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HIV SOCIAL INCLUSIVITY AND ENABLEMENT IN THE HE CURRICULUM

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Central to the student protests in 2015 was the question of the curriculum. The cry went out in many tense stand-offs around the country for the immediate decolonisation of the curriculum. The RhodesMustFall movement at the University of Cape Town demanded that the University should ‘Implement a curriculum which critically centres Africa and the subaltern ... through addressing not only content but languages and methodologies of education and learning ...’ (RhodesMust Fall 2015, 6). There is, the point needs emphasizing, much that should be said and written about with respect to what the curriculum in the South African university looks like in its full complexity and diversity, what interventions, changes, reforms and revisions have taken place over the last thirty years and, powerfully, how it is mediated and experienced. A full description, accounting for and an analysis is urgently necessary to assist the country in thinking through what is appropriate and now no-longer appropriate for young South Africans to be learning, what is critical for their social formation as autonomous and dignity-endowed subjects and, critically, how in the current conjuncture a curriculum can be developed which is mindful, inclusive and also important of the country’s full tableaux of social and cultural histories. This is necessary, it is argued here, to avoid shallow appraisals of where we are. The rhetorical arsenal in the country in the current period is characterised by defensiveness and rhetorical flourishes which both illuminate and obscure. Problematic are defensive responses which claim too much about what has been made better in the South African curriculum, as are analyses which say that the 1910 colonial and 1948 apartheid curriculum in the university remains unchanged. Neither of these is accurate. Neither is, as it is enunciated and declaimed helpful either. Teaching in the academy, and particularly in the present, is not innocent. It has

in it very problematic evocations of superiority. But what was taught even at the height of the apartheid period was by no means uncritical of colonialism and the colonial-apartheid project. What is needed to be understood is how power operates in any social period, what assumptions it makes about subjectivity, what structural resources it uses and entrenches, what strategically it chooses to discard or disguise discursively and how it mobilises certain social groupings behind its project. Rhetoric is not sufficient as a mode of analysis in circumstances such as these.

This special issue focus of the *South African Journal of Higher Education* speaks into this complexity of the curriculum debate in higher education. It is not about decolonisation. It is about the social syndromes which a movement such as decolonisation seeks to engage – exclusion, marginalisation, misrecognition, delegitimation, othering, the denial of dignity, conceits of superiority, bystanding, apathy, racism, sexism and all the other forms of power, structural and discursive, that serve to oppress and deny the humanity of some. The issue is about HIV and AIDS in its social expression as a site of classification, differentiation and ranking and how the university through its curriculum responds. As in the decolonisation discussion, of direct concern is how the curriculum addresses itself to the classification, differentiation and ranking of human beings. This special issue asks how the curriculum can be engaged to use the deep meditational strategies at its disposal to promote inclusion, respect and acknowledgement of difference. It looks critically at the sociologies in the social process which have the effect of stimulating belonging and othering and of nurturing effects of superiority and inferiority. It presents itself as a case-study for taking the larger curriculum revision exercise that is taking place in the country further.

The special issue operates at many levels. It can be read and used as an ethnography of the pedagogy of the stigmatised and marginalised. It tells the story of how colleagues working in the arena of HIV and AIDS teaching and learning in the country have in the last ten years or so gone about the work of introducing the subject into the curriculum. It is not comprehensive. There are many interesting and innovative interventions that are taking place all over the country which are not described here. But it tells the story of colleagues who worked together in the HEAIDS and formed a community of practice for themselves. As ethnography the issue looks at the content of the curriculum, what was introduced in a number of universities, it looks at the responses of the students themselves, and, differently, it looks also at the lecturers and their own subject positions. There is much in this ethnography that provokes, unsettles, stimulates and tantalises. With respect to the last, readers will come across many moments when they will wish for more, that they would have had the contributors here chasing down points

and their implications more thoroughly and even sometimes more self-critically. But the work is presented here as a start for a crucial conversation that teachers should have.

The work at this ethnographic level is in the style of much that one will find in an action-research journal. Contributors describe how they designed their courses. There is the contribution of Alves and English which looks at the challenges of teaching in an engineering faculty, particularly the resistance of students to what some perceive as unnecessary uses of their time. The work of Smit and her colleagues on an intervention in a health sciences faculty focuses on the ethical dilemmas that accompany the teaching of a course such as this. Reddy, Saptouw and Volks' contribution is about the immediate responses of students to provocative art installations about HIV and AIDS on the most public place in a university. Verhoef's article looks at how the dominant philosophical paradigm in a Humanities faculty, namely that which suggests that the world is constructed according to the normative orders of African, Western and Christian, provide hermeneutic frameworks for students to look at the challenge of HIV and AIDS.

Still at the ethnographic level there is in the selection of contributions an extremely interesting article which emerged directly out of the community of practice of the lecturers. Van Laren, Pithouse-Morgan, Volks and Alves decided to make themselves the subject of scrutiny and chose to use scrap-booking as a way of surfacing their own positionalities in their teaching. Complementing this is the contribution by Brown which focuses on the paradoxes in stigmatisation. The paradox he focuses his attention on is that of when the privileged self discovers the despised other within itself. He asks what happens when a 'white girl gets AIDS?' As another accompaniment to the self-focus evident in the earlier two pieces Volks and Musungu present a critical piece about bystanding based on the holocaust experience.

Alongside of these action-research minded contributions are a few contributions in the selection which look at how the higher education sector curriculum operates at a macro-level. Presented as such, the collection moves beyond its ethnographic gaze and arcs widely in terms of the methodologies, strengths and weaknesses that are evident in the country as a whole. This work has the benefit of a review undertaken by Lesley Wood of the sector as a whole. Wood provides a few contributions in this collection to this subject based on this expertise. There are several points of importance she raises, not least of which are acknowledgements of the strides universities have made but also the challenges they still have before them. She emphasizes the structural barriers that continue to loom large in the academy – the assertion academics make about the already full curriculum and then the much more problematic point about the relevance of HIV and AIDS issues for their own subject and disciplinary foci. Wood, and also Volks and

her colleagues, look at how the subject material of HIV and AIDS can be infused into the curriculum, and Wood, Reddy and Soudien develop an analysis and explanation of intersectionality to show how the issue of HIV and AIDS demands an approach which has to be not only cognisant of but attentive to racism and sexism.

While I would like to acknowledge how inchoate this genre of work around pedagogy and HIV, I cannot emphasize enough how critical it is for thinking about how the academy here in South Africa, but generally elsewhere in the world too, begins to confront the question of how it approaches the terrain of the ineffable. Racism and sexism are amongst the most serious unspoken and inarticulately comprehended and engaged social features of the country. They are surrounded by both denial and hyperbole. Because they have historically been engaged so selectively, they stimulate all kinds of hypotheses about their causes and characteristics. They, in the process, are totalised, either to deny them or to make them account for everything. What a contribution such as this selection of articles does is to invite a considered discussion of how one proceeds. What theoretical approaches are needed to take the discussion and the enquiry forward? What forms of analysis are necessary? What is and is not helpful? We would like to think that we are making a small contribution here to a much bigger discussion.

REFERENCES

RhodesMustFall. 2015. UCT Rhodes Must fall Mission Statement. *The Johannesburg Salon* Volume Nine: 6–14.