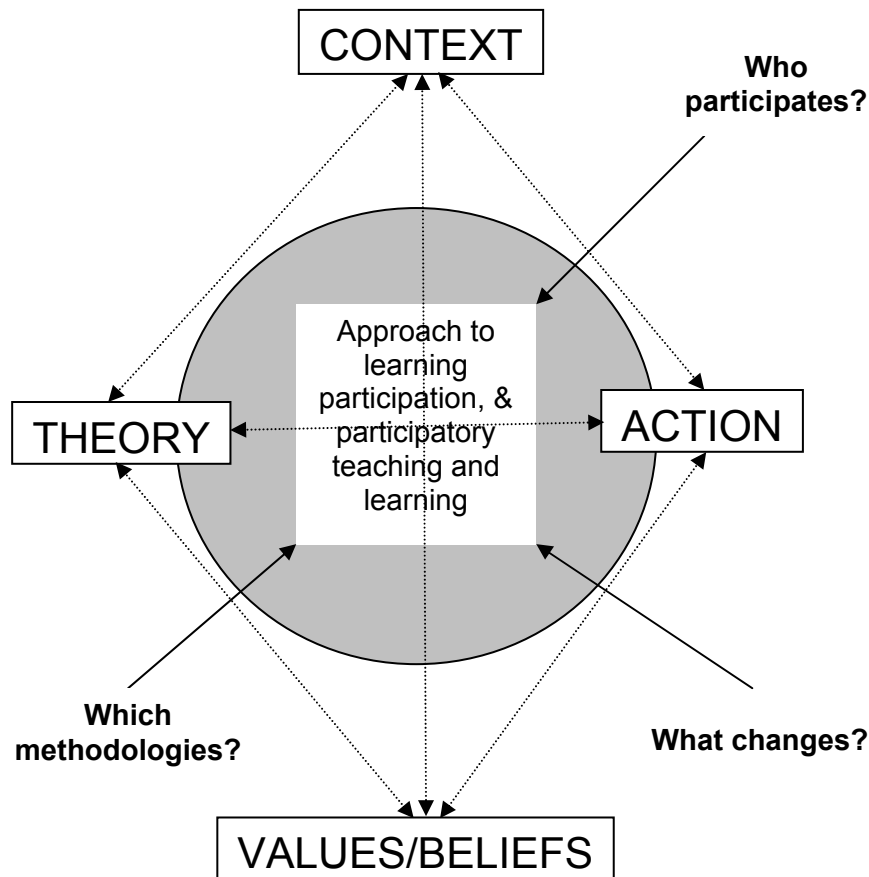
4.2 Applying the framework – a systemic analysis of learning and teaching participation

4.2.1 Who participates?

The context or positioning (socio-cultural, economic, geographic, political . . .) of an institution within the global knowledge economy and relevant research networks has great implications for the question of who participates in implementing collaborative or participatory learning initiatives. A "prestigious" and well-funded university in a Northern location may be more willing to experiment with new approaches to learning, having far less to lose than a smaller institution in the South struggling for international recognition and funds. This may result in large-scale participation by a number of actors within the institution, while in its Southern counterpart the rigid agenda may leave innovative learning approaches up

to the frustrated efforts of a few individuals. Conversely, at the institutional level, the same well-regarded Northern university may be so entrenched in a certain mentality and hierarchical mode of organisation that innovative approaches to teaching and learning are regarded as threatening its prestige, resulting in the raising of barriers to participatory initiatives. Although some HLIs may operate in relative isolation, others may have closer relationships with their local communities, opening avenues to the accepted participation of less elitist voices in establishing priorities and setting research agendas. This may be of particular importance in the South where the close proximity of HLIs to rich sources of indigenous technical, social and cultural knowledge can be a positive advantage for integration of research outcomes into curriculum development processes, and the emergence of more relevant teaching and learning programmes.

At the personal level, pressures on faculty through expectations to publish, to teach a certain quota of a course in the classroom, and the emphasis on ascription to singular disciplines may further diminish the potential for participation. Networks for implementing learning and teaching participation with high-ranking figures in ministries or donor organisations can serve to support and legitimate endeavours, but they also run the risk of exerting too powerful an influence over the network itself and stifling participation from other actors. With challenges such as these, a strong theoretical framework becomes vital for decision-making about who participates, since this establishes the foundation for the nature of participation itself.

The type of action will determine who should participate and whether that participation lies in a "learning" or "teaching" role. Figure 4.2 below depicts some of these potential dichotomies of participation. Within university-community collaborations, for example, engagements can consist of anything from community service, through service learning to community-based research. In the case of the former two, this allows for different degrees of student-practitioner and student-faculty engagement. In the latter, it usually consists of community-faculty relationships with community practitioners tending to take a leading "teaching" role. As noted earlier, CBR appears to provide the most promising opportunities for learning participation, as it focuses on community participation in research agendas, enabling community practitioners to define their own priorities and lead the research with academic support from faculty and institutions. These different models also demonstrate three increasing levels of participation in the creation of research agendas and theory.

Similarly, within strategies aimed to promote capacity development and the institutionalisation of learning and teaching participation, levels of participation can involve the inclusion of different actors (faculty, practitioners, students etc) to different extents in the design of curricula, the development of facilitation skills, and institutional reform to enhance the contextual relevance of HLIs. Again, the various participatory inputs by different actors are illustrated by Figure 4.2 below. It is perhaps not too bold to say that where the participation of actors operating within the context of social realities is enhanced, research and theory benefit from greater relevance and more focused priorities.

Finally, within local, national, regional and global learning networks, the extent and quality of participation can also vary. As discussed in the previous section, at local level participatory learning

networks tend to consist of a variety of actors (practitioners, faculty, students, NGOs, schools, businesses, local government, etc.) whereas similar global networks tend to be largely academic with some active participation from non-academic practitioners, NGOs or International Organisations (IOs). Consequently, a priority for a global network such as the LTP dialogue is to ensure close engagement with local, national and regional networks to ensure greater participation.

Figure 4.2 Learner-educator dichotomies of participation

| | | EDUCATORS | |
	HIGHER LEARNING STUDENTS	HIGHER LEARNING TEACHERS	COMMUNITY MEMBERS
HIGHER LEARNING STUDENTS	In-class discussions following service learning	Some service learning programmes	Community service/ service learning programmes
HIGHER LEARNING TEACHERS	Programmes of curriculum development, evaluation/ assessment initiatives	Local, national, regional, & global networks	CBR, some curriculum development initiatives and within research networks at all levels.
COMMUNITY MEMBERS	In some cases of community service and service learning	Elements of CBR and within research networks	CBR and in local, national, regional and global networks of practitioners

(Left margin spanning the rows: **LEARNERS**)

4.2.2 What changes?

How may initiatives in learning and teaching participation influence and transform the hierarchies of power inherent within HLIs and enhance participation by excluded faculty members and community practitioners? How can they move from their position as "centres of teaching" to *learning* institutions? What are the implications of theory and practice for the nature of change itself? Structural change can be effected in several ways:

- Firstly, through the innovations of individual teachers who are able to facilitate the learning of others while managing their personal processes of change and hence contribute to the "learning organisation".

- Secondly, through cross-disciplinary projects and programmes which transcend departmental boundaries and help to erode structural rigidities.
- Thirdly, through greater engagement with community realities and needs which further necessitates a cross-disciplinary (even a-disciplinary) approach. This helps to break down the traditional association of the academy with abstract (and sometimes irrelevant) theory by emphasising theory grounded in practice.

Within the theoretical dimension, a principal concern is the extent to which personal theories and philosophies are drawn upon from a wider range of stakeholders, many of whom operate largely outside of the academic realm. By rooting theory in practice (within the social realities of the community), moving towards increased community-based research, and incorporating community voices, knowledges, understandings and priorities the discursive transformation of research agendas may well also lead to personal, institutional and social transformation based on agendas defined and largely managed by the excluded. This highlights the critical importance of theory, which may sometimes be derided by practitioners as irrelevant, elitist and unhelpful. Theory helps one to frame and address critical questions, providing a lens through which the effects of teaching and its presence in a particular setting may be viewed. Theory is eminently practical; indeed pedagogy may be a form of theoretical knowledge, where practice and theory are different windows through which one may examine the same reality. Theory is needed also because of the wide range of contexts where participation is learned, and to guide the many forms of participatory action which take place. Theory is made relevant by the context, and makes sense within that context. Theory should also be underpinned by ethics, with the recognition of the need to achieve greater equity and justice.

What kind of changes may be seen in practice then, as a result of learning and teaching participation in HLIs?

- Personal (emotional, intellectual, spiritual etc.) transformation
- Within university-community collaborations the quality participation of community practitioners in the identification, design and co-management of research agendas leads to personal development of both the practitioner and academic populations (and indeed students, if the resulting research feeds back into HL courses).
- Institutional change may occur as HLIs are forced to renegotiate their structures to accommodate this new mode of research, and social change may occur as the ensuing research and theories feed back into practical application;
- Discursive transformation as understandings of learning, participation and processes of research are affected by new knowledges, experiences and non-academic inputs.

Table 4.1 Participation, transformation and methodologies of three selected LTP action strategies

	Action	Who Participates?	What Changes?	Methodologies?
University – Community Collabor-ations	COMMUNITY SERVICE	Students (& to some extent communities if they select the work)	Some experiential development in students, less workload for practitioners	First step of experiential learning cycle
	SERVICE LEARNING	Students (as learners), practitioners (as teachers) & faculty (as learners /teachers)	Students still the main focus but can prompt personal change in faculty & practitioners too	Full experiential learning cycle incorporating critical reflection
	COMMUNITY – BASED RESEARCH	Communities, who lead the research and faculty who employ skills & resources to contribute to needs & priorities as defined by the communities	Personal change in practitioners and faculty, social change, discursive and institutional change as research transforms	As above but since students are largely absent on a more equal basis. PAR methods
Capacity develop-ment and institutiona lising LTP	CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT	Usually faculty, less often communities and students themselves	Institutional change as structures are challenged	Participation in curriculum – design through PRA, PLA, PAR methods
	FACILITATING LEARNING	Usually faculty, less often communities and students	Personal change in faculty (may prompt institutional change)	Sensitivity, self-reflection, transparency PRA, PLA methods
	INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT	Faculty and other managerial staff perhaps with some community/student consultation	Personal change in faculty and other institutional staff, institutional change, social change?	Networks, strategic change processes and organisational learning
Networking	LOCAL NETWORKS	HL institutions, communities, schools, businesses, local government, NGOs	Personal change, transformation of institutions/ research, social change	Identifying purposes, making it sustainable
	NATIONAL/ REGIONAL NETWORKS	Usually academics and NGO practitioners with some governmental involvement	Personal change? Transformation of research agendas, policy-relevant research, social change	Using local experiences as a basis for developing national/regional strategies around common culture
	GLOBAL NETWORKS	Usually academics with some practitioners and some IO involvement	Transformation of research agendas, policy-relevant research, social change at global level	Using local experiences and PAR methods as a basis for cross-cultural experience sharing to highlight the importance of context while learning from other realities

Although within strategies of capacity development and institutionalisation of learning and teaching participation the transformative focus is clearly on change at the level of institutions, greater participation can also invoke transformative learning at a personal level. This may occur through experimentation with better facilitation techniques by faculty and practitioners, or empowerment as a result of designing their own curriculum by students. It may even lead to social change, as institutions adapt with the goal of becoming less exclusive and more accessible to communities as developmental resources. The level and extent of participation in networks also tends to correlate positively with transformative potential, although there are some exceptions. Local networks, which tend to have the largest participatory base are perhaps less likely to influence change at a global level, whether through transformation of global research agendas, discourses and generalising theories or renegotiation of the global ordering of knowledge and power through structural transformation.

4.2.3 Which methodologies?

As highlighted earlier in this paper, two cornerstones of transformative learning are experiential learning and critical reflection. Experiential learning, for example through community-based research, provides a methodology for increasing participation while prompting institutional change. It thus serves to incorporate the practitioner into the academic realm by casting the practitioner as "teacher" and the academic as "learner".

Critical reflection is a complementary practice to experiential learning. It contributes to transformation at the personal level through self evaluation, through learning from experiences, and importantly through self-awareness, identity formation and critical engagement with the learner's position and awareness in relation to power-structures. It also helps to further erode traditional student-teacher dichotomies and simultaneously increase participation by involving fellow staff, students and community practitioners in reflection. These methodologies highlight the intrinsic link between participation in learning and transformation. The more that learners participate, the more they are empowered; the more they are empowered, the more they question previous assumptions. The more they transform at the personal level, the more this is likely to impact on institutional transformation.

A wide range of ideas and practical suggestions on how to learn and teach participation in HLIs have been related from different contexts and regions of the world during the LTP dialogue (see Box 3.2). Many of these refer to specific teaching practices. For example, a teacher may establish intercultural dialogue, act as a catalyst, and provide experiences which will promote and enhance learning. Teachers may provide information which provokes and helps to loosen up rigid belief patterns. At the same time, the teacher is a symbol of authority and power, with strong self-interests; for this reason, it is vital for teachers to face themselves, and to address their own "issues" before they can help others to address theirs. Also it is critical for teachers to consider how they relate to others as human beings – in short, to address the personal dimension of learning and growth.

In summary, Table 4.1 below depicts some of the implications for participation and transformation and methodologies associated with selected action strategies for implementing learning and teaching

participation in HLIs. While there are of course exceptions, in general a greater participatory base in these initiatives tends to enhance the transformative potential, and this participation and transformation can play a crucial role in re-shaping theory and research agendas at a variety of levels.

5 Moving forward

5.1 Continuing to question

HLIs have huge potential to contribute to development and social change processes, building upon theories and practices of participation and understandings of power, which can enable them to be more effective in fulfilling their roles as development agents. Effective learning of participation, and participatory teaching and learning, require a movement from the margins to the centre of institutions and the policy environment in which they operate. But action is not sufficient in itself. It is vital to continue questioning the whole concept of learning and teaching participation. The following questions may help as a guide to proposals for moving learning and teaching participation forward:

- as HLIs transform and respond to the increased institutionalisation of learning and teaching participation initiatives, how should they adapt to the changing context? How should they ensure that the mainstreaming of projects and concepts does not imply compromising their radical, critical properties?

- how may research agendas be transformed through wider participation and interdisciplinary/inter-vocational coalitions? How can the theoretical base for learning and teaching participation be expanded in order to incorporate personal theories and philosophies grounded in practice?

- how to encourage and better facilitate further strategies for action and improve networking and collaboration at a variety of levels?

- how to develop new methodologies for articulating the value and belief systems of learning and teaching participation in order to contribute to the emergence of an ongoing critical discourse?

As part of a continued exploration of these issues through both theory and practice, the Learning and Teaching Participation dialogue aims to facilitate an ongoing exchange of experiences, stories and lessons learned from initiatives in learning and teaching participation in HLIs (see Box 5.1). One recommendation made during the dialogue has been that theoretical writings and useful resources shared by practitioners and those who are engaged with HLIs are made available in the form of accessible databases. This paper itself is intended to go some way towards responding to the recommendation for a synthesis of some theoretical writings, but efforts will be made to establish more extensive links on the LTP website. A list of internet-based resources and links will also be developed and maintained for wider reference.

Box 5.1 Moving on through the Learning and Teaching Participation dialogue

The Learning and Teaching Participation dialogue has provided a much needed opportunity to host discussions, network and disseminate lessons learned from individual initiatives. It is also contributing to the participatory process of scaling up experiences from the grassroots level into global research agendas. To address in more detail issues arising through the LTP dialogue an International Workshop on Learning and Teaching Participation took place at IDS from 2–4 April, 2003. A set of papers was prepared for the Workshop by different authors from around the world, focussing on issues, concepts and methodologies relating to LTP, some of which were later published (Taylor and Fransman 2003). At the same time, an e-forum (the fourth in a series on different topics related to LTP) took place, feeding in views and opinions of a wider range of participants on the future directions of the LTP dialogue (LTP Dialogue 2003). The vitality and relevance of the issues raised by these papers, through the discussions during the workshop, the e-forum and other events of the LTP initiative, suggest that the time is right to share stories and experiences relating to LTP even more widely. An important outcome of the workshop was the elaboration of a range of potential strategies for furthering the LTP initiative.

Recommended strategies emerging through the LTP dialogue include the following:

- Continued dissemination of publications and resource materials related to LTP;
- A review of the participatory base of the global dialogue; examining the scaling-up processes associated with alternative methodologies and strategies in a bid to ensure that local needs, priorities, knowledges, values and beliefs are feeding into the global research agenda;
- Encouragement of the formation of regional and national dialogues which help to reconceptualise the global experience in light of local priorities and needs. This is especially significant in non-English speaking localities;
- Compilation of capacity-building strategies (including resources to aid curriculum development and facilitation).

Several of these proposals are already being undertaken by "champions" who have been willing to collaborate in pursuing the desire to bring Learning and Teaching Participation from the margins of institutional life to the centre. Hopefully others will join the initiative and help to maintain the momentum of this rich and dynamic dialogue.

5.2 Possible actions

A movement towards an institutionalisation of learning and teaching participation in HLIs may be facilitated and supported in the following ways:

- Individuals within HLIs may explore ways of changing their practices through professional development which emphasises personal innovations in teaching and learning. Engagement in wider networking can nourish and support such endeavours

- HLI managers and administrators can learn about and support innovations within their own institutions which strengthen capacity. They can share lessons learned through their personal networks and community linkages

- NGOs and individual practitioners can explore possibilities for collaboration and joint learning with HLIs in developmental initiatives

Donors and policy-makers can help to create an enabling environment in which these practices can flourish. They may also support capacity development at the local, national, regional or global level. These areas of support might consist of:

- explorations into appropriate assessment and evaluation methods including participatory impact assessment; contextualised approaches to learning;
- participatory curriculum development;
- organisational development approaches that support and mainstream;
- the development of national and regional networks which can nourish and maintain the ongoing dialogue in ways that are appropriate to the socio-cultural context.

With these kinds of support, underpinned by ongoing action research, there is a real chance that learning and teaching participation and the utilisation of collaborative and participatory methods in teaching processes can assist HLIs in realising more of their developmental potential.

Appendix: IDS resources and links related to the LTP dialogue

IDS internet links

The Learning and Teaching Participation (LTP) in Higher Education Dialogue Website:
www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/networks/learnparticip/index.html

The LTP E-Forum Page:
www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/networks/learnparticip/e-forum.html

The LTP International Workshop Page:
www.ids.ac.uk/ids/particip/networks/learnparticip/workshp.html

LTP Publications from IDS

IDS Policy Briefing
'Learning to participate: the role of Higher Learning Institutions as development agents', informed by earlier rounds of the discussions and an International Workshop on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education, April 2003. Available in pdf at: www.ids.ac.uk/ids/bookshop/briefs/PB20.pdf

PLA Notes No 48 'Learning and Teaching Participation', P. Taylor and J. Fransman (eds), Dec 2003, a special thematic edition which includes papers submitted by a number of participants in the LTP dialogue is available from International Institute for Environment and Development. More information from PLA Notes at: www.iied.org/sarl/pla_notes/

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