

A COLLEGIAL DISCUSSION ON THE 'PEDAGOGY OF HOPE' AT STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY

Sanlam Hall, The Neelsie, 1 June 2010

Opening remarks by Russel Botman, Rector and Vice-Chancellor

Thank you, chairperson.

Good afternoon colleagues. *Molweni. Goeiemiddag.*

I am very pleased to see all of you here. It is good to share ideas now and again, particularly on matters of fundamental importance that affect the **place, role and function of our institution in society**.

CONSULTATION

Stellenbosch University (SU) has for some time been busy repositioning itself in the higher education landscape – and rightly so. The world keeps on turning, and we cannot stay behind.

In 2000, SU produced the *Strategic Framework for the Turn of the Century and Beyond* (SU 2000a). That document embodied the University's *Vision 2012* (SU 2000b), and, as you know, we are currently consulting on *Vision 2015* (SU 2000c). I invite you to go and have a look at all the opinions on the University's website as well as to comment yourselves. The more views, the merrier!

The same goes for the Pedagogy of Hope. When I took office three years ago, I chose this concept, inspired by the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (2006a), and his later *Pedagogy of Hope* (2006b), to kick-start a conversation about the **place and role of the University in society** (Botman 2007). A lot has since been said about it, but the discussion is far from over. We need to talk some more, so I appreciate your presence here.

Freire's initial contributions came at a time in Brazil when a lot was being done for the elite and very little for the poor people, especially in rural areas. He started thinking that if education could be provided, they could make progress in life.

Then the situation changed – politics started normalising, but economically and socially most poor people were still being excluded. He started asking what the role of education was in a democracy. It was one thing to oppose a certain system, it was another to try and achieve your aims as someone who was now part of the new democracy.

In such a situation the role of education – also higher education – becomes that of assisting citizens to become participating, benefiting, critical members of society.

Freire understood that when a society normalises politicians are quick to teach people how to vote because they want power, but they neglect to tell us how to live in a democracy. They watch society unravel without providing guidance.

These are the kind of things we should be talking about in South Africa. We have to talk about these things while we still have the opportunity; while the will to talk is still there.

Sometimes it takes one courageous conversation to lead to another. Today's conversation will feed into a process of consultation that is being driven by the Vice-Rector (Teaching), Prof Magda Fourie. It started with an introductory discussion on 20 January, which resulted in a

'discussion document' on "A Pedagogy of Hope as guiding concept of Stellenbosch University" (unpublished).

This was submitted to the Institutional Planning Forum (IPF) of the University at the end of January, and inputs there were incorporated into a second draft of the discussion document, which has been circulated for comment. All faculties and divisions – everyone attached to the University – have been invited to make submissions by next Friday, 11 June (ask your line head for a copy).

OPEN DISCUSSION

In this 'discussion document' the Pedagogy of Hope is viewed from all angles. Positive aspects are highlighted, as are negative views. For example:

- Some people are of the opinion that it is good to emphasise relevance, as it focuses the attention of the University on socio-economic problems. Others see this as a threat to academic freedom.
- Some people express an ideological objection to the Pedagogy of Hope as a result of what they call the Neo-Marxist evolution of the concept. Others spot a normative and historical challenge to pursue socio-economic justice.
- Some people believe the concept has a religious meaning, which makes it unsuitable for an institution that promotes scientific knowledge. Others interpret it as a secular emphasis on the 'possible' rather than a passive acceptance of the 'given'.

This kind of courageous, 'open conversation' is welcomed. The University is no ideology factory – it is a place of ideas, even controversial ideas. Hypotheses should always be able to be tested. We must always be able to question, investigate, and be critical if we are interested in the search for truth.

The same goes for this collegial conversation today. Everyone should feel free to state his or her point of view, and all of us should remain open to persuasion, with respect for each other. This is the only way to remain human in the midst of a diversity of thought.

The University is about to launch a high-profile public advancement campaign under the banner of 'Hope'. The aim of this campaign is, on the one hand, marketing and fundraising – an external focus, therefore. However, on the other hand it is an internal reorientation of the University with regard to the opportunities and challenges that are inherent in the present and future.

HOPE

What is the university, and what should its place and role in society be? These are the questions behind the concept of a Pedagogy of Hope, as used at Stellenbosch University (SU) for the past three years.

From the perspective of a Pedagogy of Hope, the answer is that the university should be a place of relevance. In our context, that means SU should be a place of meaning for the people of South Africa and the rest of the continent and the world at large.

In 2000 (in *A Strategic Framework for the turn of the century and beyond*), the University acknowledged that it had been a "role player in the injustices of the past" and expressed a commitment to "redress", which it undertook to pursue through:

- “Equity” – building a body of students and staff members demographically more representative of society; and
- “Service” – promoting development in disadvantaged communities and areas. (If we look around, we can see that underdeveloped areas make up the largest part of the world.)

The Pedagogy of Hope introduced in 2007 as a possible leitmotif for the University was an endeavour to ensure that these commitments were realised in practice. It needed to become more than just a sentence in a dusty document.

- To guide the core activities of the university – which are teaching & learning, research and community interaction – five themes were distilled from the international development agenda (see Appendix); and
- Our faculties came up with 21 interdisciplinary projects and various enabling programmes (see Appendix) linked to these themes.

In a nutshell, this is the hope that we will be telling the world about on 21 July: five themes, 21 projects and a handful of enabling programmes that we say will ‘change the world’. This is quite an ambitious claim, but not one totally without foundation. “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world,” as President Nelson Mandela said.

Chairperson, I am not going to speak much longer, because it is important to obtain inputs from our participants here. However, I find the following perspective to be of particular use.

PARADIGMATIC VIEWS OF THE UNIVERSITY

In the book *Universiteit, Wetenskap en Kultuur: Opstelle oor die Krisis, Uitdagings en Geleenthede van die Moderne Universiteit, saamgestel en ingelei deur Anton van Niekerk* (University, Science and Culture: Essays on the Crisis, Challenges and Opportunities of the Modern University, compiled and introduced by Anton van Niekerk), Hennie Rossouw (2003), former professor in Philosophy at SU and a former Vice-Rector (Academic), identifies three conceptions of the university, namely the pedagogic, the cognitivistic and the pragmatistic.

Rossouw (2003) says these are “different sets of **presuppositions and convictions about the character and function of the university**” (my emphasis), but also states clearly that “although they are mutually competitive and therefore apparently present one with a choice, they do not wholly exclude one another”.

Pedagogic paradigm

In the pedagogic paradigm the university is viewed as a “centre of education or general shaping by higher education... in the tradition of scientific thought”.

The ideal graduate is “the rounded and broadly oriented intellectual”, who attaches value to “rational thinking”, “the forming of valid opinions” and “open discussion”. It is someone with a “healthy scepticism”; someone who “welcomes alternative views and ideas”.

The favourite approach within this framework is the college model, i.e. a “community of interactive academic colleagues that polish one another intellectually”. Regarding different academic disciplines, the aim is “totalisation”, not “specialisation”.

Cognitivistic paradigm

In terms of the cognitivistic view, the university concerns itself specifically with the “extension of knowledge”, particularly “new knowledge” that is acquired through “research according to the strict requirements of the scientific method”.

The graduate is someone with the “intellectual skills” required for “independent research”. For the sake of the “reliability” of the knowledge product, he attaches great value to “impersonal and standardised procedures and methods”.

The approach is the institute model – a dedicated workspace in which specialised equipment and facilities are available. The exchange of ideas is not excluded, but the correct method (science) guarantees the correct result (reliable knowledge).

Pragmatistic paradigm

According to the pragmatistic paradigm, the place and role of the university are to be “practically useful” and to produce “utilisable products”. It is an “instrument” with which to promote “external objectives”, e.g. social justice or economic progress.

This view is a reaction to the ivory tower image of the university as an “institution that is busy with all sorts of esoteric activities in total isolation from its environment”. In contrast, it poses the “demand of relevance” – viz. “purposeful involvement in the actual needs of the surrounding society”.

The school model fits this paradigm best, i.e. independent units that are organised around the needs of specific careers or functions. The emphasis is on the disciplined preparation of experts. “Knowledgeable teachers” prepare “pupils” for the “successful fulfilment of social tasks and responsibilities”.

Yes, the university shapes people and extends knowledge, but there has to be a utility value to this. Its products should be trained people – experts who are equipped with the skills that are required by the professional world and social functions.

WHERE DOES THE HOPE-CREATING UNIVERSITY FIT IN?

We use the Pedagogy of Hope in a way that not only relates to the pedagogic function or education task of the university, but also to the unlocking and application of knowledge. It is meant to be just that: an inclusive and integrated approach.

The Pedagogy of Hope is equally interested in the critical thinker with a healthy scepticism and in that in which it makes a case for relevance in the context of human development.

It can be summarised as follows: SU is a place where knowledge is pursued (cognitivist) *and* communicated (pedagogic) *and* applied (pragmatistic) with a view to making the world a better place; thus a place that creates hope.

CONCLUSION

I started off by raising certain critical questions on the Pedagogy of Hope:

- Does the call for relevance threaten academic freedom?
- Do the roots of a critical pedagogy negate its value?
- Does the hope message have a religious bent that clashes with the knowledge pursuit of science?

I know what my answers to these questions are, and can elaborate on them on another occasion. Now I would like to hear what you have to say.

Thank you very much.

LIST OF REFERENCES

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APPENDIX

Stellenbosch University's strategic development themes:

1. Eliminating endemic poverty and related conditions
2. Promoting human dignity and health
3. Promoting democracy and human rights
4. Promoting peace and security
5. Promoting a sustainable environment and a competitive industry

Stellenbosch University's strategic development projects:

1. Access to Electronic Resources: Student Success and Support for Research
2. Universities' Partnership in Adapted Physical Activity
3. Africa Centre for Dispute Settlement
4. Africa Centre for HIV/Aids Management
5. Centre for Studies in Complexity
6. Centre for Invasion Biology (DST-NRF Centre of Excellence for Invasion Biology)
7. Combating Poverty, Homelessness and Socio-Economic Vulnerability under the Constitution
8. Communication and Information Systems
9. Energy and the Environment
10. Stellenbosch University Food Security Initiative
11. Geographic Information Technology
12. Graduate School (incorporating the African Doctoral Academy and in association with the Partnership for Africa's Next Generation of Academics)
13. MediaAfrika
14. Focus on the Promotion of Human Dignity
15. Security Institute for Governance and Leadership (SIGLA @ Stellenbosch)
16. Standard Bank Centre for Agribusiness Leadership and Mentorship Development
17. TsamaHub (Centre for Transdisciplinarity, Sustainability, Assessment, Modelling and Analysis)
18. Ukwanda Rural Clinical School
19. Unit for Corporate Governance in Africa
20. Virtual Postgraduate Learning Support Project
21. Youth Sport Initiative