

Colloquium on Hopeful Pedagogies at STIAS, Stellenbosch 19 November 2010

Background

The Colloquium on Hopeful Pedagogies evolved from four separate events. The first was the Development Discourses research project SU participated in. The full title of the project was “Development Discourses: Higher Education and Poverty Reduction in South Africa” and was managed by the University of Nottingham with funds provided by the ESRC/DfID Poverty Reduction programme. The second was a seminar, presented in 2009, focusing on teaching students at SU for the public good. Third was the alignment process that required the university to reconsider its offering in terms of the proposed HEQF. This process required that faculties specifically consider teaching for the public good in their submissions. Finally, the launch of the university’s Hope project, as a culmination of the ongoing conversations about the positioning of SU in the 21st century, also contributed to the conceptualization of the colloquium.

The colloquium was attended by 84 delegates and included participation from the Rector, Vice-Rector (Teaching), deans, and directors, lecturing staff and guest speakers from the HEQC, UCT and UWC. A blog (<http://blogs.sun.ac.za/hopefulpedagogiessu/>) was created for the colloquium and all contributions on the day have been posted there. A copy of the programme is provided in Appendix A.

Opening plenary

In her introductory address Prof Magda Fourie related the colloquium specifically to the Hope project. In particular she expressed the hope that the colloquium would answer questions about how teaching and learning contributes to conversations about hope and what the exact meaning of a pedagogy of hope is in the teaching and learning environment. She described the purpose of the colloquium as an opportunity to consider

- The kind of graduate attributes the University’s programmes may be aiming towards;
- Examples of good practice with regard to realizing graduate attributes for the social good in the curriculum;
- The kind of academic who is able to embed the teaching for these attributes in the curriculum;
- The institutional arrangements which would support the flourishing of academics and students for the public good.

Following Prof Fourie’s introduction, Prof Russel Botmann sketched the context for the Colloquium by focusing on the university’s contribution to public good. He stated that since the University Council’s adoption of the “Strategic framework for the turn of the century and beyond” in 2000, the University has been engaged in conversation about its positioning in the 21st century. It became evident in these conversations that this positioning should be related to the public good.

Part of these conversations, he suggested, is having clarity about what the University's contribution to the public good could be, given its nature and mandated role in society. He argued that while there are many societal needs, the university should focus on what could sustainably be addressed through science. In this way the core business of the university, knowledge production, brings hope to society. Hope, in this sense was defined in a threefold manner.

- Hope as integrated initiatives in faculties. Here the challenge is discerning how to translate hope into actions in academic activities.
- Hope as a capital fundraising campaign. This refers to the work/support that alumni do to contribute to SU's moving to hope.
- Hope as a scientific question. In this regard the university is tasked with determining, through rigorous scientific efforts, how best to describe hope, and how to relate the reality of need for hope to science and how to realize this hope.

He concluded by pointing out that these conversations are not without challenge. Thinking about hope and the university's responsibility to society could suggest a possible contradiction, namely that of service to society and academic freedom. Underlying this contradiction is the fear that the university will be instrumentalized, that it will simply become what individuals, society or sponsors want it to be. Prof Botmann addressed this contradiction by stating that service to society doesn't necessarily mean compliance. Mere compliance robs the University of its dedication to objectivity and the search for truth. For the university to succeed in its endeavour to serve society, combined strength rather than individual skills are required.

Dr Lange from the HEQC continued the line of questioning introduced by Prof Botmann by challenging received and entrenched ideas about the public purpose of the university. She argued that because education is a political act, the university's mission is public and that this mission was, in a Freirian sense, liberation. The public mission is thus related to the pedagogy of hope. This pedagogy of hope has at least two important dimensions that have to be considered. First, the inequality of society. A pedagogy of hope should not avoid this reality but rather confront it. As Dr Lange said, the knowledge of a condition is a precondition for change. The organization of society reproduces this inequality and a pedagogy of hope should at the same time be bringing about structural change (in its sphere of influence) and empowering others to bring about this change. This reflects the second important dimension of a pedagogy of hope namely the realization that inequality can be changed through human agency. Dr Lange's presentation challenged the audience by suggesting that teaching can be a revolutionary act in the sense that it can bring about change.

Prof Waghid argued that hope is a sceptical encounter, that it can only be imagined if it has not been experienced. Referring to examples from the Rwanda genocide, he suggested to the audience that an imagining is necessary if we are to offer a pedagogy of hope. He posed three questions (all in the context of Hutu/Tutsi relations) to explain the notion of hope as a sceptical encounter.

1. How can adversaries think differently? Before they can recognize human nature of others they need to recognize it in themselves. You need to begin to imagine what it means to be responsible to others. In this regard Prof Waghid argued from a project he is involved in that the oppressed shouldn't be asked to fight for their rights. Rather the oppressor should be asked to justify his denying of the rights of others.
2. How do I forgive the unforgivable? A new beginning requires that the unforgivable be forgiven. Scepticism helps us to imagine the improbable.
3. How are can relations with outsiders be respectful if the outsiders are continuously recognized only as outsiders? An imagining that others are worthy of respect is required to achieve this.

A hopeful imagining at SU means considering what our communities think is good for them. We cannot transport imaginings from other contexts to our own. We need to sceptically engage others in institution otherwise we are complicit in atrocities.

The introductory session of the colloquium concluded with a presentation by van Schalkwyk, Muller and Herman, regarding the relation between graduate attributes and the public good. The presenters argued that conceptions of graduate attributes are often characterised by a tension between those understandings that view these attributes as a process of development during the years of study and those that consider graduate attributes to be generic skills that render the graduate more employable. This tension could be mediated by thinking of these extremes as positions on a continuum rather than as mutually exclusive positions.

Any attempts to improve understanding of graduate attributes or to expand existing descriptions could benefit from the following principles:

- That desirable attributes are most usefully formulated at both university and module level, specifically when integrated in the curriculum in the context of disciplinary knowledge
- That teaching and learning practices, including assessment, ought to be aligned with module outcomes, including those linked to graduate attributes
- That formative feedback is fundamental to the development of graduate attributes
- That academics' current conceptions of graduate attributes need to be explored and shared
- That the link between graduate attributes and generic skills/academic literacies is carefully considered
- That the way in which graduate attributes are assessed and the way in which we demonstrate these attributes in our graduates (e.g. market them to the outside world), requires thoughtful planning.

In terms of the colloquium this presentation was aimed at pointing out the need for graduates that contribute to the public good, stimulating thought about the role of academic in the development of these attributes and the imagining of an institution that can produce these graduates.

Focus on hopeful teaching

The introductory session was followed by two parallel sessions that focused on specific conceptual and practical matters relating to a pedagogy of hope. The first session had five themes – “Sustainability”, “Ethics and internationalization”, “Democracy, human rights and participation”, “Social inclusion” and “Multilingualism”. In this session presenters were asked to consider how teaching for the public good could be embedded in the formal curriculum. To do this they presented examples of good practice, explored opportunities and constraints from their contexts and considered possible philosophical or pedagogical problems with teaching for the public good.

Sustainability – This session considered public good in terms of environmental impact. Presenters showed how the university contributes to empowering graduates to be responsible workers as far as sustainability is concerned. One example illustrated how this is done in the curriculum. The department of Conservation Ecology and Entomology has succeeded in establishing mutually beneficial civil society collaborations that allow their students to be exposed to real-life conservation scenarios and expert knowledge from the field. This exposure gives students insight into the social realities in which conservation issues are embedded. At the same time students produce learning materials for the benefit of land-user communities and share their own knowledge with these communities.

Ethics and internationalization – The presentations from this session highlighted the challenge of thinking about ethics in the university’s teaching activities given the diversity of ideas students are exposed to (in part due to internationalisation). With reference to a specific project one presenter showed how exposure to international students brings SU students in contact with both common and different values. These differences are also visible when students from diverse backgrounds in South Africa are considered. One argued that a point of departure should be a common basic morality based on shared humanity. This would render understandings of public good inclusive rather than exclusive.

Democracy, human rights and participation – From the three presentations related to this theme it was suggested that in order for deliberative democracy to be realized participants need to have a space in which they can express differences and fears. From the audience came the call that such conversations should be “belligerent” in the sense that they should be honest and reflect real feelings and beliefs. The presenters all attempted to provide such spaces in their teaching but felt that students’ expectations often prevent them (students) from benefitting from approaches that foster these values.

Social inclusion –This session focused on how different projects provide students with the opportunity to explore differences with a view to promoting inclusion rather than exclusion. While this sounds paradoxical the experience of the presenters indicated that such opportunities, while being uncomfortable, are powerful formative experiences for students that help them to create commonality from which they can move forward.

Multilingualism – This session highlighted the fact that language of instruction at university is not only a matter of instrumentality. Language, in other words, is more than just the instrument through which teaching materials are accessed. Language is also the courier of cultural forms and values that are important to the interpretation of teaching material. It was emphasized that a multilingual experience can enhance the development of social values and thus contribute to a “citizenship of hope”.

While the themes in this parallel session were diverse a number of commonalities emerged. In terms of challenges the heterogeneity of our student population was thought to present a particular challenge (although this very same factor was also acknowledged as an opportunity and positive contributor to teaching for the public good). The disjuncture between disciplinary work and public interest was also highlighted as a constraining factor. As far as opportunities are concerned it was clear that the energy to drive these initiatives is often found in the students rather than in institutional strategies. This holds great potential for individual modules. From all the presentations it was also clear that there are already numerous examples of good practice at SU as far as teaching for the public good is concerned.

Focus on academics teaching for the public good

The second parallel session had a more explicit focus on academics and their role in the university's contribution to the public good. This session had two pre-determined themes. These were “Optimal conditions for academics teaching for the public good” and “Implications for academics, role and identity”. For the first theme presenters were asked to consider how HE institutions should support academics to teach for the public good, what curricular and departmental arrangements are necessary to foster teaching for the public good (with examples of good practice if available) and what ethical, developmental or philosophical principles underlie support for such teaching. The second theme required of participants to ask whether teaching for the public good holds new or different demands for academics and whether such teaching requires of academics to become something different.

Optimal conditions for academics teaching for the public good – From the presentations in this session it became clear that there is an organic connection between the themes of both parallel sessions as issues of distinctions between public and private goods were raised in this session as well (this was also discussed in the “Democracy, human rights and participation” session). One of the important contributions from this session was the call for a reconsideration of the meaning (and implications) of academic freedom. While all the participants agreed that academic freedom is the cornerstone of university practice, one participant suggested that “academic freedom” should extend beyond what and how lecturers teach and what research they engage in, to a freedom that opens teaching practice to the same critical scrutiny that applies to research practices. It was also emphasized that lecturers need assistance to incorporate community-related strategies in their teaching.

Implications for academics’ role and identity – In this session it became clear that how we understand the public good will also determine how we think about the implications for the public good. An important insight from one of the presenters was that the institutional framework which lecturers step into has an effect on how they think about their teaching and being an academic. In her case her induction into university teaching highlighted the impact that a lecturer could have on the student’s being and this expanded her view of teaching to the point where she thought not just about the impact her teaching could have, but about the impact her “being” could have. Another important perspective from this session was that teaching for the public good is more than just having compassion and empathy for students. It requires an understanding of the tensions of the public domain for which students are being prepared. It possibly also requires a reconceptualisation of what it means to be an academic active in higher education. While these presentations took a different view of the necessity to reconceptualise the meaning of being an academic, both had a common understanding of where teaching should be guiding students. Finally, there were indications that academics need opportunity and guidance to develop identities that contribute to the public good through teaching.

Focus on the institution supporting teaching for the public good

The colloquium concluded with three presentations that turned the spotlight to the institution. The first was an example of how an academic’s educational research had been disseminated in a faculty with possible implications for the decisions made by the faculty. The second suggested a framework for describing what a socially just institution is. The framework is a model relying on Sen and Nussbaum’s capabilities approach, Fraser’s three dimensional concept of social justice and perspectives from the political ethics of care. Finally Prof Soudien (UCT) presented a retrospective and forward looking view of the university. He explored what the university, has historically been and what it could become in future. He stated that the university is characterised by continual renewal and that in order to become what it can be the university needs courage not to simply replicate unfulfilled promises. In the process of renewal the current South African university has to deal with the tension (perceived?) between excellence and access. In this context the university should not only come to grips with how to manage access and the societal pressure for access but also how to discover excellence in our current situation.

Concluding comments

From the colloquium a number of suggestions can be made to support the institution in its conversations about teaching for the public good. These include:

- Encouraging continued conversation between academics about the meaning and implications of a pedagogy of hope. This could be done within departments, faculties or at institutional level in existing structures (eg the Committee for Learning and Teaching).
- The sharing of good practice should be encouraged by creating further opportunities for such sharing.
- The presentation of a workshop on embedding teaching for the public good in the curriculum for academics at the annual SoTL conference or the annual Spring Teaching Academy.
- The inclusion of the issue of teaching for the public good at PREDAC. This could either be integrated into existing sessions or be dealt with as a separate session.
- If no such document exists the university could formulate a position paper on teaching for the public good. This could be related to the Rector's pedagogy of hope and have the status of a supporting document to institutional strategy.
- As an alternative to the above suggestion, the to-be-revised institutional Teaching and Learning Policy could include references to and explanations of teaching for the public good.
- A project to describe students' understanding of what it means to be taught for the public good could be launched.

Hopeful Pedagogies @ SU

How does higher education in South Africa contribute to the public good?



PROGRAMME

08:30 – 10:30	<p>Introduction <i>Prof Magda Fourie</i></p> <p>Contextualization <i>Prof Russel Botman</i></p> <p>Public purposes of the university <i>Dr Lis Lange</i></p> <p>Hope, education and skepticism <i>Prof Yusef Waghid</i></p> <p>Graduate attributes at SU: for the public good? <i>Dr Susan van Schalkwyk, Mr André Muller and Ms Nicoline Herman</i></p> <p>Discussion</p>				
10:30 – 11:00	TEA/COFFEE				
11:00 – 12:00	Parallel Discussions				
	Venue 1 – Breakaway Room 1	Venue 2 – Stoep	Venue 3 – Auditorium 1	Venue 4 – Aud 2 (Dining Area)	Venue 5 – Breakaway Room 2

	<u>Sustainability</u> Presenters: Prof Lesley le Grange, Dr Nokwanda Makunga, Ms Rhoda Malgas and Prof Mark Swilling Chair: Dr Peter Beets Scribe: Ms Melanie Petersen	<u>Ethics and internationalisation</u> Presenters: Prof Johan Hattingh, Prof Hendrik Bosman and Prof Cornie Scheffer Chair: Prof Johann de Villiers Scribe: Ms Jean Farmer	<u>Democracy, human rights and participation</u> Presenters: Ms Elmarie Costandius, Dr Jerome Slamati and Prof Sandy Liebenberg Chair: Prof Yusef Waghid Scribe: Mr Jacob du Plessis	<u>Social Inclusion</u> Presenters: Dr Brenda Leibowitz, Prof Aslam Fataar, Dr Nwabisa Bangeni and Prof Nico Koopman Chair: Dr Susan van Schalkwyk Scribe: Dr Shaun Viljoen	<u>Multilingualism</u> Presenters: Mr John Ruiters, Prof Marianna Visser and Ms Phumla Kese Chair: Dr Ian Nell Scribe: Dr Michael le Cordeur
12:00 – 12:30	Reports from parallel sessions Chair: Prof Marietjie de Villiers				
12:30 – 13:30	LUNCH				
13:30 – 14:30	Focus on academics teaching for the public good				
	Venue 1 – Auditorium 1	Venue 2 – Auditorium 2 (Dining Area)		Venue 3 – Breakaway Room	
	<u>Optimal conditions for academics teaching for the public good</u> Presenters: Prof Gina Wisker, Prof David Holgate and Prof Eli Bitzer Chair: Dr Francois Cilliers Scribe: Dr Karin Howell	<u>Implications for academics, role and identity (1)</u> Presenters: Dr Antoinette Smith-Tolken, Dr Omar Esau, Dr Faaiz Gierdien and Prof Juanita Bezuidenhout Chair: Prof Geo Quinot Scribe: Dr Daniel Roux		<u>Implications for academics, role and identity (2)</u> Presenters: Dr Debby Blaine, Prof Usuf Chikte and Prof Hendrik Bosman Chair: Dr Margaret Blackie Scribe: Dr JP Bosman	
14:30 – 15:00	Reports from parallel sessions Chair: Dr Brenda Leibowitz				
15:00 – 15:15	TEA/COFFEE				
15:15 – 15:30	Focus on the institution Chair: Dr Ludolph Botha				
	Diversity and inclusion: a student’s perspective <i>Prof Monique Zaahl</i>				
15:30 – 15:50	An evaluative framework for a socially just institution <i>Prof Vivienne Bozalek and Dr Brenda Leibowitz</i>				
15:50 – 16:30	The promise of the University: what it's become and where it could go in contexts of division and conflict <i>Prof Crain Soudien</i>				
16:30	Close <i>Prof Magda Fourie</i>				

Please visit the Blog at <https://blogs.sun.ac.za/hopefulpedagogiessu/>.

First real posting on hopeful pedagogies

Welcome to this blog on hopeful pedagogies. This is an experiment in many senses. It is the focussing of a general conversation at Stellenbosch University on specifically how we can TEACH for the public good...

Brenda Leibowitz

Recent comments

Die colloquium eerskomende Vrydag is die eerste kampuswye gesprek oor wat “Pedagogie van Hoop” in die onderrig-en-leer-omgewing sou kon beteken. Ek dink dit is ‘n belangrike stap in ons proses van vordering na ‘n gedeelde verstaan van ‘hoop’ en hoe dit in alles wat ons doen neerslag kan/behoort te vind.

Reversing the term “Pedagogy of Hope” into “Hopeful Pedagogies” as the theme of the colloquium may, I think, open up new ways of thinking about it, particularly in terms of the focus on the contribution of the university to the public good...

Prof Magda Fourie