

Intersections for Healing work

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ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR ELELWANI RAMUGONDO, CHAIRPERSON OF THE DEAN'S TRANSFORMATION COMMITTEE, OPENS THE FIRST FACULTY WORKSHOP ON "INTERSECTIONS FOR HEALING WORK"

The question about the role of the university in society is central to what transformation might be about within the academy. In searching around for what others might see as the role of the university, I stumbled upon a speech by Drew Gilpin Faust – the Harvard University President or Vice Chancellor in South African terms. I thought since we all want to be like Harvard, it might be prudent to cite those we are fervently trying to emulate at UCT. It is a speech she gave in 2010 at the Royal Irish Academy, Trinity College, Dublin. In that speech, the Harvard President makes the point that the exploration of meaning is the essence of a university.

She elaborates on this and I quote:

"Meaning is about interpretation. It is about understanding the world and ourselves not only through invention and discovery, but also through the rigors of re-inventing, re-examining, and reconsidering. To borrow a phrase often attributed to Albert Einstein, it is about figuring out what counts as well as what can be counted. Meaning is about remembering what we have forgotten, now in a new context; it is about hearing and seeing what is right in front of us that we could not before hear or see; it is about wisdom that must be stirred and awakened time and again, even in the wise."

She also implores us as stewards of centuries-old traditions of higher learning to work in order to assure that the understandable effort to promote what is valuable not eclipse our support for what is invaluable. And she reminds us that as we define higher education's role principally as driving economic development and solving society's most obvious problems, we risk losing sight of broader questions, of the kinds of inquiry that enable the critical stance that build a humane perspective.

What the Harvard President says in her speech relates directly to what emerged in our Faculty Assembly on the 15th of April. Questions around who benefits or not, who gains recognition or not and why through our efforts in the academy, are fundamental to what will provide us with a humane perspective.

What is key as we ponder upon these questions is recognising the particular context we find ourselves as a health science faculty in post-Apartheid South Africa. Our collective woundedness as a society has been mentioned on various platforms and is constantly evidenced through violent ruptures in both intimate and public spaces. We can no longer look away or fail to recognise the intricate links between our woundedness and fissures that continue to deepen as we remain divided across racial and more recently, economic lines. These ongoing divisions and shared complicities can only mean that we may not see each other the way we need and ought to. When we think about these things – perhaps the term healing, then does not seem so foreign.

Yes, healing as that which we need to go through as wounded peoples of South Africa but also the work we have the responsibility to do as health practitioners, students and researchers. Given our respective

professions, disciplines and positions within the faculty of health sciences, we are differently enabled to contribute to the healing that South Africa needs. We can no longer attempt to do this work in silos, or in ways that are about some professions/disciplines asserting dominance over others. Intersections for healing work demands of us to pay attention to the ultimate purpose of our everyday work & busyness, and to stay cognisant of who through our work continues to be ignored or stays on the margins.

The 10 sub-themes that we have identified mostly speak to patterns of ongoing exclusions OR ways in which we can begin to notice the 'excluded other'. It has been extremely exciting and affirming to see individuals come forward and volunteer to lead conversations informed by these themes – this, because these themes speak to these individuals' current work or concerns. An apt name to call these individuals is 'provocateurs' – inspired by Paulo Freire's writings on the *"Pedagogy of the Oppressed"*. Provocateurs do whatever it takes to *"bust bubbles & plant seeds so that tidy and stereotypical explanations [about 'the other'] are unmasked and discarded"* (Sandy, Year Unknown).