

Race, Education and Emancipation: Belonging and restitution in South Africa's Universities

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Restitution

- Restoring things to the state they were previously in
- Making things right for wrongs previously committed

Universities as sites of restitution?

- Education as a tool for social redress?
- Enables social mobility?
- Opportunities denied in the past made available?
- University as a key site where social, national, historical, cultural, economic conflicts play out
- Universities themselves implicated in historical injustice eg the land of UCT “donated” by Cecil John Rhodes
- Knowledge...? Production and validation

Race and Emancipation in Education

A research project conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council

- Followed students from seven universities over a period of five years
- UCT, CPUT, Wits, UJ, UKZN, Fort Hare, Uni of Limpopo
- Participants interviewed each year
- The sample mixed in terms of race, class, gender, language, subject at university

Barriers to getting/staying in

2 main findings: academics and finances

Academic obstacles

- In class problems: poor quality lecturers
- Lecturers inaccessible out of class
- Fears of appearing ignorant
- Struggles with technology
- Workload

Financial obstacles

- “You can control success... but not finances...”
- Financial aid
- Employment
- Registration and administration
- Books

Academic obstacles:

Poor quality lecturing

- CF_21_CPUTSTUD1:
- “He wouldn’t open a text book. I went to the HOD about this... So he said its entrepreneurs skill, we have to learn on our own. How do we know what entrepreneur skill is when you didn’t teach us? One of my friends says that happens as well with other lecturers.”

Academic obstacles:

Poor quality lecturing

- BF_21_UFHSTUD2_LLBB_2014b He is arrogant, he did not lecture at all. He used to tell us that he drinks expensive whiskeys, go to some party. We told the Law Council and they did nothing.

Academic obstacles: Inaccessible out of class

- BM_23_UJSTUD9_BA_2016: “The lecturer was a White man, and I asked a question and he said, “No, I have no time. I must leave for a meeting.”. But then a few seconds [after] White girls, asked the same question we were asking and they were given time. (He) showed them the answers, for more than ten minutes.”
- BM_22_UCTSTUD2_BSocSc_2016: “Adjusting was difficult. Adjusting to the space, the lecturers, having to take the initiative because no-one's going to chase after you. You must challenge yourself and overcome fear. If you feel intimidated by White men, slowly but surely- start by asking a question after the lecture, gradually you'll be able to sit in his office, and engage in a conversation. So it's about taking baby steps.”

Academic obstacles: Fear of appearing ignorant

- BF_23_UKZNSTUD5_BSocSc_2015:

“Yes, I just feel ashamed. When I talk I go, “Just think first before you say something else.” Because they were students from town. We were a few from informal settlements.”

Academic obstacles: Technology

- BM_22_ULSTUD3_LLB_2015:
“Attending computer literacy, a lecturer just say once do this and you don’t even know what enter is and you cannot even control the buttons. Sometimes you look stupid.”

Financial obstacles:

Control

- BM_22_UKZNSTUD1_LLBB_2015:
“80 percent you control it. 20 percent would be financial problems. Coming from a disadvantaged family. For instance, if you are having an assignment, you have to wait in those long queues in the Computer Labs... then you end up being late. So I think it's a matter of I can say that success it's under control, but then in terms of the resources and in terms of finances, then I can say on that one it affects your success.”

- BM_22_ULSTUD3_LLBB_2015:

“The one that I can say upsets me the most, is when I study day and night and realise I won’t have money to pay for my school fees, so that I can reach my goal at the end.”

Financial obstacles:

Financial aid

- BM_23_UJSTUD9_BA_2016:

OK, what they want first is a 50 percent average pass mark. The thing that is difficult is that if you have siblings that are older than 18 years who are unemployed, they must write Affidavit. In order for you to write an Affidavit you have to go to Dobson police station with transport. I cannot afford anything. So for me to take my sister's child support grant and use it to go to the police station. Everyone at home who is older than 18 must write an Affidavit. OK, I went there to the NSFAS offices, "Where's the father's Affidavit?". I'm like, "No, I don't have a father." He said, "Go to your mom and tell him [her] to write about the whereabouts of your father ." Then I have to go back at home, write out another Affidavit, go back to police station again in Dobsonville using a taxi. It's far, far, far. Then I had to go back to UJ. Some students even slept at the Student Administration Building for the past two days – without no food or anything.

Financial obstacles: Work

- BM_27_CPUTSTUD7_OpMan_2016:

I like to plan my move, my every step, calculate it. So I don't [can't?] afford to be in the position that I am in right now again. I've got R43,000 worth of fees hanging right here and I can work that, trust me. I can hustle, you now. I sell liver, for goodness' sake.

Financial obstacles:

Registration and administration

- BF_20_UJSTUD6_BA_2013:

“I decided to decide to come to UJ. I was comparing the application fee, if I go to Wits I will be able to afford the application fee but I won't be able to afford the registration fee. So if I come here I can afford both.”

Financial obstacles:

Books

- BF_21_NWUSTUD7_LLBB_2015:

I've used a book that cost R700... I do 7 modules, 5 of them are year modules I bought 4 books that cost R3000 and then I had to call them and then my brother gave me R2000.

Universities as sites of restitution?

- Making things right for wrongs previously committed?
- What is the role of the university? Peer-reviewed publications? Knowledge production?
- How to hold people in positions of power accountable?
Old boys clubs
- Inequalities still heavily racialised: impact on resources like exposure to technology, preparation for Uni (schools) and confidence at tertiary
- All taking place in the context of the neoliberal university

Universities as sites of restitution?

- Control: colonialism and apartheid about control; Reproduced at universities: students disempowered through lack of financial control
- Financial aid cumbersome, humiliating, unreliable
- Registration: need “capital” to get access
- Work: have to hustle and juggle
- Textbooks: the global industry

Education as our saviour???

- Universities part of society: societal problems seep into these institutions
- Universities have histories and a present: impact on potential restitution
- What will it take for:

The university as a public good; empowering those previously oppressed, educating us with 'gaps' in our knowledges

Language at University

- Difficult to imagine or impose rigid timelines for the nurturing of multilingualism since “ideally this is an ongoing process that happens at multiple micro levels requiring more qualitative forms of reporting and evaluation in order to assess progress” (HESA 2008:31).
- “The use of English has increased substantially, including at the University of Johannesburg (formerly Rand Afrikaans University) and, to lesser degrees, at the universities of Pretoria and Stellenbosch (Metz 2015:249).
- Since 2002, nothing noteworthy has happened with regard to use of African languages, except for UKZN’s ‘compulsory’ isiZulu module for undergraduates (249).

Recommendations for change (1)

1. That extra language tutorials, foundation language courses and functional writing centres be available for second and third language English speakers.
2. That African language courses be compulsory for ALL students enrolled in South African universities.
3. That there be transparency around the use of and acceptance of African languages (the dominant regional language) for administrative, marketing and recruitment purposes.
4. That some attention be paid to facilitating better understanding between students' struggling to understand the accents and language used by instructors.

Recommendations for change (2)

5. That instructors be trained to be more illustrative where it pertains to introducing new terminology and foreign concepts to students.
6. -That serious attention is afforded to the concept of *translanguaging* - “the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system (Canagarajah 2011:401).
7. The idea of translanguaging has been met with resistance in South Africa - too much work.

Recommendations for change (3)

8. Most South African students at university level are bilingual. Instead of seeing this as a deficit, it should be considered an asset that:
 - a. Will balance power relations in the lecture room.
 - b. That affords students the comfort to mix languages and other students can help translate where there is misunderstanding.
 - c. Adds another dimension to learning.
 - d. Fosters participant confidence, fluency and increases participation in the lecture room.
 - e. Turns the focus to meaning rather than form and thus, content is better understood.
 - f. May help with racial relations (Gunnarsson).

Recommendations for change (4)

9. Even where instructors are monolingual, they should consider embracing translanguaging; to let go of the authoritative role in lecture rooms and become a co-learner.
10. Instructors do not want to give up their power and not speaking other languages, automatically disempowers them:

“This university says they are promoting the learning [of isiZulu] to everyone. Then you ask one question in isiZulu – you'll see who'll fume in class [...] I've done it. I've got people I don't speak to in the faculty because of such” (BM_22_UKZNSTUD7_LL_B_2016).

Recommendations for change (5)

11. A member of staff feeling disempowered in this regard, is no different than the experience of many second and third language English speakers who have to simply accept that English or Afrikaans are primary languages of instruction.
12. As history continues to reproduce itself in our education system, a translanguaging framework might be the only way to truly ensure inclusivity and that no one language is privileged over another.