The University and Sustainable Rural Development

A Conference Paper

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1. Introduction

We come to this paper as researchers, classroom teachers, as community and political activists, and as University based teacher trainers. We start this paper by making a range of observations and suggestions about the macro relationship between the university and its habitus, to suggest points of departure that frame our understanding of the interface between a university and rural development in an African setting. We move from this meta discussion to a more focused exploration of the University and the challenge of rural education development. After suggesting a critique of the current patterned response of the University, we discuss a case study whereby we are currently exploring other pedagogical possibilities to better orient University engagement with the requirements of rural educators. We conclude by reflecting on some of the propositions facing universities seeking to serve rural development challenges. We have divided this paper into these parts, allowing us (the authors and the readers) to move between the macro and the micro – the meta patterns emerging, and how these patterns are reflected and experienced in the beauty and the grime on the so called 'ground'.

2. What is the Rural?

Like many other commentators on South African society, we proceed from the premise that it is most useful to characterise the 'urban' and 'rural', 'development' and 'underdevelopment', and the 'first economy' and 'second economy' in historical and relational terms, and not solely, or even primarily, through socio-economic quantitative parameters, anthropological descriptors, or in geographical definitional terms.

Since the discovery of diamonds, and later gold, a chain reaction of social, economic and political processes was set in motion culminating in the formal inauguration of a single political entity and a national market in South Africa in the first part of the 20th Century. This has had

profound consequences at a variety of levels and in all social domains of the peoples of South Africa. According to Terreblanche (2002: 239):

> 'From about 1890 until 1924, South Africa experienced an economic and political 'revolution'. During this period various political units – controlled by the British, Afrikaners and independent African tribes – were united into the Union of South Africa under the effective political control of whites.
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> This period was not only one of state-building, during which white political domination was consolidated, but also one in which the state – on behalf of foreign-owned mining corporations – built the institutional and physical infrastructure for white supremacy. At the same time, it created racially based socio-economic and labour structure aimed at supplying foreign corporations and white farmers with a cheap and docile labour force.'

At the sub national level the effects of these processes has been, and continues to be, differentiated and uneven on account of both the diversity of the sub national political and social entities that make up South Africa and the geographic regions in which they are found. The response to these processes was and is predictably differentiated reflecting local concerns, histories and idiosyncrasies. In the final analysis, however, once a single political entity and a common market was established, land dispossession was effected, the socio-geographic spaces called 'rural', at least from the point of view of political economy, became subordinate and subservient to the needs of the 'urban' based economy and the elites who run it. In so far as the 'rural' or the 'urban' exist in any essential way in South Africa (as geographic or socio-political spaces), they probably cannot be described (and are barely discussable) outside of the other.

The rural creates the urban and the urban creates the rural – in a complex and unequal way. The nuanced co-creation of the 'rural' and 'urban' in South Africa is what social historians, sociologists, linguists and anthropologists attempt to show when they describe the socio-cultural effects of directional (rural-urban, and urban-rural) migration internal to South Africa as manifested in the arts (e.g. Hip-hop in Lusikisiki, circumcision school in Soweto), in language exchange, and at a socio-cultural level (e.g. rites of passage schools in Soweto).

Assuming that we are able to accurately identify what the rural is, and assuming that the rural is not merely a transitory social phenomenon but more or less a stable phenomenon, we must also assume that the rural has its own internal socio-economic and socio-cultural mechanisms that allow it to reproduce itself and that this also establishes the basis for its own change. Incidentally, this is also the case with the urban. The urban is not merely the opposite of the rural. It also has its specific internal socio-cultural logic that may be different from that of the rural.

And finally, while obvious, we note that 'rural' and 'urban' communities are also internally differentiated. There are rich urban communities and poor urban communities, as there are rich rural homesteads and poor ones. As compared to the middle class and elite, the urban and rural poor live (almost regardless of geographic location, gender, religious, or linguistic background) a more similar socio-economic reality and share a similar socio-cultural experience.

Illustrative of this approach is the work of du Toit and Neves (2007), and in particular their analysis of dimensions of poverty through the examination of the relationships between the so called 'margins' with the so called 'centre'. They employ this approach to re-look at two typical South African contexts, a 'rural' setting that is Mount Frere in the 'rural' Eastern Cape and an 'urban' setting that is Khayelitsha in Greater Cape Town. Their observations regarding Mount Frere suggest that, more and more, it is difficult to speak meaningfully of 'rurality' mainly as remoteness:

> 'The busy N2 bisects the town, and freight-hauling juggernauts and cars rumble endlessly though town. Everywhere present along the bustling main drag is the branding of corporate South Africa: Vodacom, Shoprite, Vicks, FNB, Cell C, Pep Stores, KFC, Castle Lager, Oxo, and Boxer. Stalls line both sides of the main road, sometimes two deep, selling consumer goods, clothes, food and public cell phone access. The cosmopolitan make-up of this informal retail fringe gives the lie to the notion of Mount Frere as a far flung rural outpost unconnected to the globalizing world: business is conducted here by local people as well as Ghanaian, Senegalese, Zimbabwean, Chinese and Pakistani traders.' (du Toit and Neves, 2007: 10)

With respect to Khayelitsha they point to the recent 'rural' origins and 'rural' connections of many of its residents. Their main point is that people living in Kheyeitsha exist in tension with the greater city of Cape Town. The so-called 'urban' community is simultaneously incorporated and included within this 'urban' centre on the one hand, and segregated and excluded from the economy and other spheres of life in greater Cape Town on the other.

> '…poverty in the African township of Khayelitsha seems to be patterned most above all by the political economy of racialised urban space. Established in the mid 1980s, removal to which was fiercely resisted, Khayelitsha is inhabited mostly of recent migrants to Cape Town (ibid:17). Khayelitsha residents are (largely) redundant as unskilled workers, yet they are valued as consumers; they are constructed through racialised discourse of crime and fear as potential threat to Cape Town's lucrative tourist industry, yet they are themselves objects of tourism (ibid19).

While it continues to be useful to focus on the rural, for a range of socio-economic and cultural reasons, and to better understand the contingencies that make 'rural' and 'urban' existences different – both at the level of socio-political economies and lived lives – we approach the 'rural' not as quintessentially distinct, but rather as very much part of the wider social and political environment, and the historical and contemporary forces in which it exists.

3. Sustainable Development

The South African state was, in its earliest design and formation, an infrastructure of white supremacy, and oriented toward the systematic supply of 'cheap and docile' labour to emerging industrial and agricultural industrialists (Terreblanche, 2002). The core mandate of the post apartheid state (and the meaning of 'transformation', even 'development'), if you take the South African Constitution as real rather than symbolic, is dismantling the physical, socioeconomic and socio-cultural infrastructure that is apartheid.

Amartya Sen (1999) is probably the most well-known contemporary mainstream economist to re-issue the now urgent warning that our planet may not survive (sustainable development may not occur) if we see human beings mainly or only as economic beings. He makes a case for broadened conception of human beings that at its centre is a view of human beings as essentially 'political'. Rather than viewing human beings as mainly or only consumptive 'economic beings', human beings could be viewed as 'political beings' and that

> '…instead, the focus is, ultimately, on the expansion of human freedom to live the kind of lives that people have reason to value, then the role of economic growth in expanding these opportunities has to be integrated into that more foundational understanding of the process of development as the expansion of human capability to lead more to worthwhile and more free lives…' (ibid:295)

It is well to remember that Sen's view of freedom and unfreedoms, although open to criticism, is comprehensive and distinct from classical liberal conceptions. In his view 'development requires the removal of major sources of unfreedom: poverty as well tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well systematic deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or over activity of repressive states'(ibid:3). This view of development includes productive and consumptive aspects of development (i.e. the economic) and insists on a society looking much more closely at the connection between poverty, as well as socio-cultural, political and ideological domination and oppression.

In South Africa our debate about 'development' is conducted under the rubric of 'transformation'. Motala (2004:1) makes the observation that 'transformation' is a contested notion in need of problematization because it is often 'used as a descriptor attachable to almost any phenomenon associated with social change' and is 'associated with relatively unobstrusive interventions as much as to wholesale social engineering'. Further, he observes that the notion of transformation refers 'both to minimalist and maximalist interpretations of change, to politically 'conservative', 'liberal' and 'radical' constructs of social intervention, to processes, to the means of change and to their purported outcomes.'

The point we wish to stress is that our impression is that the term 'transformation' is used by many commentators to underscore the fact that what we are talking about is not fundamental social revolution, but, at best, it is talk about the need, will, strategies and programmes aimed at more or less radical reformation of this or that aspect of society. Reformation is assumed and is necessitated by the acknowledgement that certain elements of the old order have not been or cannot be overthrown, at least for the moment, and therefore that these established social groups continue to hold on to important levers of power.

In this situation the clarion call of those who do not have this power, who are attempting to empower themselves, is demand for the greater democratization of all aspects of social, political and economic life – including the media, cultural representation, linguistic diversity, ownership of capital and so on. Even when 'social transformation' is seen minimally as reformation of society, in the context of capitalist globalization and neoliberalism in South Africa, if it is to mean anything at all for the majority of the people, it must mean redistribution of the social output, of political and social participation in favour of the poor, working class and rural communities.

Given the recent history of apartheid of socio-economic exclusion and socio-cultural domination, any social transformation must imply both internal re-organization of among the excluded and socio-cultural reassertion. Precisely because this is a complex process which will possibly lead to contention and different interpretation, it is fundamentally important that democratic space and resources are provided to allow the population to make the boldest authentic attempt at 'reforming' themselves/ourselves. The development or social transformation we speak of is one which takes as its point of departure the capabilities, potentialities, and needs of the majority of people and recognizes that development cannot be conducted outside of democratic participation.

4. The University and Rural Development

To clearly confront the widespread domination of Afropessimism, it is important to recall, reclaim or invoke the long traditions of scholarship in the African continent, beginning with ancient Egypt in the third century B.C., to early Christian monasteries in Egypt of the third century A.D. and later to Islamic mosque universities beginning in the 7th century A.D. in Tunis (Zeleza, 2006). This gives the lie to the assumption that higher education in the whole of Africa owes its origin to Europe. That said, the tradition of scholarship was largely geographically restricted to the North of the continent, and did not continue uninterrupted and unchanged into the present era. And, like its European counterparts, was a space for elites and holy men.

More relevant to our purposes is that, looked at from the view of the majority of its people, and on balance, modern colonial and postcolonial universities have a poor record in catalyzing democratic and sustainable rural (and urban) development in colonial and post colonial Africa. It would not be unfair to propose that despite the phenomenal growth in University enrolment in sub-Saharan Africa since the early emergence of independence (university enrolments in sub-Saharan Africa was estimated to be 120,000 in 1960 and over 5 million in 2006), the contribution of Universities to sustainable rural development during has been a spectacular failure for most of the 20th Century.

We have highlighted the long, varied and unequal development of the tradition of scholarship in the African continent and alluded to how the fortunes of higher education in African is intimately tied to the (mis)fortunes of the postcolonial state. As African universities obtain a large portion of their funding from the public purse, it is not possible to divorce an analysis of the post colonial University from the post colonial state. Further, as efforts of post colonial governments to transform societies get frustrated by a plethora of global and local forces, leading to widespread demoralisation of the elites and local populations, opportunism and corruption, there is a growing impatience with and hostility to critical voices inside and outside the university[i].

Save for isolated 'projects' (often in agriculture, primary health, appropriate technologies and relatively narrow notions of indigenous knowledge) Universities have a poor record of contributing to rural development specifically, and autonomous national development more generally on the African continent.

Many African scholars have suggested some of the most important causes, including slavish hegemonic behaviour of the African elites to anything Western (Diop (1974), Fanon (1961), wa Thiongo (1986)); marginalization of critical African history, knowledge and social systems (Nabudere (2004), Odora-Hoppers (2004)); and the overwhelming hegemony of capital on

imaginations of knowledge and efficiency. Together with a range of other factors, these collectively led to a failure of African education systems to produce, on mass scale, generations of socially committed, intellectually grounded, and technically proficient professionals, scientists, artists and scholars – a necessary condition for the development of the Continent.

Having said all of this there is a tradition in South Africa where university trained and university based, and occasionally, whole universities, were catalysts of social and political development. While many people drawn from across universities in South Africa played an important role in the struggle against apartheid and for democracy (Reddy, 2004), it is undoubtedly historically Black universities that played the foremost catalytic agentive role in the struggle against apartheid, in particular the University of the Fort Hare, University of the North and the University of the Western Cape.

The social space called Fort Hare was for a long time, right to the end of apartheid synonymous with a nursery for the birthing and propagation of an intellectually independent Black intelligentsia. This history of Fort Hare is well known. Fort Hare has always had links with its immediate geographic community and with a variety of intellectual political communities distant from its geographic community. Understandably, up to the end of apartheid this relationship took on the form of political agitation and political mobilisation. This involved a number of concrete strategies including taking University lecturers taking up teaching positions in nearby schools and running literacy programmes – all under the watchful eye of the apartheid government and its extension the Ciskei government of time.

While the University, during different moments in its history has undoubtedly contributed to national transformation in profound ways, the crushing poverty just outside the gates of Fort Hare, in Alice, is not only testimony to the sharp inequalities in our country, but to the inability of the University to engage meaningfully with the underdevelopment at its doorstep. The purpose, epistemology, and rituals of the University have had little impact on the most local manifestation of inequality. To a large extent, the community of Alice, while tied intimately to the project of Fort Hare, remains 'outside the gates' – physically and epistemologically. Professor Derrick Swartz who was until recently the Vice Chancellor of the University of Fort Hare lamented this state of affairs by observing that:

> 'One thing that has struck me is that out institution, which has been in existence for over half a century, has produced some of the most outstanding leaders in politics, business, culture and so on. Many of the leaders were South Africans and some came as far Kenya. Yet, when you look at immediate environment of the university you would hardly notice its impact, except in a limited sense. While we can and should take pride in its

> achievements, despite all odds placed before it by apartheid, it seems shameful, indeed unacceptable, that we have made limited impact on our immediate surroundings. Something must be done about this.' (Swartz, 2006: 1)

Many different parts of the university continue to strive to realise this undisputable historical injunction. The Faculty of Agriculture, under the current intellectual leadership of Dean Raats, is undertaking some of the most important innovations in regard to the link between the University and community development, as manifested in the Nguni Cattle Project (focused on the study and distribution of indigenous cattle), the Dairy Project, and Agriparks (establishing new models for small scale agriculture to organise into a sustainable economic venture.) These innovations deserve a paper of their own. Enough to say, that despite committed and innovative leadership, it is still proving difficult to integrate these innovations into the imagination of 'standard work' for the majority of academics in the faculty.

In the following section, we focus more deeply on the example of teacher education and development, and the relationship of the University to this challenge as it plays itself out specifically in a rural context.

5. Teacher Education: Critique and Case Study

Both the forces upon us and historical precedent demand that if we as the University community (and thus arguably the potential creators of the current University space) imagine ourselves to be relevant to the challenges of rural sustainable development, we must be unsatisfied with the current boundaries of the 'rituals' and assumptions of 'normal University life.' Given that, with the exception of a few university based individuals and groups, the rituals of the university as a system have not been rooted in an understanding or engagement with the materially disenfranchised and the 'epistemologically disenfranchised' (Odora-Hoppers, 2004:8) sections of the population (i.e. the rural and urban working class or the poor), it becomes necessary for us, in community with the urban and rural poor, to reconsider our current patterns of University ritual.

There are two separate challenges. First is the difficult process of re-considering the patterns (content, pedagogy, system) of University engagement as it relates to the context and requirements of the urban and rural poor. Second is the arguably more difficult process of convincing University 'keepers of the rules,' systems ('that is just the way things work'), and efficiencies (including national funding frameworks) that it is safe, desirable, and efficient to change the pattern of our dance – even safer, more desirable, and more efficient than our current way of being. This paper focuses on the first challenge, noting the perhaps more difficult second challenge (Moyo, 2006; Porteus, 2006).

There is a well known and widely acknowledged crisis in education that serves children of the rural and the urban poor. The lack of a public education system that provides children with confidence in the area of reading, writing, enumerating, and thinking for themselves is one important scaffolding for the reproduction of inequity that we have seen over the past 15 years. There is an undisputable crisis in the early phases of the system of education, demonstrated in literacy and numeracy scores in the early phases of education ranking in the bottom trio of 11 African nations, all of which are substantively less resourced (DoE, 1999, DoE, 2003; Kanjee et al., 2001).

The crisis in education is multifaceted. Policy analysts identify the contribution of historical oppression, middle class policy bias (Alexander, 2000; Soudien, 2004), poor understanding of bilingual educational policy and practice (Heugh, 1999; Barry, 2002), resourcing (Wildeman, 2003), poor and inequitable early childhood development (Padayachee et al, 1994; Biersteker, 2001), pedagogy, curricular design (Harley, 2004; Taylor, 2001), school nutrition (Labadarios, 1999), patterns of parent and community involvement (NMF, 2004) among others.

While there are a range of factors, the agency of educators is potentially one of the most important contributory (and potentially transformational) factors. The actual experience of the classroom, central to the experience of schooling, is at least partially determined by the way that educators navigate their day to day lives – their understanding of content, their approach toward pedagogy, their sense of or lack of purpose, their relationship to young people, the way they understand educational non-performance, their understanding and engagement with the community and context around them. Beyond the importance of building a new cadre of educators into the system, that is 'armed' more substantively for the challenges of rural education, there is a massive need for support for educators already within the system.

The answer of the University to the crisis of support for rural educators already teaching within the system is largely bounded by our notion of 'in service training.' There are currently two primary forms of in service training – the widespread engagement with national distance learning programmes[ii] among rural educators and a relatively small reach of traditional in-service programmes that seek to bring educators onto University campuses whereby teacher educators lecture to these teachers about how they should conduct their classrooms. Beyond the accredited courses located within the Universities, there has also been a massive in-service retraining programme, sponsored by the state, largely focused on the new curriculum, that has primarily taken the form of short term 'workshops'.

In quantity, the reach of these programmes has been significant, with more educators attaining minimal teaching qualifications, and the majority of educators having participated in some form

of training relating to the new curriculum. While we acknowledge the important proposition that for teacher training to be most useful certain minimal infrastructural (physical, materials and equipment, and organisational structures) conditions must be present, the translation of training into meaningful new patterns of practice among rural educators appears to be especially difficult.

There are several ways in which the current pattern and ritual of University based in-service training appears to miss the beat of educators in rural schools. We raise three overlapping problematics for consideration here. The first problematic is the deep linguistic barriers between the University and the environment of the 'real' in educator's lives and the world of their classrooms. The second problematic is the sole orientation of the University around the individual, rather than other social units. And the third problematic is the routinised engagement between educators and teacher educators, emanating from the symbolic distance between knowledge in the environment of many teacher educators and the feel of the 'real' in rural educator's personal and professional lives. We will briefly describe the first two problematics, and use this paper to explore the third problematic more deeply.

5.1. Problematic 1: The Language Problematic

The post colonial African University has largely failed to diversify away from a uni-polar dominance of the language of colonial administration. The consequences of this policy choice were explored deeply in the early post colonial period. While there is contemporary some policy attention on the importance of the language debate, the University still profoundly falls short of recognising or confronting language practice as a blood line of inequity and social exclusion reproduced in South Africa today (Alexander, 2003).

A full exploration of the relationship between language, University, knowledge and rural development is far beyond the confines of this paper. The way it impacts the current engagement between Universities and rural educator development include the following:

- The overwhelming majority of University coursework, across the country, is conducted exclusively in English. With the exception of Afrikaans and a few important but poorly resourced experiments (teaching through the medium of African indigenous languages such as at the universities of the North and Kwazulu-Natal), in general, universities appear not to be moving on creating a bilingual, let alone multilingual, intellectual environment to better connect rural communities to knowledge resources.
- The crisis of education (at all levels) in this country is fundamentally tied to poor understanding and poor practice of one or the other version of bilingual and multilingual

language education. At the end of grade 6 most children have not attained the reading, writing and numerical mastery necessary for further learning. By University, most students are still struggling with deep reading and writing comprehension in English only texts, let alone spontaneous thinking in English only debates.

- At the level of the University this manifests in a crisis in the ability of teachers to read deeply. The system of education has systemically alienated most people from deep reading. We don't talk about it or address it with open eyes. And therefore we get into an unauthentic dance whereby we engage in coursework with no one reading deeply. Over time students learn to duck and dive and survive. To focus on academic survival (a heavy, all alert state) that the natural environment of learning (openness, trust, grappling) is rarely experienced
- Both pre-service and in-service course work is largely conducted in English. Again, with a few exceptions (such as a Project for Alternative Education in South Africa (PRAESA) and Additive Bilingual Education (ABLE)), there is little thinking and teacher development programming to support educators to work out the classroom implications of a bilingual and / or multilingual paradigm of education. Educators are not being effectively assisted to reconceptualise language teaching away from monolingual and subtractive bilingual pedagogical instincts; nor are they supported to assist learners to negotiate the complex (real and imagined) relationships between language and cultural practice, identity, and epistemology in the context of national reformation and renewal.
- The current research into literacy and teacher practice in the classroom is almost totally dominated by researchers who do not have access to the local languages, beyond Afrikaans. Our pedagogical and content strategies are almost entirely based on research that considers literacy and numeracy through the dynamics of English, and to some extent English as a second language.

The results are devastating and partly explain patterns of the reproduction of racial oppression in education and society. The navigation of mother tongue based bilingual tongue education is complex, and largely still unmapped. And for the most part we continue to teach in a way that gives the tools of knowledge only or mainly through a language that most teachers and learners do not understand well.

Beyond issues of bi and multi-lingualism, there is another issue of language that separates the University further from the space of engagement with rural communities. More and more the choice of organisational 'discourse' of the University reflects the context and influence of its private sector agora, and is becoming increasingly alien to people who stand outside of private sector consultancy environment. The University of Fort Hare, like many others, has chosen as one

of its core planning and evaluation tools, what is called a 'balanced score card.' The vocabulary of the balanced score card, in this case, is alien not only to rural communities, but to the University community itself. To better understand the tool, consultants emerging from the world of private sector performance management come to 'explain' the tool to us. There are four performance objectives. Teaching, research and community engagement all fall within ONE performance area, called 'internal processes'. Internal processes, we are told, could be considered within four categories – operations management, customer management processes, innovation processes, and regulatory and social processes. We were asked to consider our performance goals, as they relate to teaching, learning and community engagement ('internal processes'), assisted by these notions. We are told that this is a participatory process.

There is little time in University life whereby academics come together to collectively strategise on issues of performance in relation to our mandate to the rural and urban poor. Instead of a deep study of the context of poor, we spend a significant piece of our collective time grappling with a discourse that leaves us on our heels, aligns our minds more closely to imagination of the private sector, and contributes to the distance between ourselves, our way of speaking, and the 'real' of the rural poor.

5.2. Problematic 2: Centring the Individual

The target of almost all University based training is the individual. Universities enrol individual students, in this case educators. The role of the University is to help an individual to progress in their own grasp of knowledge to better navigate their lives and world – minimally the goal is to move an individual from one qualification level to another. There is obviously a role for training that responds to the individual needs of an educator. Rural educators are fundamentally important in their own right.

A dysfunctional educational system manifesting itself in a poor and underperforming rural school is a social phenomenon to which the University response is individualised teacher training. This response is rooted in a assumption that 'educated' individuals change society; or, in this case, 'educated', 'capacitated' or 'trained' individuals can change a school. The idea is that if the school system is dysfunctional, our best contribution is in extracting individuals (rather than teams) from the school system itself, and providing so called 'capacity', with the assumption that this new capacity will enable them to 1) apply their new knowledge effectively in their own classroom; 2) resist the organisational culture that may work against such new practice; and 3) perhaps even transform the larger school practice through individual demonstration.

In reality this overly simplifies the way organisations or societies work. A range of organisational and social development theorists describe the process of transformation of an organisation as substantively different from the transformation of an individual. If the school community does not somehow change with an individual, it is rare that an individual, on her own, can transcend or shift the organizational culture of the school. The idea of a team of people entering a University space as a collective of learning is largely alien to a University's declaration of what is acceptable, register'able, evaluate'able. A relatively recent experiment with registering 'leadership teams' rather than individuals within an accredited University based course work programme at Fort Hare (see ELMD in Moyo, 2006), was closed down in 2004, with some senior administrators of the time declaring that 'this is not the job of a University.'

5.3. Problematic 3: The Routine

The third problematic is the scripted/ routinised nature of engagement between educators and teacher educators (whether University bound or other). This problematic draws from the other problematic, but has a life of its own.

Most teacher training takes the form of classes called 'ama-workshops.' The 'ama-workshops' operate at a level whereby educators can 'play their part' and remain untouched (not confronted) by the new knowledge they are exposed to. Educators to some extent enjoy the workshops, at the very least because they get a break from the humdrum of classroom life. Educators know the script, and act their part – material is presented, they break into small groups, the small groups report back on flip chart paper, the educator most fluent in English is chosen to 'report back', and it seems that everyone 'gets it'. Those educators, who do take notes, often insist on copying the exact words used on the learning tool (flip chart, overhead, powerpoint presentation) without summarising the notions with words that are meaningful to them. The material is often focused on the new vocabulary of state curriculum and the process of 'participation'. When these workshops are evaluated for 'quality' they are often rated as 'good' or 'fine', even 'excellent'.

(The other day we were tired and fell into this trap. We were discussing the notion of 'child friendly schooling' with educators from Mqanduli. We got into this ritualised dance on the flip chart, listing all of the characteristics of a child friendly school. The educators were animated, and began putting all sorts of suggestions up on the flip chart. They had all the right answers. They knew this set up. As a facilitator I started sensing that we were somehow breaking new ground here. Several of the educators who we privately knew relied heavily on corporal punishment, were explaining the virtues of non-violent discipline. It would have been easy to

have walked away imagining that we had cut new ground, imagining that the educators could now be leaders of child friendly schooling. As a teacher educator, it was easy to lose track of the obvious – that the educators knew the 'right answers', but that the 'right answers' answers are somehow difficult to translate into their worlds.)

The ritual frames a relatively friendly engagement, with little thread, little capacity to 'stick'.

Almost overwhelmingly, the so called experts (in this case University based teacher educators), if they ever did, no longer have to *themselves* attempt everyday to create effective learning and teaching in the context of deep poverty, demoralisation and minimal support. That is, they do not really really know, for themselves, how to manage the complexity of large classrooms, hungry learners, multilingual language acquisition (with a few appropriate print materials) and content knowledge in text, stability and food poor environments. Thus, knowledge is introduced, but falls short of being introduced with clarity as to how it interfaces with the stressful context of rural classrooms. Too often, advice is given without really really knowing, for oneself, how this advice can mediate teaching and learning in a rural school. Even those teacher trainers who hail from rural schools, once they make it out of rural education tend to ignore or minimise the effects of structural conditions in limiting the possibilities of education <u>for most children</u> in materially impoverished and socially stressed environments.

(Confucius in one of his maxims put down the 'characteristics' of a 'good man or gentleman' (sic). One of them is that a good 'man' will not give advice that he himself has not tried. In this sense, there are few consistently good men (or women) in policy development or teacher education.)

The lack of AUTHENTICALLY knowing how to successfully navigate a normal rural classroom, without corporal punishment, to high levels of educational performance means that we are not able ourselves to link content and pedagogical suggestion to the dynamic and often stressful environment of the rural classroom. Over time, this becomes epistemological violence – if the knowledge that is presented is consistently unworkable in its applied sense, the power gained through the dance between knowledge and application is stolen.

Many rural educators, over time, have settled on an inner conclusion that while any given 'workshop' may be nice, even enjoyable, 'it will <u>NEVER</u> work in <u>MY</u> classroom or school.' They may be correct, they may be mistaken. The thing is the orientation is devastating. It becomes an internal operating system of sorts. Unless deeply confronted, educators can sit, engage, enjoy ama-workshops, having subtly freed themselves from allowing this knowledge to truly confront their own practice. Any knowledge gained is NOT being translated into practice,

because the environment of knowledge exchange, and the world in which the knowledge of the teacher educator symbolically resides, is so very distant from the exigencies of practice.

The word violence helps us understand the depth of the wounds this inflicts. Woven into the double lives implicit within the post colonial existential crisis, so-called professional knowledge becomes unrelated to the 'real real' of life. Over time, educators divorce knowledge from their realities manifesting through claims like 'this is too academic; me, I'm a teacher.' Some teacher educators, sensing or knowing this gap, emphasise that teacher education must be 'only practical', and not 'academic', often relegating, in their own mind, the importance of theory and knowledge as a source of power and creativity for any professional navigating environments of complexity. The lack of a reading culture amongst educators, discussed below, is further entrenched.

This epistemological violence reaches to other realms that are beyond the scope of this paper. The private world of an educator who concludes 'this wont work in my classroom', often does not locate the critique at the level of epistemological weakness or knowledge bias. Instead the ways that in which she hears a teacher educators talk about classroom practice confirms in her own mind that, 'there is something wrong with <u>these</u> children' (referring to the children in her classroom). If this stuff works for 'white' or Middle class Black children and within so-called model C (middle class contexts), and it does not work in my classroom, the 'blame' turns inwards – either I am useless, or these children are useless. Usually the internal dialogue accepts some of both of these conclusions. Conclusions like 'these children cannot really think well' become an issue of hegemony rather than structural domination. And the results play themselves right through the education system with logical and devastating momentum.

An extension, or example, of relegating the 'real' outside the boundaries of the Universities is our definition of 'student performance' as the ability of a student to pass a series of formal assessment. This should definitely be part of assessment, what we are not ourselves accountable to is whether or not the so called knowledge is translated to practice on the ground, beyond teaching practice, in real classrooms where our students work after graduation. More importantly, the University <u>itself</u> is not held accountable to the translation of knowledge into practice. We are held responsible for training a certain number of educators, but not in understanding whether our engagement with educators increases their ability to provide learners with strong skills of reading, writing, enumerating and thinking for themselves. While this is methodologically complex (performance is not a function of teacher skills and knowledge

alone), it is nevertheless a glaring lack of accountability between University based processes and the context of the rural poor.

6. An Emerging Case Study

As a response to this, over the past two years, we have been trying to experiment with alternative forms of engaging with teachers. We are currently working with 20 Junior Secondary Schools in Mqanduli, covering Grade R to Grade 9.

In case the tone of this paper in any way suggests we have answers to the above critique, let us quickly be clear that the tone is one of animation and interest, knowing that we, as part of the community of a University in many important ways still remain within the confines of the critique.

In this section we share a few experiences emerging from our work in Mqanduli. The experience is ongoing and we are not yet in a position to extract definite final lessons. In this way, it is very much work in progress.

Possibly the main innovation of this work has been the establishment of a shared learning and teaching 'theatre' as the basis of our interaction with rural educators. That is, we have set up 'life' and then sought to demonstrate collectively another way of handling it, for real.

From the beginning, we deliberately chose not to call this a process of teacher development. Our overall aim was to work with the 20 schools to try to understand the process by which a group of relatively dysfunctional schools could start to 'stand up' and function effectively again. Our hypothesis was, and continues to be, that while sustainable school change and performance is contingent on minimum infrastructural conditions and the leadership of the broader school community, the role and orientation of educators is decisive.

We began by creating what we called 'learner leadership camps' (i.e. 'the learning and teaching theatre'). Each of the 20 schools was invited to participate; in order to participate we entered in to an Agreement of Honour with the school governing body, educators, learners and key community leaders (including women's leader, religious leader, traditional leaders, councillor) , in which was laid out clear terms of reference and expectations for the engagement.

Four learners were invited from each of the 20 schools. The learners were selected from the elected student leadership (Representative Council of Learners) from Grade 7 and 8 (ages ranging from 12 to 20), with equal gender representation. As such, we set up a new 'classroom' of 80 learners, or 'shared theatre'. Over the first year, we had three 3 day 'camps', starting from the morning (8 am) until night (9 pm).

In the first instance, we took a risk and did not even invite educators. We hoped that educators would be intrigued enough to insist (correctly) that educators should be present. They did insist, and thus we invited at least one educator per school to join the 'camps'. The educators who came represent in essence the most committed of educators – beyond the experience and learning, there are no incentives provided. Educators had to give up on three long weekends – and the ones who came did so voluntarily. (As the process went on, they became more and more committed – insisting on continuing the workshop despite the teacher strike, with full attendance during that session.)

Thus, these are 'good' people, committed in a meaningful sense to both education and children.

The process forward was designed as a combination of sessions whereby educators were together with learners, observing (and participating) in the methodology of the 'classroom', and sessions whereby educators were taken into separate sessions whereby they were encouraged to reflect more critically on the meta process of the shared 'classroom'.

We will reflect on five short stories, each that reflect different dynamics of this design: the early dance, the lesson on apartheid, the poetry, the drunken teacher, and the systemic evaluation.

6.1. The Early Dance

Our design (while cautious in this respect) had overestimated the early possibilities of new engagements between educators and learners.

In the first session whereby educators gathered separately from the learners, we reflected on the overall objective of the programme – to create schools of care and learning excellence. There were two reflections sessions – one on what they expected from this programme, and the other on their understanding of what currently blocks better functioning in their schools.

Almost uniformly, the answers to these posed their conception of their learners as being the source of the problem. There was a deep emphasis on the word 'these', in the comments, '**these** learners, they don't concentrate / listen to us / respect us / behave well.' And our hope is that you will teach **these** learners 'life skills' so that they behave better / more respectfully in the classroom.

The behaviour of the educators was fascinating in the early stages. In the early stages of the camp, learners came up with ground rules. One of the most important ground rules to them (beyond 'no stealing' and 'no rape') was that people listen when other people are talking. At the end of the process, the facilitator asked everybody if they could 'stand' for the rules. All did.

Almost immediately, the educators started whispering and talking amongst themselves. While the facilitator kept pointing to the rules (no talking while others are on the floor) it did not seem to dawn on educators that the 'rules' would apply to guiding their behaviour too. It was especially true when children spoke – almost without exception, in the early days, when a child spoke, educators would not listen. (Again, remember, these are not the worse imagination of an educator – these are nice, basically committed educators.)

The ritual of communication was hysterical, and not altogether surprising. When educators were in the room, children were extremely hesitant to participate. When the educators left the room, the children were engaging, asking questions, talking. There was no subtlety to this dynamic. The surprising thing was how long it took for educators to recognise this deeply for themselves. (They would only do so late in the second session – a full 6 days into the process; it took even longer for them to 'get' (and laugh at themselves knowingly) that **they** were the ones with the discipline problem.)

In the early camp, learners were exposed to the idea that young people have always played an important role in society. Across time, young people have different issues that they are concerned about. In one breakaway session the learners were given time to think about what were the issues that they as young people were most concerned with. In small groups, we asked educators to listen and observe. It was near impossible for them to do in the beginning. In many groups, the educators, when they thought they were not being watched, dictated to the learners what they should write on the flip chart. Educators were convinced that 'substance abuse' must be a concern of the youth of today. The learner who was taking notes on the flip chart did not understand the English word, and so the educators would spell it out. The flip charts came back largely in English (a language these learners rarely use, as we will discuss below). The list sounded like a stereotyped teacher discourse on 'the problem of young people' rather than the problems that concern young people: ama-substance abuse, ama-ti'nage pregnansi, i-HIV and AIDS. One is not suggesting that these issues are not of concern to young people, but rather to demonstrate the difficulty, even inability, educators had in trusting or allowing young people to think on their own and for themselves.

6.2. The Lesson on Apartheid

In the first camp, held over Freedom Day, the theme was how to understand the history of apartheid and the role of young people in changing the world. After engaging with a range of materials, and watching Sarafina, learners were given a chance to ask their 'big questions'. The questions, asked cautiously and with deep respect, were along the lines of, 'what was really the

problem between whites and blacks?' and 'has apartheid ended?' and 'could you give us a report -back about how blacks and white are getting along now?' Educators were given a space to answer these questions. They all gave text book answers – the problem was this guy who arrived in 1652, apartheid has ended because Madiba was elected in 1994, and on the last question, well, it seems things are better now.

In the next camp we decided to provide learner with a deeper sense of the story. We did this for two reasons. One, we thought it would be interesting and important for learners to have a deeper sense of the complexity of the questions they posed; two, we wanted to demonstrate to educators a way at giving more substantive answers to the questions children raise. We also wanted to re-affirm the role of educators in providing new information – many educators had misinterpreted the new curriculum framework to stand 'against' any sort of lecturing in favour of non-content drive facilitation only.

Brian gave the lecture. It was not meant to be a demonstration of creative pedagogy, but of how to make an input of information, through a lecture format, be oriented to building the thinking capacities of the learner. Simple principles were used. First, dates were not emphasised, but rather emphasis was placed on the story, and the logic running under it. Second, he posed questions along the way, just to get children to enjoy imagining – questions like, 'what do you think a young man was feeling when he first went to the mines?' 'How might it have impacted a community if all the men went to the cities?' We moved out of the learner's immediate context, and started by talking about the oppression of the Irish, and oppression of China – emphasizing that oppression is not inherently attached to people who we classify as 'white' and 'black'. We purposefully made the input challenging – consciously just beyond the easy grasp of the learners in the room (*ala* Vygotsky's zone of proximal development). The lecture was bilingual; we did not veer totally away from English, given that the learners are in Grade 7 and 8, and should theoretically be moving toward English as a medium of instruction.

After the session, the educators convened separately, and debriefed the experience. The conversation was posed as reflecting on Brian's lecture, and providing him with friendly advice for how to improve the lecture. The comments were important – as they began to reveal the real pedagogical assumptions and 'knowings' of the educators. The following comments were made lovingly, and with great concern for improving Brian's approach. And they are not exaggerated:

1. Brian was advised that **these** learners do not think very well. And so it was not wise to present such difficult information.

2. He was informed that none of the children know any English, and so he mustn't use any English.
3. He was advised that these learners have never heard of China, and so he should leave China out of the picture when we are talking about apartheid, because it is confusing.
4. They thought that it was unfair of Brian to ask the children questions that they did not know, like 'what do you imagine it would feel like to go to the mines for the first time?' They said it was unfair to ask children to imagine things they did not know.
5. All educators agreed that next time Brian needed to make a 'worksheet.' On one side of the worksheet would be the key dates, and on the other side was the information that he wanted the learners to remember. They said that it is not good to present information unless there is a worksheet so that learners can then get the 'answers right.'

The discussion emerging from these critiques are beyond the confines of this paper. They led us into an extremely deep understanding of the pedagogical assumptions of educators, and allowed us to wade in the water of these assumptions with them, using our common 'classroom' as a demonstration site. It was through this discussion that educators made their own self recognition that 1) they don't believe learners can really learn; 2) the poor literacy and language acquisition is not confronted at any stage, but rather 'passed on' to the next year teacher; 3) across the system of education they compensate by 'dumbing down' both the language and content of education; 4) learners are not so undisciplined after all; 5) learners engage and ask questions only when they are out of the room; 6) learners get enthused when their questions are answered deeply; and 7) some of these new pedagogical tools can work with **these** children, and that perhaps we must engage in new ways after all.

This was one turning point for educators, in their ability to feel the 'real real' of the process, and their authentic engagement with the process unfolding.

6.3. Poetry

At the end of one of the sessions, learners were given some simple guidelines on writing poetry. They were asked to use the spare time in the evening to write a poem for themselves. That day we had an evening dance session (a session designed both for fun, and to suggest to educators and learners the joy of making new moves). The electricity went out at the end of our joint session. The next morning educators told us that there was no way that learners could have written the poetry because there was no time and no light after the night session. We agreed, and said that we would allow learners to postpone the poetry until the following morning. When

we opened that morning, we asked whether anyone had managed to write poetry, given that there was no light. Out of the 80, about 40 learners raised their hands, and jumped at the chance to share what they had written. They wrote largely in Xhosa. They wrote about school, about their love for their mothers, about their fears of HIV and AIDS, about friendship. The educators kept catching each other's eyes in disbelief. They couldn't BELIEVE it. After the session, the educators were pointing out the learners from their schools. They were SO PROUD. And the learners saw the educators being **so proud**.

At the end of the camp, one of the most earnest educators came to thank us for the time. For him, he said it was the first time that he really knew, for himself that **these** children could create and think on their own. He said that previously he had thought it was not appropriate to ask one of these children just to write. He thought he had to write a sentence and allow them to fill in the box. (This educator has undergone an amazing process of changing his identity and pedagogy, admitting that he used to manage classrooms through corporal punishment, and now he has realised that he can manage through being a role model. These sound cliché, but are revolutionary when they are truly experienced and internalised.)

During this year we will be producing a journal of learner poetry to be used in these schools.

6.4. The Drunken Teacher

The pedagogical innovation, again, was to try to set up 'real life' through a 'shared classroom' or 'shared theatre'. In this pedagogy, we allow people to play their role for real, but then have space to reflect on the meta patterns they observe, both in themselves and others.

And the life of a school is complicated. Teachers are tired. They feel disrespected. Like many, the find comfort in different channels of release and support – soapies, religion, and alcohol.

In the first session, a group of male educators drank alcohol during one of the evenings. They were relatively subtle, and our relationship was not strong enough for the confrontation, so we watched but did not strongly intervene, beyond moving them away from the space with learners. During the second camp, when our engagement was starting to be much more real, one male teacher got extremely drunk.

The process of navigating this within our 'community' (the community of educators, including ourselves) would take another paper. Enough to say, that the instinct of the other teachers was to try to 'look away', hope it all 'goes away', and conclude within themselves that none of the learners had noticed. For the most part, educators were extremely concerned, felt their integrity deeply beaten down, but did not have the communal tools beyond the two choices of 'looking

away' or 'establishing a disciplinary committee' (which turns out to be another emotional equivalent of 'looking away' for the majority of educators.) The process forward included a painful and emotional process of not looking away, at apologising to the learners collectively, and being accountable to their concerns, at openly confronting the individual involved from the perspective of shared integrity, to acknowledging collective complicity. It was clear through the process that this was not about a 'workshop' but about engaging in a new way with what happens regularly in the school context. It was painful, embarrassing (many educators would rather have disappeared under the table during some of the discussions) but ultimately liberating. The process, like real life, is not yet over. Up until now, the accountability agreements emerging from this process have not been broken.

One of the most moving parts for the educators was in openly acknowledging to learners, the disrespect that was caused to them, and taking responsibility to take action to ensure that it didn't happen. To collectively say: ' we know that one of us was drunk, we know that our responsibility as adults is to keep you safe, we have failed and therefore disrespected you, you deserve better, no respectful adult should be drunk around a school space, and we have our own process to hold ourselves accountable to respecting you in the future.'

Through this process the thing that surprised educators the most was that the learners had noticed! They insisted that the learners did not notice, and were actually moved to hear, from the learners, what it felt like to them. They were also struck by the responses, particularly the older boys. There are typically a group of older boys in these classes, having started schooling late due to responsibilities of caring for livestock. These older boys tend to get the reputation of the 'disrespectful' ones, the ones that don't listen. (Watching the classroom carefully, this observation is not entirely accurate, but the typecast is unshakable in the mind of most educators.) These boys are often more reticent in their classroom participation, for a number of reasons. It was these boys who had the most to say about this incident. They were deeply hurt, ashamed, frightened. They expressed a feeling that educator drunkenness goes along with educators acting inappropriately with children. The boys emphasised, we are learners, not adults, and we don't need you to be our friends, but rather be our teachers. More than that, they were deeply moved what they heard as the educators' collective apology. They emphasised how much it made them proud. There was a moment of shift in the relationship, whereby educators felt the pride associated with being accountable to the learners.

Educators were deeply moved that 1) learners had noticed; and 2) learners see clearly and are affected deeply by disrespectful action of even one educator. They began to see that their integrity as teachers depends to a large extent on their collective integrity. When it comes to their relationship with children, their integrity is contingent on ensuring all children are treated

with integrity by all educators. When an educator transgresses respectful boundaries, it is a collective responsibility to address the problem, and it is unworkable to 'look away'.

The point of this story is not so much the detail, but the suggestion of pedagogy. By placing the so-called 'coursework' into the beauty and the grime of the real world, one is able to engage educators on their own playing field – demonstrating, in their own back yard, that other 'moves' (and ideas behind these new moves) work.

6.5. The Systemic Evaluation

We agreed jointly with the educators that the only way to know whether or not we are collectively making any influence on the care and learning environment of the schools was to undertake a baseline evaluation. The baseline evaluation took two forms – a child friendly evaluation (self developed tool) and a systemic evaluation (standardised tests for Grade 3 literacy and numeracy in isiXhosa).

While the final results of the systemic evaluation are still being processed and compared to national norms, it is clear to conclude that the literacy and numeracy results were devastating. While a score of 50% is considered extremely low, the 20 schools in the sample scored anywhere from 5% to 35%.

The importance of this data cannot be understated. First, educators were truly surprised (shocked, even angry) about the Grade 3 tool. They considered it way higher than their expectations for a Grade 3 learner, and labelled it as 'very unfair.' A great number of children had no ability, whatsoever to read. The educators were extremely frustrated that they could not read the exam to the learners, explaining that the learners could not read for themselves. When they understood that this was a national standardised examination they were speechless. In the words of one educator, 'if you are telling me that all learners are supposed to pass this exam by the end of Grade 3, then I can really see for the first time that me, I am failing miserably.'

The point of this exercise WAS NOT to beat up the educators. Rather, we used this data to help them see, for themselves, the simple point – literacy and numeracy are in crisis, and while the may not be the cause of the problem, they are part of it. Given that all of these teachers consider themselves to be committed on a basic level, it allowed for a much deeper exploration of content and pedagogy, especially as it relates to language acquisition to emerge.

At this point, the educators REQUESTED that we consider a more formal teacher development 'course'. They formed an organising committed, and have been the drivers of the process that has played itself out this year, whereby beyond the learner leadership camps, educators get

together in separate sessions studying language, literacy and pedagogical innovation in their classrooms.

6.6. What is the Point?

There are three points to this discussion:

1. Educators have gotten very used to being in developmental workshops, holding a deep assumption that none of this is all that applicable in **my** classroom;
2. If the University is going to engage in the unleashing of excellence in rural schools, it cannot imagine that knowledge exchange (even with limited homework application to practice) will translate well into new practice, particularly in non-middle class contexts.
3. Teacher educator research demonstrates that teacher teach the way they have been taught, unless there is a 'disrupting' experience that allows them to experience and see something anew.
4. One place to epistemologically place a 'disrupting' experience is to place new knowledge in the conditions of the 'real' – only then can educators see and experience for themselves the power (or lack of) of what is being suggested.

7. Emerging Points of Departure

Our work and thinking on the role of higher education in a post apartheid, highly unequal, essentially poor but transforming country suggest to us a number of ideas or working propositions around which rural communities and university (alongside other stakeholders the university is accountable) can dialogue, interact, and cooperate. These propositions speak to the role of the university and the place of rural communities in the mission of universities, in particular those universities that find themselves in the middle of the geographic rural hinterland, poverty and deprivation.

The first point of departure is that we cannot afford to be entirely cynical (dismissive, frustrated, despondent, exhausted to a point of 'otla esta jwang?') about universities. For as long as they are publicly funded spaces where thousands of people go to learn more about themselves, the world and how to live in and function in the world, they remain vital public places accountable to public imaginations for social change.

The University is one of the most important public vehicles responsible for creating the consciousness and orientation of the middle class. A middle class (including talented young people from rural areas themselves) that gets detached, ineffective, or adopts a cynical relationship to the agenda of the urban and rural poor poses one of the most important threats to achieving a dignified democracy in the future. Not only does the University represent a public space with the potential to become a more important catalyst for sustainable rural development, but the University serves to either attract or detract young people from lives that are inspired by social challenges, or merely inspired by private concerns.

For those people who have the academic grades, the money required (both to enrol and to complete their studies), a university has the potential of being a 'turning point' experience in their lives. Embattled as the 'African' university has been, and continues to be (inadequate public funding, increasing fees, low throughput, a growing culture of managerialism and so on), universities are places where young people from across the country and the world come learn, develop and to make advances in science / social theory / philosophy accessible and comprehensible to the mass of the people both as ideas and in social practice.

Social development and educational change happens, but it takes time, resources and investment into the processes and public institutions of local decision making. This is also the way to ensure that change is sustainable. This brings us to our second proposition, or point of departure. Partly because of the depth and intractability of the crisis in education and rural development (and the growing urgency to deal with it) government and other actors in development are attracted to 'quick fix' and often 'expert driven' solutions. Computers are invested into schools, without any deep collective knowledge or experience of how to make these investments educationally productive. The 'failures' that emerge are blamed on teachers, 'poor management', and 'lack of community support.' Local economic development initiatives bring in 'consultant trainers', many of who have not themselves been responsible for managing local enterprise in any environment, let alone in the environments facing rural economic entities.

Many rural communities are not in a position to stand up to the development approach of 'outsiders', given the relative paucity of development opportunities, and the symbolic opportunity and resources implicit in the 'outsider' interest. Too often in this context, development strategies become based on various forms of substitutionism, whereby a range of 'outside experts' are substituted for development of local capacity. Private sector contractors substitute for local builders; the intuition of consultants substitute for the intuition of local

animators; NGO's substitute for municipalities, and so called local Integrated Development Plans are written, via professional template, by a small number of 'experts' whose primarily expertise lies in making plans look, in the name of one local councillor, 'nice and professional', making the new-development-talk of 'IDP' more deeply a part of the vocabulary of development consultants rather than local community animators. The local community animator, agreeing that the plan 'looks professional', is largely left on her heals as to where her and her community 'fit in'. If the most important 'output' of any development work is the lessons emerging ('yasis, we really messed that one up, next time we should do it this way...'), the most important output is consistently exported out of the community, with people whose relationship is contingent on specific short term relationships defined by large scale development management plans.

It is easy for a university to fall into the trap of a form of substituionism that is 'extensionism' – a phenomenon in which the university sees itself literally as repository of knowledge which if people got of hold of it, all their problems would be solved. The assumption is that if the university manages to propagate itself without interference and contamination – clone itself into the psyche and hopefully epistemology of rural community leaders, all will be well. Relationships become uni-directional, un-substantive, and short lived.

Any knowledge that is deeply meaningful, that can lead to self directed activity (or praxis) must be real to and absorbed by each person in a complex social process that is not the same for everyone. And this process takes time. No one can learn for another or transfer knowledge to another. We learn from each, but only those things that are personally and socially meaningful ourselves. Universities are already involved in rural communities, the issue is how to make the involvement more meaningful, collaborative, respectful, mutually beneficial and a profound experience for all concerned.

Thus, one of the calls to the University community is to ensure that the discourse of knowledge is biased toward application in rural communities. If we cannot orient our research to ensure that ideas are indeed applicable, sustainable, and ultimately non-violent to rural peoples, we are a dangerous lot to claim we can 'teach' the rural poor. This is not a call for the intellectual community to shut its mouth, but rather to engage deeply (get our hands metaphorically dirty) in the non-sterile environment and different theoretical environment of the 'real' of the working class and rural poor.

In the long run, it is neither University based scholars nor government associated experts that will sustain socio economic development in communities. Scholars get tired and governments change. Perhaps the single most important contribution of a university or any other external body can make in a community is to support the building of local institutions and for local communities to establish collaborative networks and organizations of their own across geographic spaces (Nabudere, 2006).

The third proposition tempers the second point of departure in important ways. There are some who interpret the first point of departure as a call to romanticise what is broadly referred to as a 'participatory' and 'assets oriented' approach. Universities, like other social actors, have a right, even a responsibility, to openly propose to government and to society new ways of looking at, thinking about, and doing things. Through private and public funds, the rural poor support University based communities to think – not for private, but for public benefit.

The third point of departure recognizes that the university has developed certain knowledge's, skills, attitudes and ways of looking at the world that should be of service and certainly available to society at large. Both as part of their professional responsibility and also as citizens of a country, academics, in the course of their professional life and as private citizens, have the responsibility not only to study society but also to **propose back** to society what they believe are the best decisions to make. With rural communities too, universities academics in particular have the responsibility to propose back to communities. There are times and situations that may require the university to play the role of an observer. Arguably in most situations, the universities must assist communities to create spaces where firstly everyone that has a view on a important matter in the community is heard, and secondly where the academics (who are truly public intellectuals) can, with sensitivity, humility and without expectation that their advice will be followed to the letter (if at all), give their most considered proposals to a community. This is part of being part of an authentic community. When academics hold back from engaging and sharing their ideas openly (often justified in the name of 'participatory process'), they implicitly allow themselves to stand outside of the community of collective grappling. This is quite distinct from being overbearing, manipulative or on the other extreme distant and aloof from communities.

The fourth point of departure is that one of the basic functions of a university in post colonial (and post apartheid) Africa is to assist society in resolving its postcolonial existential crisis. The cause, nature and implication of what we call the postcolonial existential crisis is beyond this

paper, but is hinted at even in the experiences in Mqanduli as discussed above. The post colonial existential crisis is that Africans live, at least, double lives – straddling the so called 'modern' and so called 'traditional', a mind that holds different worlds in different languages – one dominant, the other, more real in its connection of language to living, subdominant, the so called values of home and so called values of the capitalist workplace. There are advantages of course to having and living two lives. The double existence arises from the fact that the kind of colonialism we had here, unlike that in North America or Australia, did not succeed in exterminating the majority of us but only subjugated many of us. As we entered capitalism (or modernity) many of our social systems, cultural practices, spiritual and epistemological orientations continue to exist, albeit in truncated forms. The crisis is how to merge these multiple worlds so that they are internally coherent to an individual and to a society.

This demands a much deeper understanding of the role of language and social development, and the role of the University in this relationship. Alexander (Wolfe, 2006: 24) suggests that 'there is no doubt that the situation in which modernity and technological sophistication is accessible to African people only through the languages of Europe, generally speaking is one of the main reasons for the enduring mediocrity of African intellectual production in the late 20th century.'

Beyond the critical and neglected role of languages, the role of the University in relationship to the post-colonial existential challenge deserves another paper, and probably more importantly a new set of discussions between Universities, and between Universities and the communities they try to serve. With all of their limitations, universities in South Africa remain one of a few public spaces where whatever is common or universal in humanity can be 'translated' (both in linguistic and in practical social terms) or made comprehensible across societies, communities, cultural practices, and epistemologies. This was one of the theoretical bases for the existence of a university, and remains one of the reasons our communities continue to send their people to university – to find ways of articulating, and where necessary disarticulating, our social and knowledge systems from the dichotomies and polarisations of a post colonial existence.

8. Conclusion

In this paper, we have suggested that the history of the University and development in the context of rural Africa has been, up to now, as a general canvas, not a pretty picture. The contemporary socio-political and regulatory pressures on the University threaten to further

alienate the University from spaces that are not characterized by middle class or elite sensibilities. To orient a University space around the challenges of social justice and participatory democracy requires a radical 'letting go' of the hegemony of inherited imaginations of the University space – notions of knowledge, efficiency, what is a student, what are outcomes, ritualised pedagogy.

This is going to require new ways of theorising about the University space, what we call the African University space. This is also going to require the day to day 'wading in the water' for methodologies, languages and relevant theory to link our 'knowing' more authentically and accurately to the 'real' of the rural poor.

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[i] Duncan (2006) documents cases across four South African Universities whereby Universities are becoming increasingly hostile to alternative viewpoints and freedom of speech.

[ii] Over the past decade, many of the mixed mode and distance education programmes have been undermined through a range of funding formulae, and are only recently being re-considered through possible shifts in national policy.