ACTIVE LEARNING STRATEGIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION: TEACHING FOR LEADERSHIP, INNOVATION, AND CREATIVITY

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Preface

Undoubtedly, higher education is in an era of transition. The quest for fast integration of knowledge into innovative services and products, capable of promoting a socially inclusive sustainability vision for our societies, challenges the design of academic programs as well as the priorities of higher education top administrators and policy officers.

At the same time, the young generation is more and more attached to the use of technology in their daily lives; they have transformed into technology advocates, with various side effects — mainly their motivation not to use the monolithic, static learning content that is promoted in the traditional learning paradigm for decades.

In another context, the archetypal vision and mission of the academic learning process, especially as it relates to the cultivation of active citizens, personalities with critical thinking and creativity, aiming to contribute to better societies, is also being reconsidered.

What should be the vision for the learning strategies in higher education of our century? Which are the determinants of a learning philosophy promoting knowledge dissemination, the development of skills and competencies, and the ethos and social responsibility of students? Which is a viable and sustainable model for the integration of the numerous learning technologies that appear every few years and are promoted as panacea for any learning insufficiency? How can we facilitate a collaborative, distributed culture of mutual understanding, respect, and cross-fertilization between peers, disciplines, institutions all over the world? Is there a way in our turbulent times to cultivate peace-making processes and long-term sustainable — i.e., simultaneously environmentally friendly, socially just, and economically viable — interactions between nations, religions, and cultures based on shared values incorporated in modern educational systems? Which is, at the end of the day, the best contribution of education to the well-being and happiness of all the stakeholders involved?

With such big questions, our book is a rather humble effort to reposition the focus of our scientific teaching and learning community to the basics. In our opinion, active learning is not a simple didactic approach in a complex world. We define active learning as a holistic philosophy for a humanistic vision in higher education, where individuals, groups,

institutions, and nations contribute to a global transformation in balance with nature and with respect toward nature as well. Active learning is a transformative process that brings together knowledge artifacts, learning contexts, humans, and social problems as well as challenges for the present and future of our societies. The ultimate contribution of active learning is an innovative way of thinking, where reality and truth are not a case of black and white, where teaching and learning are an exploratory journey to the wealth of knowledge and different realities, and, finally, where nothing is taken for granted but the provision of a fruitful learning context, full of interactions, that can reveal to everyone his or her own path to inner achievement and fulfillment.

Active learning in our approach is a new way of understanding the dialogue between the accumulated knowledge, the inner inquiry of each person for personal development, and the social exploration for securing a better world for all. Active learning is about balancing personal motivation for self-fulfillment with group capacities for high impact contributions in business, culture, education, and every domain of human activity.

Active learning is a holistic approach. It is transparent in any aspect of higher education and has direct implications and prerequisites for administration, faculty, government, and various stakeholders. The resources required for active learning implementation should be investments with great return in terms of social value, sustainability, and development.

Active learning, furthermore, is about linking human minds and souls in a creative spiral of knowledge transformation and skills development at individual, group, and institutional level. It is hard to accept this in the context of a technocratic society where the specialization and the focus on core disciplines is something like an axiom.

Active learning is about interdisciplinary integration and intersection. This is an additional challenge for higher education. Without a systematic process of launching interdisciplinary programs and curricula, there will always be a critical lack of creativity and impact. It is time to link innovation with active learning strategies that interact with many disciplines at the same time. This will bring back the focus of education to the object of the matter. The learner is not an abstract concept. It is a complex entity with a personality, a psychological background, and cognitive capacities, developing within a certain social context. It is a real challenge for our times to reconsider the motivation we should prompt in the young generation. If the motivation is strictly related to narrow economic models of return on investment or employability

terms, our society will always be in lack of responsive actions to address the big social challenges of our times.

Our *Active Learning Strategies in Higher Education* is in fact a journey. At the end of its reading, researchers, academics, policy makers, and students will realize that this is just the beginning. This is because active learning requires a personal vision: the vision of an out-of-the-box education − to consider your learning process as a constructive process that brings you together with other people from all over the world. Active learning is about modifying your context, from the micro-world of your personal beliefs and understandings to a whole universe of magnificent human contributions.

We do believe that our times are the most suitable for such a humanistic shift in the design and delivery of programs in higher education. Global collaboration for the big challenges of our times, such as the preservation of our planet, poverty, socially inclusive and just development, smart and sustainable cities, mutual respect, and generation of new knowledge for providing sustainable solutions to social problems, is the vision for the active learning philosophy we propose. At the end of the day, it is about bringing more light into our souls. We do believe that we all deserve it. Let us imagine and work for a better world for all, for us − now and the next generations − and for all living beings. Learning can always make the difference, as it decreases ignorance which feeds our problems, can mobilize emotions, and can motivate our action.

Our next planned edition goes a step further. It provides practical guidelines for active learning that can lead to social transformation.

People can always make it! Margaret Mead − a renowned anthropologist − said "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has." We do believe in the capacity of the global community of creative minds and caring individuals to use active learning for the development of a new culture that will lead to more sustainable societies.

Acknowledgments