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**≠ "quality" as the Premise for an
Educational System: Impasses, Dilemmas, and
Challenges in the 21st Century**

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South African Research Chairs Initiative (SARChI)

- A strategically focused knowledge and human resource intervention into the South African Higher Education system.
- **Mandate:**
 - Advance the frontiers of knowledge, create new research career pathways and stimulate strategic research.
 - Fast track leadership building through postgraduate training.

DST/NRF SARChI Chair in Development Education

- **Funded by the South African Department of Science and Technology.**
- **Administered by the National Research Foundation.**
- **Hosted by the University of South Africa (Unisa).**

UNISA

- It is a **mega-university**
- It is the **biggest university in Africa**
- It is the **8th biggest in the world**

SARCHI-DE Goals

1. Make **transdisciplinarity** a core facet in Leadership Building.
2. Offer robust expositions of the **constitutive rules and norms that control current thinking and practice.**
3. Represent an **epistemology of hope** - hope that **probes the future and thereby illuminates the possibilities of the present.**

To begin with

A RIDDLE: THE WILL TO ACT

- **What happens when we raise the ethical benchmarks in research, practice and policy work?**
- **What happens when the inner voice of disenfranchisement meets the outer voice of empowerment... ?**
- **When the inner cry for self determination meets the warm embrace of co-determination?**

Knowing that...

- Sometimes the **entities** that
- perform the **functions** and **wield the authority**
- are **actually NOT persons** like pilots and doctors,
- but **WORDS** (Richards 2009)

QUESTIONS BEING ASKED BY THE CHAIR

- What kind of **transformative actions** must be brought to bear to enable both **restorative action and sustainable human development** to occur in Africa and elsewhere?
- How can key areas of **disciplinary knowledge production** (such as science, economics, education and law) **be reconstituted** in order to bring about **a just and human-centred development** on the continent and globally?

In other words,

The Need for More than Rights

In fact, from **Epistemic Pluralism (Miller 2008)**

- we have to move swiftly beyond equality to a method of dialogue....

- And thus to: **Cognitive Justice (Visvanathan 1997)**

Introduction and General Reflections

- Quality is the base that anchors the **component** part of the system.
- If it is “there” nobody **talks about it**, because there is no need to!
- If it is not “there”, people try to **identify with the components** e.g. gender education, sustainability education, leadership education for instance and attach these to the mainstream education.

For Instance...

- 30 years ago, it was found that there was something missing in the sexist bias of the schooling system so much that **gender specialists** were created, and trained, and came.
- New notions: **gender neutral, gender sensitive, gender blind policies** were created.

Cont....

A few years later, there was something missing about the ways schools behaved when looking at the global society – and **sustainability** came:

Sustainable schools, sustainable practice, and now.. oh yes.. GREEN LIVING.

Cont...

- All the time, people already knew that there is a mismatch between text book knowledge and knowledge of “life”, so **economists** felt guilty, and
- took it up as “entrepreneurial skills” that was missing, so life skills oriented in the economic way “took the day”.

Cont....

- In 1990's, it was realized that education is actually a fundamental right for all people, women and men, of all ages, throughout our world, so **educationists** stepped in during the EFA and reminded the world.
- **Meeting basic learning needs; an expanded vision; and a renewed commitment** took the day for a decade.

Cont....

- They set unrealistic goals, narrowing down **“education” into ‘schools’** and the whole thing was finished right there.
- The rest you can read in the Dakar Reports.

But OOOPPPS,

- they left out adults, so a parallel process was set up to complement the already existing one. It was called CONFINTEA 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and so on.
- Conferences were called, and goals were set, and then people breathed and continued with business as usual.
- The whole thing was reduced to individual **project, not program, not even strategies!**

The UN conference in Rio in 1992?

- ... I can say, was a **“mess”** from the vantage point of conventional mainstream education.
- It was what the traditional and uncreative teachers call, **“overload”** from the schooling point of view.
- Agenda 21 especially called for **recognizing the integral and interdependent nature of the Earth, our home, the nations.**

THE CONSTITUTIVE AND SYSTEMIC QUESTIONS

- How were **schools**, by which I mean the conveniently narrow convenient meaning of the concept of education, supposed to define the **“rights of people to development”** for instance?
- They were used to **grading people, sorting them out, and celebrating the winners... that is still all! The rest, (the failures)...well it was their business!**

Not the schools, for god's sake!

- **Schools take the “best” and narrows the numbers “by law” even further as the students go up the ladder.**
- **By the time they reach universities, out of a million that enrolled in the first place, we in the apex of higher education are satisfied with only a couple of thousands.**

We are top class!

- **And of course, we pat ourselves in the back and say... or shout “good job” to anyone that can listen**
- **We are top class! We are the best!!**

In Sweden...

- This is what the late **Prime Minister Olof Palme** was faced with!
- The concept of the university must change somehow! **Life Long Learning** took a different shape altogether!

Won by the Right

- How could educationists in the late 20th century where the war of ideas was already won by the **“Right”**
- combine their exclusivist enterprise with the **“educating for the earth”** in an integral and interdependence way **“when we weren’t taught that at school”**?

Caring for the trees

- So the best way was **to stay back**, and
- instead encourage immediate action by some other group..
- so **environmentalists** came in.
- And brought in pedagogies around “caring for trees”, and **eco-tourism** was the order of the day.

But alas!

- they left out “eradicating poverty and reducing disparities”
- and its link with that specific phrase to “conserve, protect and restore the health and integrity of the Earth’s ecosystem”.
- They also left out the primitives who had made it part of their lives to live with the earth.

They didn't wear shoes did they?

- **They didn't have capital to trade in the stock exchange did they?**
- **How could they know? How could they?**
- **So the primitives were lumped under the poverty group in the aid business.**

So they travelled...

- So the environmentalists travelled all over the world in good faith and trained people along the way.
- They partly succeeded or are slightly succeeding in the reducing and elimination of unsustainable patterns of production and consumption but not at a **systemic level** covering the real issue; the **constitutive rules of the game**.

Impasse 1: Albert Einstein and Ralston Saul on Higher Education

- **For Einstein:** most of the major states of history owed their existence to conquest. The conquering peoples established themselves, legally and economically, as the privileged class of the conquered country.
- **They seized for themselves a monopoly of the land ownership and appointed a priesthood from among their own ranks.**

Cont....

- **The priests, in control of education,**
- **made the class division of society into a permanent institution**
- **and created a system of values by which the people were thenceforth,**
- **to a large extent unconsciously,**
- **guided in their social behavior..**

Cooing about excellence

- **Higher education institutions who coo**
- **about “excellence” derived from contemporary western habit of thought**
- **would find it hard to account for the deliberate exclusions inherent in the notion they currently deploy.**

John Ralston Saul

- John Ralston Saul was more forthright
- and wrote in his *“A Fair Country: Telling the Truths about Canada”* of the **existential illiteracy** that bedevils the elite in dealing with **lived contexts**.
- Democracy, true democracy – in fact **lived democracy** – is a **terrifying thought**.

He Wrote....

- **“...you wanted land.**
- **The land belonged to somebody else. You took it.**
- **You despise the actual owner.**
- **You believe that you are pure and unique.**
- **You believe that you are exempt from the ethical principles.**

Cont...

- You wish every day that the original owner would **die soon or perish faster**, but she/he doesn't quite die.
- Then you impose a **legal system** complete with lawyers and judges to defend that historical act of theft.
- The last thing you want is **actual voice** of such a person to enter the chorus” (Ralston Saul 2008).

It is an awkward moment.

- higher education must overcome what Thorstein Veblen called "**the predatory phase**" of human development
- It goes beyond the squabbles of disciplines and paradigms as they battle it out with each other.
- The intellectual eco-system has to go further than that.

Impasse 2: Higher Education, Economics and Hegemony

- Susan George in her article, ***“How to Win the War of Ideas”***
- Stated that the markets did not fall suddenly from heaven.
- It was the result of a concerted, long time ideological effort, nurtured over many decades through thought, action, and propaganda on the part of identifiable actors.

- It weaved its way through the “*laissez-faire*” doctrine,
- through neo-conservatism (for Americans), and
- neoliberalism for Europeans and “*la pensee unique*” (the dominant or single mindset) as the French would call it

- The rise of the neoliberal movement (looking back), is the result of 50 years of intellectual work .
- She writes that “if there are three kinds of people: those who **make things happen**,
- those who **watch things happen**, and
- those who **never knew what hit them**.

- The neoliberals belonged to the first category,
- and most progressives to the latter two.
- The progressives remained complacent until it, suddenly, it was too late”.

- They understood that to transform the **economic, political and social landscape**, they had first to change **intellectual and psychological one**.
- They understood the pigs in George Orwell's Animal Farm when they said "**some were more equal than others**".
- So to let some ideas be more fashionable than others, **they must be financed**.

- Well that was what happened: the America Institute, the Heritage Foundation (that shaped the fall of Mozambique under Samora Machel), the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research, the Cato Institute and journals like the Policy Review, and magazines like the National Review, the Public Interest, the New Criterion and the American spectator were funded.

- Donors *en masse* took to forcing the poor countries to **accept the conditions or else...**
- They provided project funding and not to intellectual infrastructure and institution building.
- Shock treatments based on freedom for business but repression for the poor **became one the new tools of operation.**

- With it came the history of the loss of different concepts like Equality, when the “E” of the word was turned almost upside down.
- When it regained its balance, it was turned instead “the other way around” as in my Title.

- What was then left was an awful sounding meaning of “quality” that has stuck with us since,
- and brought with it the measurable of things..
- the number of pit latrines, if you come from Africa,
- the number of computers per class if you come from a “developed” country.

- Some words that got reversed or
- received the same treatment as equality
- was democracy,
- governance,
- success,
- transparency,
- ownership ... to name but a few.

Universities as a National and International Resource

- The maturity of a given academic institution is best marked by its capacity to handle change and transformation intellectually
- As part of a knowledge generating, knowledge accreditation and knowledge dissemination institution,

- universities have a crucial role in shaping national, regional and international development
- by the way they develop frameworks for rethinking plurality, conceptualize and
- re-conceptualize operational frameworks
- and adjust their paradigmatic narratives to contextual realities.

- Universities are also centres or part of a powerful system of ‘discourse coalitions’,
- armed with disciplines which control crucial resources
- that can delimit or
- make possible the generation of new visions of society.

- This gate-keeping function
- provides security in terms of affirmation of the familiar,
- but may require critical introspection in order to enable the fields transcend their limitations,
- and thus “dare to make us grow”.

- Such introspection can let evolve in a generative and constructivist manner,
- the questioning of theoretical habits of thought and especially the normative role that traditional conceptual backgrounds have played,
- and continue to play in shaping the rules and the university's relationship with others

- The link between the scientist and science,
- and between science and society,
- remains a real and serious challenge for the University
- especially in how to establish protocols and new ethical premises
- for the conduct of scientific work in and with communities.

- It is my belief that it is only by so doing
- that substance may be generated into concepts such as:
 - ‘excellence’,
 - ‘productivity’,
 - ‘relevance’,
 - or even **‘quality’**.

Do these dilemmas require a personal philosophy?

- The answer is YES!
- In my lifetime, I have followed the following precepts and allowed them to and inform my personal practice:
 - first you are human, then a scientist
 - commitment to transcending the limitations of existing arrangements that limit possibilities for human creativity

- deep recognition that we are part of the problem and thus part of the solution
- respects unfolding oppositions,
- seeking new synthesis,
- and new visions of possibilities and options

- “person” and then structure centered-ness,
- recognition of history (histories),
- importance of teachers (as personification of humanity),
- and of values (technocracy is a flower that blossoms in periods of political conservatism),
- and promoting cultural and epistemic tolerance.

- Quoting Freire, I believe that:
- *“... dialogue is an existential necessity, it is the encounter in which the united reflection and action of the dialoguers are addressed to the world which is to be transformed and humanized.*

- *... It cannot exist in the absence of profound love of the world and of men.*
- *The naming of the world, which is an act of creation and recreation, cannot exist if it is not infused with love.*
- *Love is at the same time the foundation of the dialogue,*
- *and the dialogue itself (Freire 1972: 61-62)*

Conclusions: Quality and Gumption

- **Gumption** is an old Scottish word once used by pioneers, though seldom heard nowadays.
- It is **common sense, combined with energy...**
“Energy of mind and body”,
- **sound practical judgment and**
- **the mental ability to understand and discriminate between relations.**

- Robert Pirsig, in his first book ***Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values*** (1974) says:
- that when we **connect with Quality** we're **filled with enthusiasm,**
- which manifests often in **wide-open receptivity to the creative potentialities inherent in any moment**
- **not bricked up and walled in by zombie-like behaviour and other self-defeating reactions to life.**

Cont....

- Gumption keeps us **contacting the world from Quality**
- and **not from anger and frustration or greed and violence,**
- or from a host of other deadly **energy sinkholes** we can lapse into
- to “muck things up good”.

He warned us to...

- find ways to avoid the “gumption traps” that lie hidden in the most innocuous seeming situations,
- and into which we stumble and then must, if we care enough, spend energy setting things right again.

the 'psychic gasoline'

- A person filled with gumption doesn't sit around dissipating and stewing about things.
- **He's at the front of the train of his own awareness, watching to see what's up the track and meeting it when it comes.**

Gumption Traps

- A gumption trap is **anything that causes one to lose sight of Quality,**
- **and thus lose one's enthusiasm for what one is doing .**

- **I thank you for your attention.**