Teaching as transformation? The Im-possible Task of Academics in South African Higher Education

TEACHING AS TRANSFORMATION?

The Im-possible Task of Academics in South African Higher Education

Dr Dina Zoe Belluigi, Queens University Belfast
@DZBelluigi

27 April 2018, For the seminar ‘Teaching’
Old Staff Common Room, Queen's University, Belfast, Northern Ireland.

With thanks to Brent Meistre for a selection of images from Class_____ (2001)
Colour photographic prints, 30x30cm (http://meistre.org/photo/class)
ABSTRACT

What influences, informs and impacts on the development of 'teaching' in higher education, reflects the ways in which the purpose of higher education is negotiated.

This talk will consider dominant constructions of the roles and responsibilities of the academic in South African universities in the wake of that country's negotiated political settlement, which pivot around how teaching has grappled with notions of access.

Questions will be posed about whether approaches to ‘access for success’ should continue to be positioned within myths of advancement in this field of professional practice, or whether such impulses thwart the more radical equity projects of ‘access to challenge’ in a context burdened with legacies of injustice from colonialism, apartheid and the cold war.
STRUCTURAL ACCESS

ACCESS AND SUCCESS

ACCESS TO CHALLENGE
What ends did higher education serve?

The spectre of ‘Bantu education’

The silence of HE institutions in the face of oppression
## Racial Categories in SA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Racial Categories</th>
<th>Percentage (2011 consensus)</th>
<th>Numerical value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black Africans</td>
<td>79.2%</td>
<td>41 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>4.62 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian or Asian</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>1.29 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>4.59 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 'black' students

Only 14% have access

### First generation students

78%

- isiZulu 22.7%
- isiXhosa 16%
- Afrikaans 13.5%
- English 9.6%
- Sepedi 9.1%
- Setswana 8%
- Sesotho 7.6%
- Xitsonga 4.5%
- siSwati 2.5%
- Tshivenda 2.4%
- isiNdebele 2.1%
Within the ‘realm of influence’ of academics – tasked to transform and provide access:
Teaching – Research – Community Engagement
Spectre of the ‘negotiated revolution’

Deficit communities    Deficit knowledge & ways of being

WHAT SHOULD BE WITHIN THE REALM OF THE ACADEMIC’S INFLUENCE?
WHAT SHOULD BE WITHIN THE REALM OF THE ACADEMIC’S INFLUENCE?

Reflexivity & positionality of privilege > Machinations of domination; Systemic oppression
Progress, Advancements > Disruption, Decolonialisation, Activism
What should be within the realm of the academic’s influence?

Transformation

Structural
Cultural
Agential

Of the institutions for society

Decolonising the curriculum
(micro, meso, macro)

Decolonising the archive
(local/ global for knowledge)
TEACHING AS TRANSFORMATION?

The **Im-possible** Task of Academics in South African Higher Education

? Can institutions/ individuals/ traditions act against their own self-interest?

? Can education disrupt reproduction of its own self-image?

? Who has the ‘right’? Who has the responsibility?


THIS ANALYSIS IS BASED ON ASPECTS OF

Belluigi, (D. Z.) & Thondhlana, G. Forthcoming. Transformation or ‘training the dog’? Faculty insights into approaches to access and equity within an historically white institution in South Africa.


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Brent Meistre (2001) *Class_____* Colour photographic prints, 30x30cm

([http://meistre.org/photo/class](http://meistre.org/photo/class))