Tackling Transformation: Using all of our minds

Valerie A. Brown AO, BSc MEd PhD
Director, Local Sustainability Project
Australian National University
Utopian thinking for a better world

Why would we try something so ambitious?
In the current transformation era, do we have a choice?

1. We live in an era of transformational change: **globally, locally and personally**
Do we have a choice?

1. We live in an era of transformational change: globally, locally, personally

2. The whole human species is re-shaping itself in response: physically, socially, environmentally
Do we have a choice?

1. We live in an era of transformational change: globally, locally, personally

2. The whole human species is re-shaping itself in response: physically, socially, environmentally

3. We are a thinking species, so our response to the complexity is to think collectively: as individuals, and as a community.
Thinking about a just transformation hopefully and collectively with all of our minds: how?
17th – 19th Century objectivity ruled

In the 19th Century Social Sciences faithfully copied the Biophysical Sciences

Objectivity divided the thinker from the thinking
20th Century Sciences allowed for subjectivity

Focus: Discipline
- Communities: Sociology
- Populations: Demography
- Space: Geography
- Time: History
- Cultures: Anthropology
21st C Sciences recognized multiple knowledges

- **Individual knowledge** = personal experience
- **Community knowledge** = shared stories
- **Specialised knowledge** = observations
- **Organisation knowledge** = political agendas
- **Holistic knowledge** = synthesis
The knowledges reject each other:

- **Individual**
  - Unreliable

- **Community**
  - Bias

- **Specialised**
  - Silos

- **Organisation**
  - Self-serving

- **Holistic**
  - Airy fairy

- As a citizen of the community
- As an expert in your field
- As a strategist in your political environment
The knowledges form a power hierarchy

1. ORGANISATIONAL
2. SPECIALISED
3. COMMUNITY
4. INDIVIDUAL
5. HOLISTIC
In this 21\textsuperscript{st} Century the tide is turning:
from single-minded to collective thinking

- The world is not static: it is dynamic, and full of surprises
- Knowledge is not a given: it is multiple, open-ended, and uncertain
- Ethical concerns are not for just one problem: they are for a just world
The home of the collective mind

Leonardo da Vinci 1605
Local Sustainability Project

>300 social learning workshops

across four continents

1990 – 2010

Local Agenda 21
Human learning is cumulative: ‘and’ not ‘or’

Collective thinking =

1. Objectivity
   +
2. Multiple knowledge cultures
   +
3. Multiple ways of understanding
Multiple ways of understanding

All of our minds
Multiple ways of understanding

- Aesthetic
- Biophysical
- Social
- Sympathetic
- Ethical
- Collective
- Individual
Homes for collective thinking include:

- **Systems, networks:** WWW; modelling
- **Global summits:** Economic, Social, Env’t
- **Think tanks:** Liberal, Conservative
- **Social movements:** Transition Towns
- **Dialogue centres:** Sweden, Canada, Australia
Searching for collective thinking has found:

- An unbounded mind
- A participatory mind
- A transdisciplinary mind
- Pattern language
- Dialogue
- Mode 2 society
- **Collective learning**
A collective learning spiral connects:

IDEALS
What should be?

FACTS
What is?

IDEAS
What could be?

ACTION
What can be?

DO

DEVELOP

DESIGN

* 7 ways of understanding
Introspection

Observations

Narratives

Relationships

Senses

Feelings

Synergy

Collective understanding

Individual

Biophysical

Social

Ethical

Aesthetic

Sympathetic

Collective

Collective answers: introspection, observations, narratives, relationships, senses, feelings, synergy

and

and

and

and
Collective understanding:

Individual

Biophysical

Social

Ethical

Aesthetic

Sympathetic

Collective
Collective thinking: Durban

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introspective</th>
<th>WSSF, beaches, hills, crime</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biophysical</td>
<td>Port, 4000/sg mile, 885/person sq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>British, Vooortrekkers, Zulus, Ind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethical</td>
<td>Civil society action, flat dwellers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aesthetic</td>
<td>Golden mile, valley of 1000 hills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sympathetic</td>
<td>Farmers, pastoralists, urban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>Essence of Durban</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Collective practice includes (HIV/AIDS clinic)

- Introspection
- Observation
- Shared stories
- Principles
- Patterns
- Feelings
- Collective thinking
Questions

Individual

Biophysical

Social

Ethical

Aesthetic

Sympathetic

Collective

Sources of answers

Introspection

Observations

Narratives

Principles

Senses

Feelings

Collective thinking
We must think globally. We must look at the big picture. We must! We absolutely must.

Because the big picture is easier to look at than the small picture.

Why?

Just you and me and our mess....

I wonder is there a medium-sized picture, with an angel and a tree—maybe some flowers....

What's in the small picture?
I wonder is there a medium-sized picture; with an angel and a tree—a hill; maybe some flowers....
Transformations

• Stone Age

• Bronze Age

• Iron/Steel Age

• Information/Digital Age

• Age of the Collective Mind