

# Some Thoughts and Materials about Sustainable Development and Transformative Learning in Higher Education

Handout for session SE50-TR01 on “What should higher education institutions be doing to advance sustainability research?”

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[www.cde.unibe.ch](http://www.cde.unibe.ch), [www.bne.unibe.ch](http://www.bne.unibe.ch), [www.copernicus.org](http://www.copernicus.org)

This is the dominant institutional reality in Higher Education

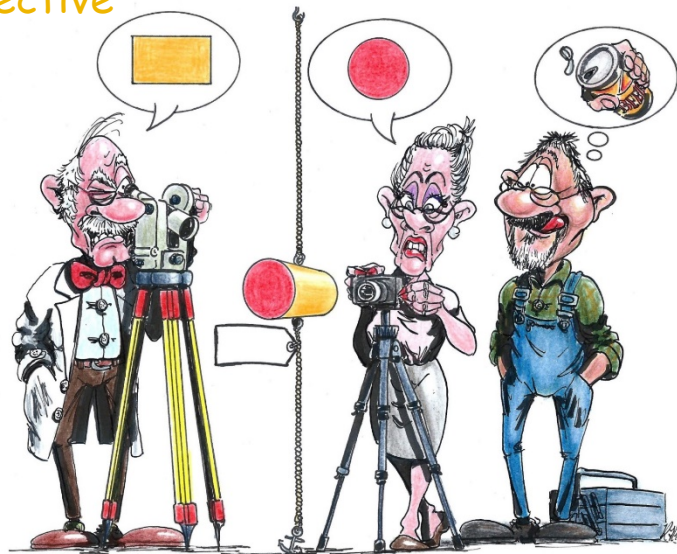


... with **clear perspectives** and corresponding perceptions of the Other:

Natural  
science  
perspective

Social science  
perspective

Actors'  
perspectives



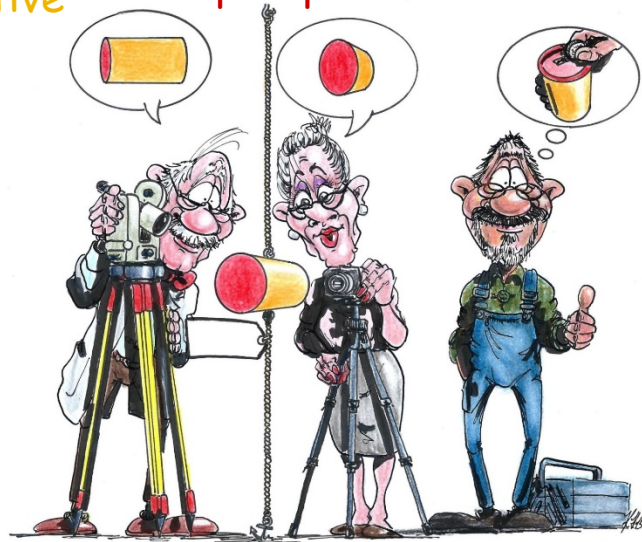
...but the knowledge developed is **not appropriate** for sustainable development and does not lead to transformation

Changes begin when you start doing inter- and transdisciplinary work together...

Natural  
science  
perspective

Social  
science  
perspective

Actors'  
perspective



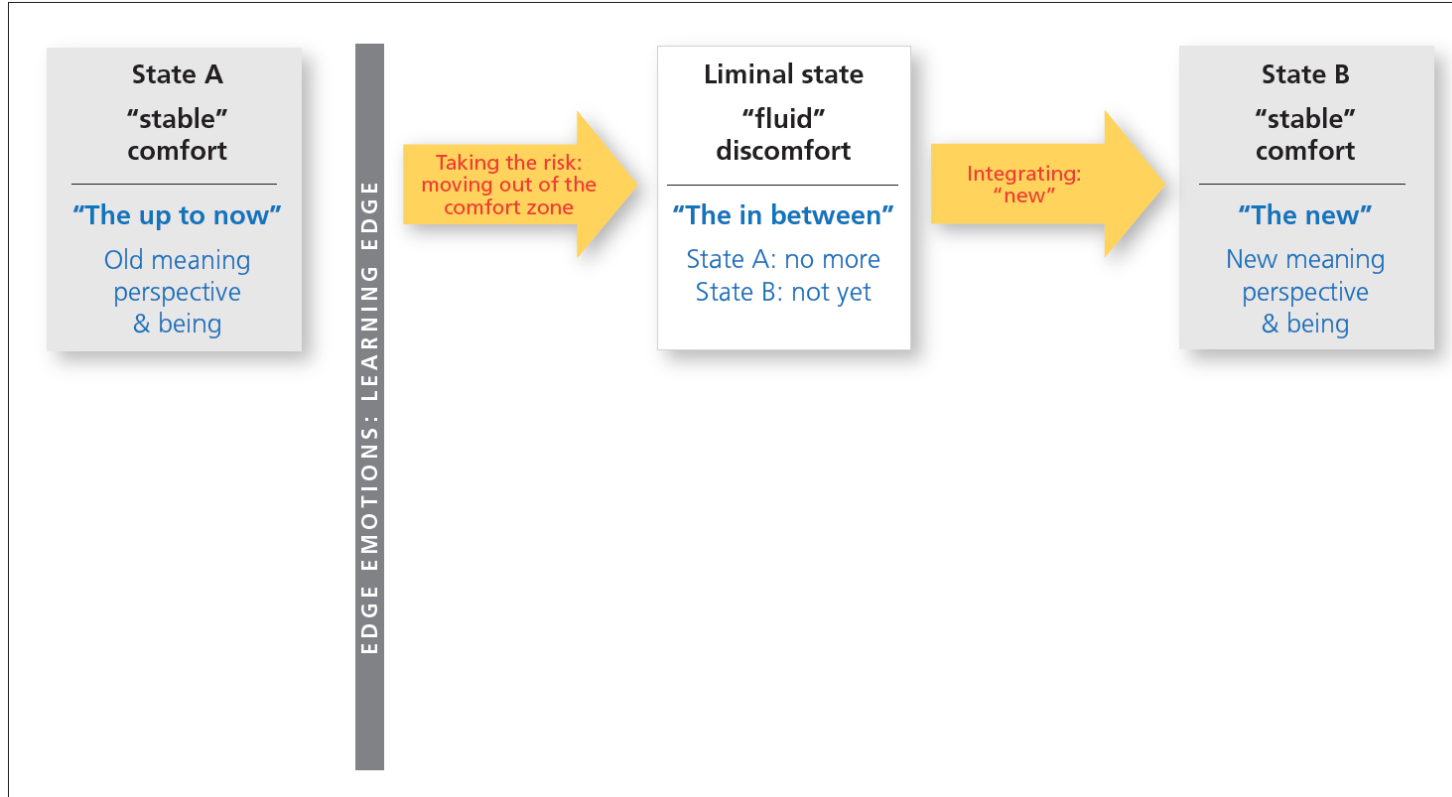
...this can lead to  
transformative learning (and  
sometimes to changed  
behaviour)

# Eight propositions for transformative learning and teaching (TLT)

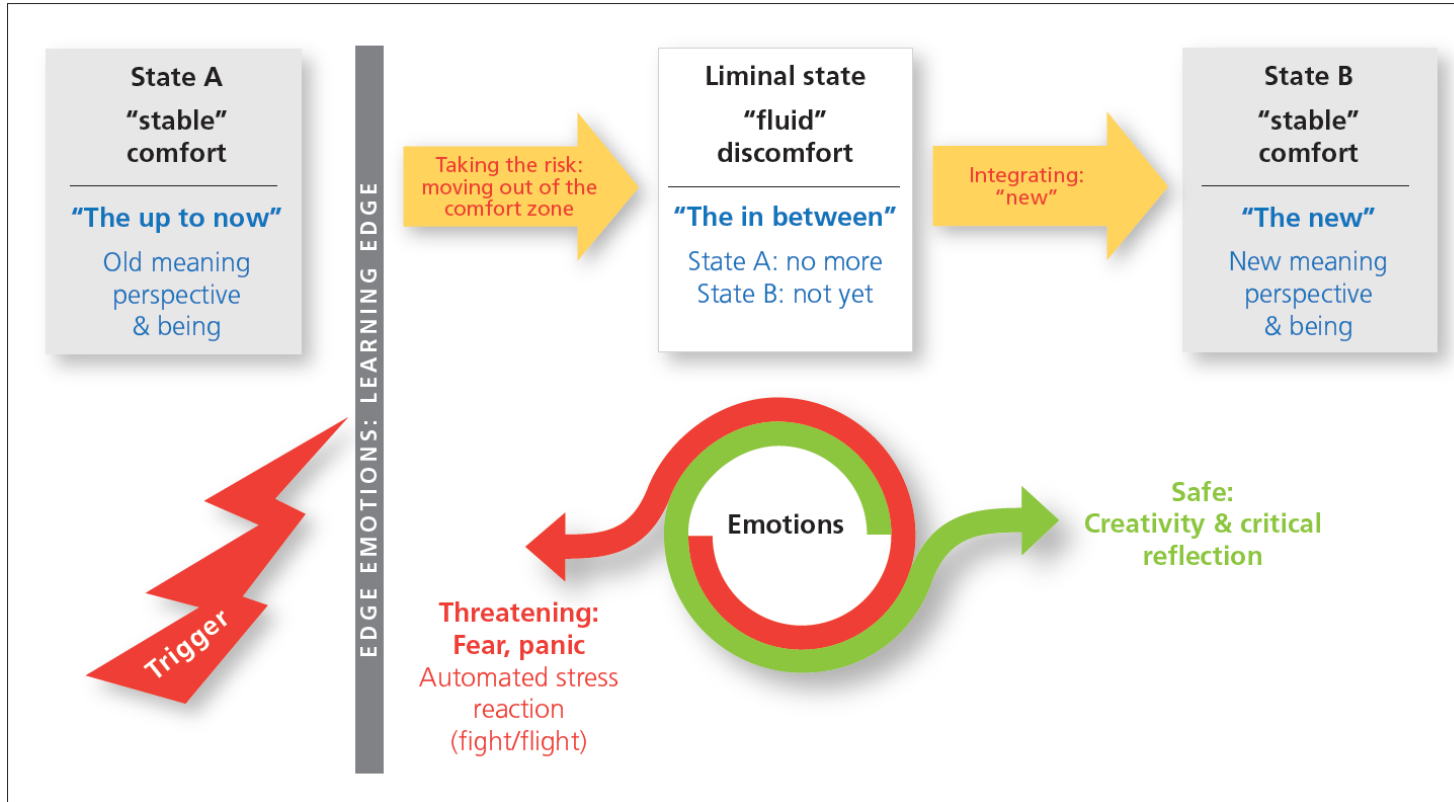
1. Higher education has **fundamental potential** for TLT.
2. Sustainability requires **value-oriented** TLT.
3. Sustainability-oriented TLT in higher education requires a **reflexive examination** of normativity.
4. **Emotions** require targeted attention in sustainability-oriented TLT in higher education.
5. Normativity and emotionality constitute **challenges for science-based** university teaching.
6. **Safe** teaching-and-learning arrangements are needed to facilitate TLT processes.
7. It is necessary to **professionalize** sustainability-oriented TLT and clarify relations with established university pedagogy.
8. **Further research** on sustainability-oriented TLT in higher education is needed.

Source: Bornemann et al 2020: [Sustainability-Oriented Transformative Learning and Teaching in Higher Education \(saguf.ch\)](https://www.saguf.ch)

# Transformative Learning as a process



# What it requires...



Source:  
Förster et al 2019:  
[Transformative  
teaching in Higher  
Education for  
Sustainable  
Development:  
facing the  
challenges](#)

# Edge Emotions according to Mälkki and Green

Edge emotions: “the **experiential dimensions of challenges to one’s meaning perspective**” (2014).

With Berger (2004), they highlight “the moving nature of the boundary between knowing and not knowing. The **fluidity of that boundary** is what is most troubling for the learner, as it involves the **loss of a point of orientation.**”

They argue: “traditional education considers itself to be an **epistemological enterprise**, whereas transformational learning is **ontological** in nature”.

Buddhist aphorism (Chögyam Trungpa): “You should feel grateful whenever you’re disappointed or frustrated because it means that you are getting news from reality.”

Source:

Mälkki, K. and L. Green (2014). "Navigational aids the phenomenology of transformative learning." *Journal of Transformative Education* 12(1): 5–24.

Further interesting sources on transformative learning:  
<https://visionautik.de/product/a-transformative-edge-knowledge-inspiration-and-experiences-for-educators-of-adults>  
<https://legacy17.org/ont/>