

---

<sup>b</sup>  
**UNIVERSITÄT  
BERN**

**CDE**  
CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT  
AND ENVIRONMENT

# **Strengthening higher education institutions' will to change: A Manifesto for Transformative Learning**

Workshop 197, facilitated by Anne B. Zimmermann

## **Higher Education with Impact Conference**

13-15 December 2023

Hasselt – Old Prison, Belgium

Contact : [anne.zimmermann@unibe.ch](mailto:anne.zimmermann@unibe.ch)

# Who we are... (members of saguf AG BNE)



**Dr. Anne B. Zimmermann**  
Associated Senior Research Scientist  
Centre for Development and Environment, Univ. of Bern



**UNIVERSITÄT  
BERN**

**CDE**  
CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT  
AND ENVIRONMENT



**Dr. Ruth Förster**  
Freelancer – Founder  
dr. ruth förster training & counseling, Zurich



**Marlene Mader**  
TdLab, ETH Zürich



**Sandra Wilhelm**  
anders kompetent GmbH, RCE Zürich



**Dr. Helene Sironi**  
SironiWeiss - Umwelt.Bildung.Transformation  
Stiftung SILVIVA



schweizerische akademische gesellschaft für umweltforschung und ökologie  
société académique suisse pour la recherche environnementale et l'écologie  
swiss academic society for environmental research and ecology

# What and how today

## **Workshop aims:**

1. ... respond to the Manifesto and reflect on transformative learning
2. ... discuss possibilities of contributing to change in your contexts
3. ... and start joining forces to strengthen HEIs' will to change!

## **Art of hosting – four rules:**

- ✓ *speak from the “I”*
- ✓ *speak with intention and remain focused*
- ✓ *listen with attention*
- ✓ *stay curious and avoid advice*

# Let's get to know one another! Picasso party, 8 mins

In pairs:

2': **Keep eye contact continuously during this time!**

Person A: talk about yourself

Person B: listen without interrupting & draw the person

1': **B shows drawing to A, enjoy and comment!**

2': **Keep eye contact continuously again!**

Person B: talk about yourself

Person A: listen without interrupting & draw the person

1': **A shows drawing to B, enjoy and comment!**

1': Individually, add a title to the portrait that hints at the **person's superpower** for helping to change the paradigm in education

1': **Hand over your drawing to the person portrayed – enjoy!**

To begin with...

... your understanding of transformative learning?

“Transformative learning involves a **deep structural shift** in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a **shift of consciousness** that dramatically and **permanently alters our way of being** in the world.

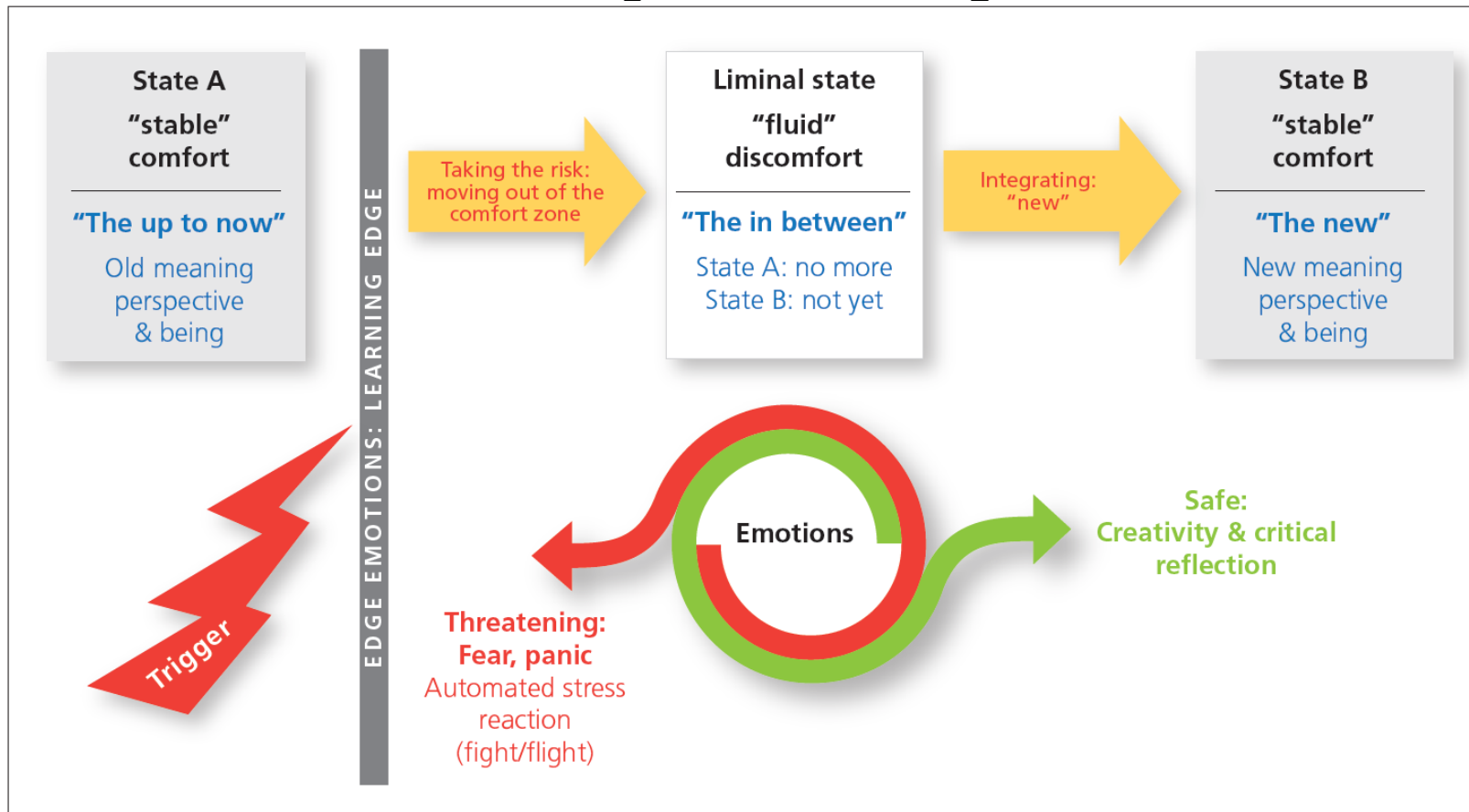
*(Morrell & O'Connor, 2002, p.xvii)*

Such a shift involves our **understanding of ourselves** and our self-locations; our **relationships** with other humans and with the natural world; our **understanding of relations of power** in interlocking structures of class, race, and gender; our **body-awareness**, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our **sense of possibilities** for social justice and peace and personal joy.”

# How the Manifesto came to be... - Part 1

**Before:** AG BNE explored transformative learning & relation to ESD

Then: issue of *teaching* when aiming for transformative learning -> articles!



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

# How the Manifesto came to be... - Part 2

Before: AG BNE explored transformative learning & relation to ESD

Discussed issue of teaching when aiming for transformative learning -> articles!

And then? **Desire for impact!** Apply it in practice!

BUT: limitations of the HE system...

**Change the system? How?** Position paper!

*More of the same...* -> morphed into a **Manifesto** (see Agile Manifesto). BUT!

Required a change of mindset and habit...

-> use of role-play (to write with impact: understand who the reader is!)

AND NOW??? We have a **website...** -> **can it lead to impact?**

Also: need for supporting practitioners implementing transformative learning...

[www.learning-for-transformation.ch](http://www.learning-for-transformation.ch)

Learning for Transformation

[Home](#)



[Manifesto](#)

[Literature & Links](#)

[Initiators](#)

[Legal Information](#)

[Contact Us](#)

 EN 



## Manifesto

The manifesto contains four demands and corresponding core messages that have emerged from our broad and collective expertise, based on knowledge and practice. We have underpinned each of the core statements with arguments; these arguments are available as fold-out texts.

[Endorse the manifesto](#)

[Adopt the manifesto](#)



# What we suggest committing to:

- 1 We all contribute to enabling transformations towards sustainable development.**
- 2 Cosmetic changes won't do: we are open to radical changes in our thinking, feeling and acting. Individually and collectively.**
- 3 We are committed to transformative learning processes everywhere in society.**
- 4 We shape learning environments and learning processes for transformative learning in a conscious and competent manner.**

For each demand: core messages, then fold-out arguments for the core messages

1 We all contribute to enabling transformations towards sustainable development.

1.1 The world's crises require that we respond with massive changes and competent action.

1.2 Education for sustainable development needs to be available to all, at all educational levels, and throughout life.

2 Cosmetic changes won't do: we are open to radical changes in our thinking, feeling and acting. Individually and collectively.

2.1 A sustainable future implies radically questioning our certainties and values.

2.2 Transformation means systems change and not stabilization of the system.

2.3 A sustainable future is not compatible with the neo-liberal growth paradigm.

3 We are committed to transformative learning processes everywhere in society.

3.1 Transformative learning enables us to challenge our certainties and values.

3.2 Transformative learning at the societal and individual level are intimately linked.

3.3 Challenging our certainties and values means leaving our comfort zone. This requires being willing to learn and unlearn.

4 We shape learning environments and learning processes for transformative learning in a conscious and competent manner.

4.1 Transformative learning requires a shift in the understanding of teaching away from a knowledge transfer to an enabling approach.

4.2 Transformative learning requires specific teaching skills and corresponding professional development.

4.3 Learners willing to abandon their comfort zone need safe learning environments.

4.4 A transformative pedagogy must reinforce individual and collective self-organisation and enable action.

# Questions for Discussion, 1<sup>st</sup> round

(in **pairs**, 8 min.)

Quick assessment of the 1-pager

Does the Manifesto make it clear to you...

- a) what transformative learning is?
- b) why we need it?

Quick notes on the page where you find the text unclear or unconvincing

# Questions for Discussion, 2nd round (in **groups of 4**, 8 min.)

Can the Manifesto support implementation of transformative learning in your working environment?

-> identify **stumbling blocks**



-> also identify **stepping stones**



# Questions for Discussion, 3rd round

(in **groups of 6**, 15 min.)

Look at the stumbling blocks and stepping stones in your larger group; by combining them in different ways, can you **design a change strategy** to deal with them? Identify what role the Manifesto could play.

- Arrange the postits on the flipchart
- Add comments, drawings, etc. that emerge from your discussion onto the flipchart
- Think about what actors should be involved in what context
- Who could be allies and how do you approach them? ... etc.

# Building new alliances

Add your name and email on the flipchart (*or fill in the Feedback form on the [contact page](#)*)

Was a question you came with to this Workshop NOT dealt with?  
Write it on the flipchart

Thank you for participating! 😊

# Insights provided by the participants in a Workshop in Bern (1 Sep 2023)

1. Can a Manifesto work as a ready-made? Does it lead to action? Or should you rename it a “Call to Action”? Purpose-driven reflective action is the strongest way of learning!
2. What triggers us is the urgency of the need for action: six of the nine Planetary Boundaries have already been exceeded! Nevertheless, try to legitimate this urgency not with negative reasons but with positive visions of alternative futures.
3. It's important to make it clear that it's about sustainability-oriented transformative learning – it's not just about transformative learning.
4. Will this also reach the skeptics? Litmus test: talk to a liberal party or right-wing person – can you convince them?
5. Reflections on the intersection between climate change, economic growth, and postcolonial issues show that the normative discussion about sustainability doesn't mean the same in the Global North and Global South. So does the Manifesto only speak to a Swiss audience? does it take into account global inequalities? We are a minority here in Switzerland and discussions about transformative learning may not be relevant in other countries. Moreover: economic growth is necessary in some countries where there are insufficient essential commodities.

# Some references

- Bornemann, Basil, Ruth Förster, Sofia Getzin, Andreas Kläy, Anaïs Sägeser, Flurina Schneider, Patrick Wäger, Sandra Wilhelm, and Anne B. Zimmermann. 2020. *Sustainability-Oriented Transformative Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Eight Propositions on Challenges and Approaches*. Discussion Paper 2020. Bern, Switzerland: Swiss Academic Society for Environmental Research and Ecology (saguf).
- Kläy, Andreas, Anne B. Zimmermann, and Flurina Schneider. 2015. Rethinking science for sustainable development: Reflexive interaction for a paradigm transformation. *Futures* 65:72–85. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2014.10.012>.
- Putnam, H. (2002). *The collapse of the fact-value dichotomy and other essays*. Cambridge, MA, and London, United Kingdom: Harvard University Press.
- Singer-Brodowski, Mandy, Ruth Förster, Saskia Eschenbacher, Petra Biberhofer, and Sofia Getzin. 2022. Facing Crises of Unsustainability: Creating and Holding Safe Enough Spaces for Transformative Learning in Higher Education for Sustainable Development. *Frontiers in Education* 7. doi: 10.3389/feduc.2022.787490.
- Sterling, Stephen. 2021. Educating for the future we want. In *GTI Forum Opening Essay*. Cambridge: Tellus Institute.
- UNESCO. 2020. *Education for Sustainable Development: A Roadmap (#ESDfor2030)*. Paris: UNESCO.
- UNESCO. 2021. Berlin declaration on education for sustainable development. In *UNESCO World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development. Learn for our Planet. Act for Sustainability*. Berlin: UNESCO.
- Wals, Arjen E. J. 2020. Sustainability-oriented ecologies of learning: A response to systemic global dysfunction. In *Ecologies for Learning and Practice. Emerging Ideas, Sightings, and Possibilities*, edited by Ronald Barnett and Norman Jackson, 61-78. Oxon: Routledge.
- Wals, Arjen E. J. 2021. The power of transgressive learning. In *GTI Forum Contribution*. Cambridge: Tellus Institute.