

Editorial

The transformation of higher education: Context of the establishment of the Centre for Leadership and Management in Education at Stellenbosch University

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Abstract

Higher Education in South Africa is currently engaged in a serious process of transforming the apartheid legacy in higher education, on the one hand, and striving for socially-relevant academic excellence, on the other. Striving for academic excellence is not restricted to higher education in South Africa, but is in actual fact a global phenomenon that is primarily manifested in the manner in which knowledge production is achieved. This article aims to shed light on the effect of the changing nature of knowledge production in higher education. In the last section of the article, the Centre for Education Leadership and Management of the University of Stellenbosch (Celemus) is presented as a higher education response to this reality.

INTRODUCTION

The Education Faculty of Stellenbosch University (SU) established Celemus in June 2007. The Centre primarily focuses on the improvement of the management and leadership capacity of teaching staff at schools and higher education institutions. It therefore makes available the expertise of SU staff (mainly from the Education

Faculty) and that of external partners to help meet the particular needs of specific programmes and that of students.

The formal and non-formal education programmes of Celemus are aimed at broadening the knowledge and understanding of leadership and management through investigating and critically analysing and evaluating education theories, approaches and practices in a way that, at the same time, encapsulates the three key processes accepted by the University as its responsibility, namely, research (knowledge production), teaching and learning (the transmission of knowledge) and community interaction (the application of knowledge) (see the *US strategiese raamwerk vir die eeuwisseling en daarna* 2000).

However, the rationale for the establishment of the Centre can hardly be limited to internal vision and decision-making processes. Like other universities in South Africa and those worldwide, the University finds itself on a new and rapidly changing playing field. This has given rise to the search for relevant and adequate applications of existing and new research insights and knowledge in community sectors, which may be able to address certain needs. This means, on the one hand, sharing existing knowledge where there is an expressed need for it, but also, on the other hand, allowing this search and the creation of new expertise to be informed by the realities of the specific communities and its agents. This is the context in which the establishment, positioning and operationalisation of the Centre for Education Leadership and Management of the University of Stellenbosch must be seen.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

International context

The growing imperative of social relevance and accountability has in the last three decades put the international Higher Education sector under considerable pressure to fill the gap between higher education and society by shifting from disciplinary research to applied or problem-solving research (Waghid 457, 2002). This dimension of institutional change in universities is described by Kraak (2000, iii) as a ‘shift[ing] away from its traditional liberal formulations as a “house of knowledge” – detached from the larger society to pursue science unhindered by the narrow interests of government and business – towards a conception of university in service of the market, where intellectual labour has become commercialised, serving primarily the innovation demands of the new global economy’.

According to Le Grange (2005, 1449), this phenomenon, driven by globalisation and the democratisation of access to (higher) education, is generally explained in terms of renewing insight into the work of Michael Gibbons (*The production of knowledge: The dynamics of science and research in contemporary societies* 1994) and that of Peter Scott (*The meanings of mass higher education* 1995). Their theoretical intervention poses the argument that there is a shift from Mode 1 to Mode 2 knowledge production, where Mode 1 refers to pure, disciplinary, homogeneous, expert-led, supply-driven

hierarchical peer reviews and indeed exclusively university-based knowledge. Mode 2 refers to applied, problem-solving, trans-disciplinary, heterogeneous, hybrid, question-driven, entrepreneurial, network-embedded knowledge. Underlying this dichotomy is the reproduction of the assumption that knowledge production is the exclusive domain of the higher education academic. In the midst of the increasing consideration of problems in the community and the response to needs or demands, these aspects are dealt with in the knowledge construction process in a manner which suits the academic (or higher education institution). Knowledge production, presentation or application takes place in a context in which power over the process is still seated in the academic institution and not in the university community that it serves.

Le Grange (2005, 1449) highlights five of the main components of Mode 2 knowledge production, drawing on the salient characteristics identified by Gibbons. Firstly, Mode 2 knowledge is produced in the context of implementation. The knowledge is meant to be useful and the imperative for usefulness is determined from the start while knowledge is produced through a process of ongoing negotiation until the interests of all participants have been considered. Secondly, Mode 2 knowledge is trans-disciplinary, as it makes use of a variety of theoretical perspectives and practical methodologies in order to solve problems. Contrary to interdisciplinary knowledge, trans-disciplinary knowledge does not result from existing discipline and does not contribute to the formation of new discipline. Thirdly, Mode 2 knowledge production is not heterogeneous in terms of the skills and the experience that people bring, and the composition of the research team can change over time as needs unfold. Knowledge is therefore produced in various fields and in new environments which consequently lead to the development of new ways of organising knowledge. Fourthly, Mode 2 knowledge is characterised by an increased measure of social accountability and reflectivity. As knowledge is produced in the context of implementation, the researchers' sensitivity to the implications of their work is increased and both the research themes and designs are influenced by the problem-solving imperative. Fifthly, Mode 2 knowledge is characterised by new forms of quality assurance with more criteria as those used in disciplinary knowledge.

According to Barr (1995), the shift to Mode 2 knowledge production in higher education worldwide is in essence a paradigm shift born out of a situation in which 'difficulties or anomalies begin to appear in the functioning of the existing paradigm which cannot be handled adequately' and when 'an alternative paradigm [exists] that will account for all that the original paradigm accounts for . . . and [that] offers real hope for solving the major difficulties facing the current paradigm'. It would not be possible to simply accept that this theoretical shift is a reality at higher educations today, especially in view of an increasing emphasis on accountability and performativity. Symptomatic of the latter is the higher education transformation of recent years and the consequent 'policy epidemic' which Ball (2003, 215) describes as 'an unstable, uneven but apparently unstoppable flood of closely inter-related reform ideas [which are] permeating and re-orientating education systems in diverse social and political locations which have very different histories'. But it is the nature

of different institutional cultures which is the product of socio-political processes, structures as well as agencies which over time determine the possibilities for a real shift to a higher education institution characterised by Mode 2 knowledge.

The shift from Mode 1 to Mode 2 knowledge production, however, does not indicate the substitution or displacement of Mode 1 knowledge production, but rather a situation, as rightly argued by Waghid (2002, 469) in which the two modes of knowledge production exist alongside each other and relate to each other in two ways:

firstly, that Mode 2 knowledge production flows from Mode 1 knowledge production and exists parallel to it without replacing it; and

secondly, that each mode represents a specific way of knowledge production and interacts with each other in a complementary manner.

The latter aspect is also examined by Le Grange (2005, 1450) when he cites Scott's view that the contrast between Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge represents a taxonomy of ideal-types instead of an empirical description of the research process.

In an exploration of international tendencies Waghid (2002, 458) comes to the conclusion that the most important reason for the shift from Mode 1 knowledge production to Mode 2 knowledge production relates to economic change. It is therefore clear that the merits of the research and teaching university relative to public costs are constantly scrutinised in countries such as the USA, UK, Russia and Canada. He further argues that the change is primarily the result of a slump in economic growth forcing governments to lower their subsidies to public universities. The changes are manifested externally in the massification of higher education, the use of private higher education, the bigger role of the state in the regulation of higher education, the existence of new organisational forms in higher education, the decreasing availability of government funds for institutions, the increasing concern with management (managerialism) in the academic workplace, the changing circumstances of academic employment and new forms of sites of knowledge production (Jansen et al. 2007, 179).

The above-mentioned circumstances have contributed substantially to the development of a new dimension in higher education where universities are trying to make a contribution by providing community service through integrated teaching and research-based services (based on knowledge production in the context of their application). This approach challenges universities and academics to position community service alongside teaching and research and in the process generate applied knowledge which helps communities to address social problems (Waghid 2002, 458). Where communities are full and equal co-producers and users of Mode 2 knowledge, the assumption can be made that they, as well as universities, are jointly responsible for social change.

Motivational forces for changing ways of knowledge production in

The South African context

The question that can now be rightly asked is what the motivational forces or impetus for the changing ways of knowledge production is. A report of the Council for Higher Education (Jansen et al. 2007) shows that although changes in higher education are well recorded, the same cannot be said of the nature, origin and the development path of the shift to Mode 2 knowledge production (except for explanations related to globalisation). In an effort to fill this void, the CHE report provides new explanations over and above the now well-known theories of change in higher education, such as neo-institutionalism, culturalism and adaptation theory. According to the report the impact of globalisation is so central that it cannot be ignored.

The CHE report defines globalisation as the strengthening of world-wide social relationships which connect remote areas in such a way that local events are influenced by events taking place kilometres away and vice versa. This realization makes it possible to understand the relentless logic of economic rationalisation within universities, the transnational acceptance of common discourse (such as managerialism) and technologies (such as quality assurance) within institutions and the growing vulnerability of public universities against global and regional trade in education services. The report, therefore, rightly argues that universities are not uncritical respondents of global authorities and points, in this regard, to Weiler's (2005) description of the phenomenon of ambivalence which facilitates an understanding of the behaviour of the state and universities with regard to globalisation. Weiler (2005, 177) describes ambivalence as a function of social and political contradictions in respect of the role of knowledge and the objective of universities. Thus ambivalence immediately points to contradictory dispositions towards a specific issue whereby one disposition inhibits the expression of another and at the same time results in uncertainty over which approach, disposition or action to follow. The perception that short courses which emanate from real needs and facilitate knowledge production, when compared to traditional qualifications, are regarded as of lesser value, serves as an example of the ambivalence referred to here. In spite of the theoretical shift to Mode 2 knowledge production, this disposition clearly points to a measure of inertia given the priority accorded to Mode 1 knowledge production.

Neither globalisation nor ambivalence can, however, explain the remarkable flexibility of universities as institutions, in light of their external environment over the last two decades. The sociologist Francisco Ramirez (in Jansen et al. 2007) explains this phenomenon in his thesis on the rationalisation of universities. He agrees that universities are changing in the direction of greater inclusiveness, usefulness and adaptability, but then argues that such responses are not simply rational adaptations to the environment but that the changes take place as a result of general rationalisations in order to promote their legitimacy, both by the rationalisation of universities as organisations as well as by the decrease of tradition and charisma as legitimising sources of university identity. The processes are trans-national since universities the world over support the idea of social usefulness instead of the university as

the institutional embodiment of higher culture and establishment knowledge. As universities become less elitist under pressure of massification, the same logic also inspires greater usefulness, diversity and adaptability with regard to university knowledge. The development of the idea of the socially embedded university is broadening the world over and in the process creates a close global network which takes the logic of mass higher education forward so that university-specific traditions are undercut by the normalisation of the rationalised university. The profound transformational effect of these circumstances on higher education is still in the process of changing the nature of higher education. Le Grange (2006, 368) gives an idea of this change when he argues that higher education institutes are no longer enclaves and the only agents of knowledge production, rather that the knowledge community is one in which knowledge production is socially spread and where universities are just one of the role players in the knowledge production process. This partnership forms the basis of what has become known as service learning in which a direct link is made between what happens in university classrooms and offices and in the world outside.

South African context

Higher education institutions, and specifically universities in South Africa, are not excluded from this process. In South Africa, however, the process has an additional dimension because of the country's apartheid past – the need to address the legacy of apartheid. Drawing on the ANC's discussion document on education and training Bunting (in Waghid 2002, 459) sums up this legacy as follows:

- Uneven access to higher education which offered white South Africans greater chance than Black South Africans of gaining admission to universities and technikons;
- Success rates of students (outputs) of previously administered House of Assembly (White) universities have been significantly better than those of other groupings of universities under the management of House of Delegates (Indians), House of Representatives (Coloureds) and the Department of Education and Training (Blacks);
- Unequal employment opportunities for those who are not White. In 1994 Whites held nearly 90% of permanent academic posts in all South African Universities and technikons;
- Unequal staffing resources in terms of student-lecturer ratio and better qualifications which favoured historically White universities (HWUs), and inequitable financing which had a bias towards HWUs, and
- Lack of responsiveness (relevance) and democratic accountability of higher education institutions to the needs of the majority of South Africans.

Since 1994, the new government of national unity has had to meet the challenge of addressing these legacies. The policy framework developed to do so was incorporated in the 1996 report of the National Commission for Higher Education which provided the framework for the restructuring and formed the basis of the 1997 Education White Paper 3 on Higher Education and the subsequent Higher Education Act (Department of Education 1997). The preamble of the Act focuses mainly on aspects of equality, development, accountability and quality (Waghid 2002, 464). The emphasis on addressing the legacies of the past and aligning South Africa with international models are clear from the formulation of the objectives of this legislation:

1. Establish a single co-ordinated higher education system which promotes co-operative governance and provides for programme-based higher education
2. Restructure and transform programmes and institutions to respond better to human resource, economic and development needs of the Republic
3. Redress past discrimination and ensure representation and equal access
4. Provide optimal opportunities for learning and the creation of knowledge
5. Promote the values which underlie an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom
6. Respect freedom of religion, belief and opinion
7. Respect and encourage democracy, academic freedom, freedom of speech and expression, creativity, scholarship and research.
8. Pursue excellence, promote the full realisation of the potential of every student and employee, tolerance of ideas and appreciation of diversity
9. Respond to the needs of the republic and of the communities served by institutions.
10. Contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, in keeping with international standards of academic quality
11. Enjoy freedom and autonomy in relation with the State within the context of public accountability and the national need for advanced skills and scientific knowledge.

The University of Stellenbosch

The University of Stellenbosch' commitment to repositioning itself in accordance with worldwide tendencies is clearly evident in the University's Strategic Framework (*Strategiese raamwerk vir die eeuwisseling en daarna* 2000). This describes the Stellenbosch University's response to the requirements of a 'new and rapidly changing playing field' as a broad, open process which not only entails projections but also a serious and critical re-evaluation of the University's institutional character (University of Stellenbosch 2000, 8).

This repositioning process is in line with that of universities as institutions that excel in community service (providing for integrated teaching and research-based services based on knowledge production in the context of their application), and they are responding to the challenge to position community service alongside teaching and research. In so doing, applied knowledge, which supports communities in addressing social problems which will hopefully make them co-responsible for social change, is generated (Waghid 2002, 458). In the mission statement of the University this aspect is worded as follows: ‘The reason for the existence of the University of Stellenbosch, in line with university’s ideal of science excellence, is to create and maintain an environment within which knowledge can be established, shared and used to the benefit of the community and is reflected in the core performance areas of the university namely research, teaching and learning and community service’ (<http://www.sun.ac.za> 2008/05/22).

CELEMUS: AN EFFORT TO GIVE PRACTICAL CONTENT TO MODE 2 KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

The international, South African and local contexts (Stellenbosch), as well as the ongoing interaction between these, are the rationale for the conceptualisation and establishment of Celemus. Based on the needs of mainly the education community which it serves – locally, nationally and on the continent – the Centre’s primary aim is to bridge the gap between theory and practice on the basis of academic excellence and a relationship with community partners taking part as equals.

Although the three priority areas of University of Stellenbosch – quality teaching, research and community involvement are intertwined in the aims of the Centre, the provision of high-level expertise to address social problems is its main thrust. In order to achieve this, Celemus focuses on the broadening of knowledge and understanding of leadership and management by means of investigation, analysis and critical evaluation of leadership and management theories, approaches and practices. Depending on the needs of clients, the Centre works in collaboration with faculties, departments and other institutions attached to the University. The design and presentation of academic development programmes are, therefore, offered on an agency basis, in consultation with Academic Development Programmes Section of the University. The improvement of the skills’ levels of managers/leaders on various levels in education is partly embedded in the focus on the enhancement of the research and professional capacity of the Centre’s students with a view to supporting them to become reflective practitioners instead of uncritical acceptors of previously produced knowledge.

The Centre is currently in partnership with one of the districts of the Western Cape Education Department with a view to strengthening curriculum leadership and management capacity of teachers from 21 schools as well as co-ordinating the mentorship component of the Advanced Education Certificate: Leadership and Management. Through this involvement, the Centre is ideally placed to observe

the interaction between Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge production, but also to acquire new insights via observation and critical reflection. An aspect which was significantly highlighted in the reflection process is the danger that universities may continue to disregard those whom they serve as full and equal discussion partners, due to perceptions that universities have the sole right to knowledge production. This realisation has compelled the Centre to adapt its methodology to allow the experience and insights of all role players to be noted in a process of critical dialogue. This critical dialogue is informed by an ongoing flow of information backed by journals, diaries, reporting and field notes of an on-site person.

The operational agenda of Celemus has been primarily shaped by the perspectives developed by Habermas (Ritchie 2007, 2). The idea that power is created and perpetuated through discourse is central to Habermas's many ideas on politics, social justice and the structure of power and community. More specifically, he argues that the messages within a social system are directed towards maintaining hierarchical aspects of that system by protecting the privileged and marginalising the voiceless even more. This course of events can be overturned when space is created for the voiceless to influence the rhetorical process in which power is produced. In this context the marginalised are given the opportunity to offer their opinions on the hegemonic systems in society and are placed in a position to negotiate new systems of power.

This interaction with its partners creates opportunities for Celemus to strive to attain its broader vision, that is, to make a contribution to developing critical citizens. Celemus seeks to turn the space that is created during contact sessions and follow-up at the schools where participants are involved in programmes into safe spaces where they can deliberate and engage in critical dialogue on their roles as democratic citizens. These deliberations and critical dialogues offer participants the opportunity to make knowledge generated in practice part of the process of critical debate and thus produce new knowledge that can inform their practice as well as that of academics. This space thus offers Celemus, as a centre situated at a university, the opportunity to be a role player in the production of both Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge as well as to facilitate the interaction between the two knowledge production modes.

In this way Celemus contributes to the creation of a deliberative democracy, a term that is aptly describe by Elster (1998, 8) as

collective decision making with the participation of all who will be affected by the decision or their representatives: this is the democratic part. Also, all agree that it includes decision making by means of arguments offered by and to participants who are committed to the value of rationality and impartiality: this is the deliberative part.

This direction/directedness challenges centres such as Celemus to create public spaces in which critical communication is embedded in democratic criticism and renewal is promoted. Thus Celemus makes a contribution to 'in creat[ing] a society and workplaces that are free from domination and where all members can contribute equally to produce systems that meet human needs and lead to the progressive

development of all' (Deetz 2001, 26). This sort of communication moves beyond conventional 'academic' communication in that it includes humour, emotion, testimony, story telling and gossip, and creates the possibility of demystifying the process of knowledge production.

Thus where the nature of knowledge and the way it was previously produced remained primarily the domain of the University academics, it is now clear that for knowledge to address unique problems it can only be significant if it is situated within the realm of the practitioner making the latter an integral part of the verification of that which appears to be applied knowledge. This has been proved in the short existence of Celemus and has broadened our understanding of Mode 2 knowledge production in the repositioning of the University from 'an institution that exists to provide instruction' to 'an institution that exists to produce learning' (Barr and Tagg 1995, 13).

It is against this background that Celemus intends to become an institution that contributes to the development of an organic leadership core that constantly reflects on their work as leaders in education and in so doing contribute to the production of socially relevant knowledge that helps us to 'understand human existence, and the struggle needed to improve it' (Freire 1994, 8).

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