

Colloquium on Hopeful Pedagogies – 19 November 2010

Focus on academics teaching for the public

good

Implications for academics, role and identity

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Introduction: Education is particularly equipped to maintain the existing social order and also to promote varying kinds of change and mobility (Nasson & Samuel, 1990). The role of Higher Education is to produce and disseminate knowledge and to undertake community engagement (Lategan 2009). Waghid (2009) argues that the role of a university can be enhanced through democratic deliberation, compassionate imagining and cosmopolitan justice.

Implications for academics:

The implication of academics teaching for the public good is profound.

It would require interrogating the capabilities of lecturers, their role and the changing academic identity needed to fulfil such a task.

Furthermore, it raises issues about the composition, skills and competence of teaching staff in relation to their understanding of complex relationships between higher education and society with respect to citizenship and social justice.

It would also require a re-examination of what constitutes the domain of higher education knowledge within and between the specific disciplines.

Current models of teaching and learning would need to be reassessed and possibly adapted to critically enhance public good. Drawing from the cultural capital of a diverse student population and linking learning and teaching materials to student experiences would constitute a great challenge and opportunity as well.

Discussion points.

Higher education as a vehicle for promoting public good is of considerable social, political and economic significance for both development and citizenship. In the South African context with its high levels of inequity utilising Higher Education to promote public good is a compelling proposition. The impact though on both education and the public good needs to be evaluated. Wallerstein argues that equity and development are not necessarily correlative. They may even be in contradiction.

In a different context Tony Judt (2010) in an essay *Captive Minds* provides insightful account of the servility, compliance and appeasing nature of intellectuals during certain historical periods requiring accelerated development. He emphasises the attraction of intellectuals to authority and more generally of the appeal of authoritarianism to the intelligentsia. Teaching for the public good at a university needs critical support from academics in South Africa. There are several lessons to be learnt of similar approaches in different epochs.