

## Chapter Fourteen: Concluding Thoughts and Way Forward

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This scholarly volume, *Advancing Education in a Complex World: A Human-Centred Approach*, offers a rich tapestry of theoretical and empirical contributions that collectively challenge conventional paradigms of education. Through the diverse lenses of philosophical grounding, research praxis, subject-specific pedagogy and policy critique, the chapters converge on a singular imperative: to reimagine education systems as fundamentally human-centred in both intent and execution.

The opening chapter establishes the conceptual foundation for understanding human-centredness within the broader terrain of complexity. The subsequent contributions then operationalise this foundation across multiple contexts—from research supervision, STEM education and mathematics instruction to early childhood development, curriculum reform and policy analysis. Central to this discourse is the recognition of education as an ecosystem—relational, dynamic and embedded in socio-cultural, political, economic and ethical realities.

Human-centred education positions people at the heart of educational decision-making, practices, and design (McGill 2021). It is founded on the principle that learning environments should foreground human needs, relationships and overall well-being. This orientation disrupts conventional assumptions about education by reconsidering its purpose, how learning occurs and the nature of relationships within educational contexts. Human-centred education provides a compelling alternative to narrow, test-driven models, advocating instead for a holistic approach that balances academic rigor with inclusivity, personal growth and well-being. Systems described as human-centred are intentionally developed with close attention to stakeholders, their interactions and the contexts in which they operate (Shum et al. 2019). As such, human-centred education supports lifelong, inclusive and emancipatory learning practices.

At its core, human-centred education reconceptualises education by foregrounding values such as care, empathy, flexibility and creativity. It seeks to cultivate individuals who are equipped to shape their own lives while contributing constructively to society. Human-centred education approaches emphasise the development of key interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies, including communication, adaptability, assertiveness, empathy and creative problem-solving—capabilities that are essential for navigating an unpredictable and rapidly evolving world (Shum et al. 2019). Ultimately, human-centred education aims to enable young people to live purposeful lives and to participate in building a just, inclusive and flourishing future (Thomson et al. 2020). It provides learners with the knowledge and professional capacities required to foster compassionate and equitable societies.

Human-centred education, as elaborated throughout this volume, is not simply about care or empathy in isolation. It demands critical engagement with paradigmatic worldviews (Chapter Two), reintegration of personal meaning in the sciences (Chapter Three), and systemic transformation in pedagogy (Chapter Four, Chapter Five and Chapter Eight). It calls for inclusive frameworks that address both cognitive and affective domains (Chapter Nine, Chapter Ten and Chapter Eleven), and policy responses that reflect contextual intelligence rather than centralised control (Chapter Twelve).

Several key themes emerge from this body of work. First, *Interconnectedness*: A recurring recognition of the intersection between the personal, political and pedagogical realms. Second, *Critical Reflexivity*: Authors advocate for a continual re-examination of inherited assumptions, practices and institutional frameworks. Third, *Inclusion and Equity*: Whether through arts education, gender awareness or linguistic diversity, the need for inclusivity is foundational. Finally, *Transformative Practice*: There is a shift from prescriptive models to participatory, dialogic and adaptive modes of teaching, research and leadership.

The interplay of diverse disciplinary perspectives, enriched by the vibrant infusion of innovation and ingenuity, reflect the dynamic ways in which education can be advanced within an increasingly complex global context. Central to this progression is a human-centred approach that

compassionately engages with the multifarious dimensions of complexity. This orientation seeks to achieve a thoughtful equilibrium between technical competencies (hard skills) and interpersonal or affective capacities (soft skills), affirming the enduring significance of a humane ethos in educational praxis.

## **Suggestions for the way forward**

### **1. Embedding Human-Centred Approaches in Teacher Education**

Human-centred education begins with how teachers are prepared. Teacher education programmes must, therefore, move beyond technical competence to foreground relationality, care, dignity and contextual responsiveness as core professional values. Adopting a human-centred ethos means recognising pre-service teachers as whole persons whose identities, histories and lived realities shape their professional practice. Initiatives such as *Inkhulumo* model and gender awareness programmes exemplify how dialogical, inclusive and contextually grounded approaches can be embedded within teacher preparation. These models demonstrate that human-centred education is not an abstract ideal, but a scalable and sustainable practice that equips teachers to engage ethically and empathetically with diverse learners and communities.

### **2. Rethinking Curriculum and Assessment**

A human-centred approach demands curricula that are responsive to learners' diverse ways of knowing, being and becoming. Curriculum design—across disciplines such as mathematics, robotics and the arts—must, therefore, value multiple intelligences, cultural epistemologies and human values alongside disciplinary knowledge. Equally important is the reimagining of assessment practices. Traditional assessment regimes often marginalise learners by privileging narrow forms of achievement. Human-centred assessment, supported by both conventional and emerging digital technologies as demonstrated in Chapter Six, can create more inclusive

and equitable opportunities for demonstrating learning. Such approaches foreground assessment for learning, rather than merely of learning, reinforcing learner dignity and agency.

### **3. Fostering Contextually Intelligent Leadership**

Human-centred education cannot flourish without leadership that is sensitive to context and complexity. Educational leadership and policymaking must, therefore, shift away from one-size-fits-all solutions toward decentralised, contextually intelligent governance. As illustrated in critiques of the BELA Act, policies that ignore the socio-cultural, historical and economic realities of schools, risk undermining human dignity and local agency. Contextually intelligent leadership recognises schools and communities as relational spaces, requiring policies that are flexible, participatory and responsive to lived conditions. This orientation is essential for ensuring that educational reforms serve people rather than systems alone.

### **4. Strengthening Research–Practice Integration**

Human-centred education calls for knowledge production that is collaborative, ethical and transformative. Participatory Action Research (PAR) and other engaged methodologies exemplify how research can be embedded within practice to address real-world educational challenges. By positioning educators and learners as co-researchers, these approaches honour local knowledge and lived experience. Strengthening the integration between research and practice ensures that scholarship does not remain abstract or detached but becomes a catalyst for meaningful change within educational communities.

### **5. Advancing Interdisciplinary and Transdisciplinary Dialogues**

The complexity of contemporary educational challenges necessitates approaches that transcend disciplinary boundaries. Human-centred

education benefits from interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary dialogues that bring together insights from philosophy, science, technology, the arts and policy. Such integration enriches educational thinking by acknowledging that human learning is multifaceted and interconnected. By fostering cross-disciplinary collaboration, education can better address ethical, technological, cultural and social dimensions of learning, creating more holistic and responsive educational pathways.

## 6. Prioritising Holistic Learner Development

At its core, human-centred education is concerned with the flourishing of the whole learner. This requires moving beyond narrow academic outcomes to cultivate resilience, creativity, agency, empathy and ethical citizenship. Educational environments must, therefore, be intentionally designed to support learners' emotional, social and moral development alongside cognitive growth. In an era marked by uncertainty and complexity, prioritising holistic development equips learners not only to succeed academically, but to navigate life with purpose, responsibility and adaptability.

In summary, this volume extends beyond a compilation of academic reflections to offer a compelling call to action. It urges scholars, educators, policymakers and communities to reimagine and reconceptualise education as a profoundly human endeavour—one that is relational, contextually grounded, ethically driven and responsive to the intricacies of our complex world. The way forward lies in embracing this complexity with compassion, contextual awareness and a commitment to transformative change.

*“Education advances not when systems become more efficient, but when they become more humane—attuned to dignity, difference, and the lived realities of those who inhabit them.”*

## References

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