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*#TeachersMustFall:
Transgressive teaching in post-
apartheid higher education
institutions*

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Teaching and Learning in Higher
Education Conference



Process

Currere “complicated conversation” (Pinar, 1976; 2006):

- Running of a course, or a course of study.
- Engagement with the past, the present and the future.
- Curriculum an active and biographical.
- No separation between pedagogy and learning: “the curriculum is pedagogy, and vice versa. Curriculum is the coming together of teacher, student, and text within a situated moment in space and time, in which we are called upon to produce (or co-produce) both themselves and culture.” (Carlson, 2005)

ARGUMENT: Higher education teachers need to teach transgressively in order to effectively respond to the “question of the moment”, i.e. that of decolonization in higher education. This political moment requires for the troubling of traditional conceptions of teaching, and a move towards the discovery of ourselves as teachers and discovering our students.

Climate of higher education in South Africa

- 2008 Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institution: “discrimination, in particular with regard to racism and sexism, is pervasive in our institutions.”
 - Disjunction in terms of policy and practice caused by two reasons: 1. poor dissemination of information pertaining to policy 2. A disjunction between institutional culture and transformation policies
- #RhodesMustFall (Rhodes as symbolic of white supremacy and a culture that celebrates the oppression of black people)
- Decolonisation (content, authors, languages, institutional cultures, spaces)
- #FeesMustFall (increase access and open higher education)

Reactions

- Critiques of VCs supportive of decolonization and institutions that support it (RW Johnson):

“In those days VCs stood for principles like university autonomy, academic freedom, opposition to the Separate Universities Act, even higher academic standards...Instead VCs have adopted the motto of the 19th century French politician, Alexandre Ledru-Rollin:

“There go the people. I am their leader and therefore I must follow them””

“South Africa has the top four universities in Africa, all built on the British model. We have already seen what has happened to one university (UKZN) which was forced down the road of “decolonization”. The result was the flight of students and faculty, administrative chaos and the drying up of benefactions from donors. At the end of that process UKZN has been effectively ruined and is bankrupt. This is the fate that awaits our four top universities if they give way to the likes of RMF and the transformation lobby.”

- Standards argument (Max Price 20 years to produce a professor; black academics not being there; concerns about the quality of teaching from black staff)
- Misunderstanding of the project: Erasure of "white colonial" objects and knowledge (Mondli Makhanya; Njabulo Ndebele)
- Securitisation
- Compartmentalisation (exclusive focus on race)
- Student-tsotsi mentality

Reality of our students

Musa's story

My name is Musa. When I was 4 years old my mother passed on, leaving me with my grandmother who then passed on in 2002. After her death my family rejected my two siblings and I, leaving our aunt, who volunteered after a heavy argument, to look after us. From 2002 till 2006 I lived under very difficult conditions. There was constant emotional, physical and psychological abuse at my aunt's home. I could not report any of this because I was young and my aunt convinced me that nobody would take me nor believe me if I reported the abuse. I also did not report it because I needed shelter and a place to call home. This abuse was not only directed at me but also my brothers as well. Fortunately my older brother managed to get out of the home by moving in with relatives from his father's side. I did not know who my father was as I had never met him. Therefore, I had nowhere to go. As for my younger brother, he ran off and lived in other people's houses.

In 2003 when we moved, my aunt's abusive behavior had not stopped. However, she got more careful. One of my neighbors reported my aunt to the school I was attending. And that caught the attention of my educators because I was a high performing student. In 2005 the school put me in a program called "Gift of the Givers Foundation". Through this programme we received stationery and food parcels. This made me feel motivated to work harder. However, it made my aunt furious because she felt I was bad mouthing her. In 2006 when I was at the end of grade 6 she chased me out of her house. I then moved into my friend's home. In 2007 the school organized the Beacon of Hope Bursary from Telkom Foundation for ten learners, and my name was among the learners on the list. The teachers arranged that I move back with my aunt so that the bursary application forms could be filled accordingly.

In 2008, after receiving the bursary from Telkom, I was enrolled in grade 8 at a former model C School, which luckily was a boarding school. My fees and everything were sponsored to me by the bursary. I achieved merit certificates and sport certificates throughout my high school career.

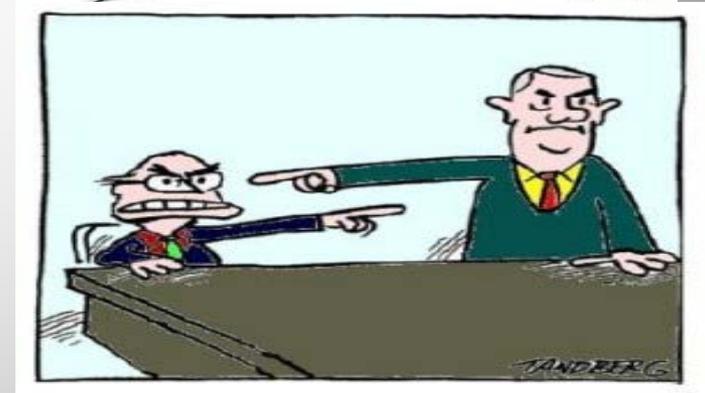
In 2012 I matriculated but could not go to university as I had no financial support. Being the motivated person that I am, in 2013 I volunteered to be a reading mentor at a primary school where I had studied. I had to live with one of the teachers, because my aunt wanted nothing to do with me.

In the year 2014, with the help of my teachers and my friend's grandmother, I applied to UKZN Edgewood Campus and got accepted. However, I did not get any funding. My former teachers assisted with putting together the registration fees. I spent the entire year last year without any financial support; I was assisted by my roommates, with meals and some clothing items.

At the end of the year last year, I applied for a NSFAS loan. I have been told that I have been granted the loan, much to my relief. The challenge now however is that I still owe money for last year. I have no one who can assist me in paying the debt. As I have outlined above; I am an orphan and have been assisted throughout my life by people around me. I have been informed that my NSFAS loan will be withdrawn if I cannot pay last year's debt. I am really concerned about this as I don't want to drop out of the university. I want to make a better life for myself. I passed all my modules in 2014, with most modules being above 70%. My current average is 70%.

I have fought very hard to make it to the university; it is hard to concentrate knowing that you do not have a home to go to when the residences close, and that your fees are not paid for and the chances of you being financially excluded are high. Despite all this stress, I have tried very hard and have done well. I need a lifeline to enable a better future for myself.

How are teachers in higher education responding the “questions of the moment”



Historical calls for decolonized and transformative teaching

- Mamdani (UCT)
- Jansen
- Keet
- Hemson and Francis

What is transgressive teaching? (hooks, 1994)

- Classroom space as complex
- Education as a political exercise: critical education pivotal
- Classroom as a space of discomfort
- Education as a practice of freedom (learning as fun)
- Teaching beyond content and numbers; teaching as performative
- Democracy and dialogue central to the process of teaching
- An interrogation of who we are in the classroom
- A belief that everyone can learn

Challenges the notion of “disembodied minds”

“The traditional arrangement of the body we are talking about deemphasizes the reality that professors are in the classroom to offer something of ourselves to the students. The erasure of the body encourages us to think that we are listening to neutral, objective facts, facts that are not particular to who is sharing the information. We are invited to teach information as though it does not emerge from bodies.” (hooks, 1994, p. 139)

“If we examine critically the traditional role of the university in the pursuit of truth and sharing the knowledge and information, it is painfully clear that biases that uphold and maintain white supremacy, imperialism, sexism, and racism have distorted education so that it is no longer about the practice of freedom. The call for a recognition of cultural diversity, a rethinking of ways of knowing, a deconstruction of old epistemologies, and the concomitant demand that there be a transformation in the classroom, in how we teach and what we teach, has been a necessary revolution— one that seeks to restore life to a corrupt and dying academy.” (hooks, 1994, p. 30)

How might transgressive teaching look like in the context of South Africa?

- Acknowledgement of our woundedness (and our pain)
- We can't teach what (and those) we don't know
- Deliberate and conscious engagement with 'difference'
- Teaching heavily embedded in processes of power
- Recognition of our societal dysfunctions
- Demanding more from our students
- Recognition of voice as a political exercise
- Interrogation of our privileges
- Welcoming resistance

What then?

- Higher education at crossroads: teachers have an ethical and moral obligation to offer teaching that is embedded in a project of social justice.
- Listening to each other is pivotal in this process.
- The current “fires” in higher education are needed if we are to have higher education spaces critical of privileging, while simultaneously affirming of difference – a higher education that is reflective of the African experience.
- So should teachers fall? Perhaps not. Certainly traditional notions of teaching must fall: our assumed positions of power, our stereotypes and our fears need to fall. Thus, a new teacher can emerge: a teacher conscious of her student’s social, political, economic and contextual needs, who is not afraid of being challenged.