

## **'TRANSFORMING PEDAGOGICAL VALUES'**

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**Theme: 'Improving Education Systems'; Breakout Session on 'Shared Values'**

Ladies and gentlemen, I support the contention that it is the responsibility of higher education and educational institutions to instil in their students an understanding of – and a respect for – human diversity, heterogeneity and interdependence. In order to substantiate my position, I would like to refer to our experience at Stellenbosch University to highlight some of the lessons I think we can use from that and apply elsewhere.

I will start with the broader South African experience, though. You are all familiar with my country's transition from apartheid to democracy, signposted by our universal non-racial elections in 1994. Now, in that context, we started to think about an African idea or philosophy that could guide the way we think about people in South Africa. The idea of Ubuntu is a traditional South African philosophy. It proposes that a person is a person through other people. This became an important mantra in the country. The inclusiveness of Ubuntu can be seen as a corrective to the exclusiveness of apartheid and racism.

Former President Mandela then stepped on the stage with one very strong message. I quote, "Education is the best weapon you can use to change the world".

The demand in our transformation was for educational institutions to translate their relevance in society into the idea of how science can change society to create a better context and a better world. Clearly this has universal application, but in distressed societies such as ours, educational institutions face not only an educational obligation but also a moral obligation. It is from this morality that values emerge and the debate of values is driven in all our institutions.

Early in its history, Stellenbosch University was seen as an ethnic university, exclusively serving the needs of one section of the population: that is, white Afrikaans speakers (Thom, 1969). It does not mean that the university had only like-minded people. There were a number of dissidents at the university. However the mission of the institution was clearly defined in terms of homogeneity, exclusivity and ethnic interests.

The transformation required a reorientation of the whole institution in terms of its values. The value reorientation to reposition the University was clearly marked by two vantage points. On the one hand, we looked back and said, "We must ask ourselves what way we are going to look at where we are coming from." That is the past, ethnic, racial history. On

the other hand, we would like to look at where we are going to as a common, diverse and non-racial future.

This search for an orientation around values became very important and it led to two very important decisions at Stellenbosch University. On the one hand, the acknowledgement that the university had contributed to the injustices of the past. On the other hand, a commitment to be part of redress in the future so that the next generation will have a better chance of growing with shared values.

In this context, we started to work with themes such as equity and service (SU, 2000). This would take the form of building a staff and student core that was demographically more willing to welcome others into the institution, not only from South Africa but people from all over the continent and people internationally. It would be a community more representative of the South African society.

Apart from being representative, there was the other question. How can we secure that we continue to serve our next generation? The idea of development became a very important part of our debates. We are now at a point where there is broad consensus at the University – from the Council, throughout the Senate of the academics and throughout the student body – that the University is no longer the preserve of any specific group or language group but a national asset, a continental partner and a global participant in education.

When I was appointed Rector and Vice-Chancellor in 2007, I dedicated my term to the realisation of this commitment to future generations (Botman, 2007). I proposed the development of a critical pedagogy for Stellenbosch University in connection with the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of Hope* (Freire, 1970, 1992). His contributions are linked to the idea that education should help to transform the world, specifically by empowering people to become agents of change themselves. It is a critical pedagogy. It is a progressive pedagogy of transformation. It seeks to transform broken realities. Its subject is a very ambitious subject called "the world". For the progressive educator, every educational moment - whether in the search for knowledge or the sharing of knowledge or the application of knowledge - is an opportunity to unveil the hope that we have for future generations. It is hope that seeks action and leads to the transformation of the world.

Stellenbosch University has taken five themes from the international development agenda, as captured in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), to guide our core activities of teaching and learning, research and community interaction (Botman, 2010b). These themes are the eradication of poverty and related conditions, the promotion of human dignity and health, democracy and human rights, peace and security as well as a sustainable environment and competitive industry.

Our various faculties came up with 22 academic initiatives and enabling programmes that give expression to these themes (SU, 2010). These range from an interdisciplinary food security initiative, and a programme for combating poverty, combating homelessness and socioeconomic vulnerability to centres for dispute resolution, HIV/AIDS management in the workplace, and sustainability.

It includes efforts to reverse the effects of the African brain drain. We have set up a collaborative network with five other universities outside South Africa to fast-track the delivery of PhD graduates. It is called the Partnership for Africa's Next Generation of Academics (PANGeA, 2010). It is a great project, which we started this year. We have 32 students and only 12 of them are from South Africa.

At a point, we also realised that all knowledge must be equitably accessible if we want to make a difference on our continent and in the world. Thus earlier this year, Stellenbosch University became the first African university to sign the Berlin Declaration on Open Access to Knowledge in the Sciences and Humanities.

Taken as a whole, our five development themes and our 22 academic initiatives are known as the University's HOPE Project. This seems appropriate in the light of the fact that the idea of hope is embedded in all education. Education is empowerment through knowledge. It is the message of possibility over limitations, of opportunity over cynicism. It is the message of creation and creativity over destruction and of embrace over exclusion.

Through an institutional value orientation, universities produce graduates for the public good (Walker, 2010). These days, graduate attributes are generally seen to go beyond technical knowledge and the private good (Van Schalkwyk et al, 2010). They now include qualities that also prepare graduates as agents for social good (Bowden et al, 2000). They will eventually become the value-driven leaders of the future.

In order to produce graduates who can meaningfully transform society into welcoming spaces, you need to become the sort of institution where graduates of this nature can be nurtured (Van Schalkwyk et al, 2010). Another way to say this is to quote Mohandas Gandhi: "You must be the change you want to see in the world".

Institutions of education must embody and institutionalise the values embedded in the MDGs to become the kind of institutions that embody the changes that we want to see in this world. That is why the work of WISE and this Summit is so important. Here we learn to hold hands so that the next generation of world leaders will share values that will change the world for the better.

Thank you.

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