



# [Book Review] *Hope Circuits: Rewiring Universities and Other Organizations for Human Flourishing* by Jessica Riddell

## KEYWORDS

hope, transformation, agency

Jessica Riddell's (2024) *Hope Circuits: Rewiring Universities and Other Organizations for Human Flourishing* is a transformative work that reimagines higher education (HE) as a catalyst for individual and societal change. Grounded in extensive research and practical experience, the book offers a compelling vision for a future where learning is not merely the acquisition of knowledge but a transformative journey of personal and societal growth. Riddell's work resonates powerfully with the five SoTL Grand Challenges (Scharff et al. 2023) and provides a fresh perspective for rewiring HE. Central to Riddell's argument is the transformative power of hope. By cultivating a culture of hope, institutions can unlock the potential for innovation, creativity, and resilience. This is a radical departure from the prevailing discourse in HE, which often focuses on challenges and constraints. *Hope Circuits* offers a counter-narrative that emphasises possibility and agency.

*Hope Circuits* provides a framework for cultivating the intellectual capacities required for navigating an increasingly complex world. Central to Riddell's argument is the concept of "gappiness," a term borrowed from Shakespeare that captures the disconnection between theory and practice in HE. This gap is particularly evident in the realm of SoTL, where there is often a disconnect between research findings and classroom practice. By encouraging experimentation and risk-taking, the text offers a path to bridge this divide. This aligns with the growing recognition of the need for innovative pedagogies to address complex global issues. The text further offers a compelling response to prioritising student engagement. Riddell's emphasis on student voice and agency (Barkhuizen 2021) is a refreshing counterpoint to traditional models of teaching and learning. By creating learning environments that are meaningful and relevant to students' lives (Brooman, Darwent, and Pimor 2015), institutions can foster a sense of belonging and purpose.

The book's exploration of the interconnectedness of emotions, cognition, and social factors in learning is firmly situated in a global education post-pandemic framework. This framework calls for a holistic approach to education and is a timely reminder that learning is a complex and multifaceted process. By acknowledging the emotional and social dimensions of learning, as highlighted by Miller-Young, Yeo, and Manarin (2018), the book offers a more nuanced understanding of student success. Equitable access and student success are central to the core messages that punctuate the text, and Riddell offers a powerful framework for addressing these issues. By centering hope and belonging, she provides a vision of HE as a force for social justice. Her emphasis on the importance of diversity and inclusion is a critical component of creating equitable learning environments.

Finally, *Hope Circuits* contributes directly to the advancement of the practice and use of SoTL. The book serves as a meta-analysis of existing research (Eady et al. 2021), synthesising insights from various fields in order to offer a comprehensive vision for the future of global HE. By providing

practical strategies for institutional change, Riddell empowers SoTL scholars to become agents of transformation. The book's emphasis on collaboration and shared purpose is essential for addressing these SoTL complex global challenges. Riddell highlights the importance of cultural humility and intercultural competence. By foregrounding the diversity of perspectives and experiences, institutions can create more inclusive and equitable learning environments. This has potential, Riddell argues, to develop the global citizenship that is essential for preparing students to thrive in an interconnected world.

Throughout the book, Riddell offers a strong criticism of the current state of higher education, arguing against the focus on profit and competition (Naidoo and Williams 2015). By challenging the dominant discourse of efficiency, competition, and marketisation, the book offers a vision of HE as a public good. This is particularly important in an era of increasing inequality and social polarisation.

Poignantly, Riddell recognises that the challenges facing higher education cannot be solved in isolation. She calls for a collective effort, involving faculty, students, staff, and administrators, to create a shared vision for the future. This emphasis on collaboration is particularly relevant to the SoTL community, which is built on principles of shared inquiry and collective knowledge-building (Felten 2013).

*Hope Circuits* is not simply a theoretical treatise; it is a practical guide for institutional change. It offers a range of strategies and tools for cultivating hope and building a more resilient and equitable higher education system. These include:

- Creating a culture of experimentation: Encouraging risk-taking and learning from failure.
- Building strong relationships: Fostering collaboration and trust among faculty, students, and staff.
- Developing a shared vision: Creating a clear and inspiring roadmap for the future.
- Measuring what matters: Focusing on outcomes that truly reflect student success.

The text, however, is not without its limitations. The focus on individual agency and institutional change can sometimes overshadow the role of external factors, such as government funding and societal expectations, in shaping the landscape of HE. Additionally, the tools presented may require adaptation for application in diverse institutional contexts.

*Hope Circuits* is more than a book; it is a clarion call to action for HE. Riddell's work offers a roadmap for navigating the complexities of the twenty-first century, providing a blueprint for institutions to become engines of social change and human flourishing.

The book's core message is clear: hope is not a luxury but a necessity for HE. Riddell's emphasis on student voice, agency, and belonging is particularly resonant, challenging the global HE sector to reimagine the student experience as one of empowerment rather than consumption.

Through the careful and strategic crafting of ideas and visions, the text offers several key lessons for HE leaders. First, we must prioritise equity and inclusion. By centring the experiences of marginalised students, we can create more just and equitable campuses. Second, we must cultivate a culture of experimentation and risk-taking. By embracing failure as a learning opportunity, we can foster innovation and creativity. Third, we must build strong relationships and collaborations within and beyond the academy. By working together, we can address complex challenges and create a more sustainable future.

The book also challenges us to rethink our metrics for success. Rather than focusing solely on traditional measures of performance, such as research output and graduate employment rates, we must foreground outcomes that reflect the broader impact of HE. These include measures of student well-being, social mobility, and environmental sustainability.

While *Hope Circuits* offers a compelling vision for the future, it is essential to acknowledge that implementing its recommendations will require significant effort and resources. Structural inequalities, economic pressures, and political challenges will continue to shape the higher education landscape. However, these challenges should not deter us from pursuing a more hopeful future. By embracing the principles outlined in *Hope Circuits*, HE institutions can become catalysts for positive change. Through fostering a culture of hope, equity, and innovation, we can prepare our students to be critical thinkers, engaged citizens, and ethical leaders. This is not merely an aspiration; it is an imperative.

#### AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

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