

KEY NOTE ADDRESS AT THE 5TH CHE CONSULTATIVE CONFERENCE
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I thought of a number of different ways to structure this address. The easiest might have been simply to name some of the “big” changes made from 1997 and to write a few critical comments on each one. Another was to list a number of significant policy concerns and hold them up for scrutiny.

I chose rather to use a device borrowed from Saleem Badat in a paper entitled Strategising Higher Education Reform : 13 Propositions Informed by the South African Higher Education Transformation Process, 1994 – 2003. My propositions though are somewhat different, as are some of my arguments.

Proposition 1. Knowledge Matters

In most countries with HE institutions this proposition needs no defence. In post-Apartheid South Africa however, I believe, that it does.

In his paper Badat refers to our nation’s triple challenge of growth and equity within a fledgling political order. He offers the view that:

“For good political and social reasons it is not an option to postpone one or other elements of the triple challenge or tackle them in sequence. They have to be confronted, by and large, simultaneously”. (page 4). He commends the correctness of governments view on this by quoting from the White paper 3 of 1977 which states:

“The South African economy is confronted with the formidable challenge of integrating itself into the competitive arena of international production and finance.....

Simultaneously, the nation is confronted with the challenge of reconstructing domestic social and economic relations to eradicate and redress the inequitable patterns of ownership, wealth and social and economic practices that were shaped by segregation and apartheid.”

I fear that both Sadat and the White paper may have understated the challenges facing the new South Africa. What Per Dalin calls the unprecedented situation of ten revolutions occurring simultaneously in the world is, I believe, closer to the mark. These are

1. The knowledge and information revolution
2. The population explosion with its greater stress on the natural resources of our planet including fresh water and energy.
3. Globalisation

4. The economic revolution referred to in the White Paper quote above
5. The technological revolution and the powerful impact of the widespread use of technology.
6. The ecological revolution including global warming and changes to the weather patterns and the growing desertification and the deforestation and pollution of our planet.
7. The social/cultural revolution and the pressure it puts on our traditional social institutions like the family and the school.
8. The aesthetic revolution
9. The political revolution
10. The values revolution.

He argues that together these represent the biggest challenge our species has ever faced, a challenge that demands changes in the way in which we have understood the natural and social worlds and our place within them. These challenges require a true paradigm shift as they challenge our conceptual frameworks, our points of departure, our assumptions and our experiences so deeply and so comprehensively that a satisfactory response to them will necessitate a revolution in our thinking. The old thoughts are just not good enough.

How, then do we proceed with such a project, this triple challenge greatly amplified, with HIV/Aids lurking in the background? Dalin seems to think that it has something to do with knowledge and understanding.

Castels seems to agree when he speaks of networks, partnerships and education. Nixon links hope to agency based on knowledge. Comte and St Simon and Marx, and practically all the great social thinkers, agree on the centrality of knowledge to the project of progress or development or revolution. Knowledge matters because it provides us with different ways of understanding and so increases the range of options available to us when confronted by our challenges. The power of choice is a wonderful boon, and it is often the difference between life and death.

Proposition 2 : Higher education institutions are a national treasure

It seems then that there might be some agreement that we humans can find innovative responses to the challenges that beset us, responses that might assist us to endure and greatly improve the life chances of the culture. Most suggest that such responses are contingent on the knowledge that we have and our use of it, and on the partners we have to complement our efforts. It is in this area, the area of knowledge production, preservation and dissemination that we humans have been particularly successful, with new knowledge being created at stupendous rates; knowledge for immediate use, knowledge about the past, and great discoveries that help to shape the future.

Through methodologies developed by us, we are penetrating deeper and deeper into the mysteries of the material and social worlds, into the mysteries of life and creation itself. These methodologies and the ever more powerful use of our human brain have

transformed human society, and will continue to do so, for better or for worse, at every accelerating rates.

Jerome Bruner suggests that we are distinctive and we have survived and flourished as a species because of 5 humanising factors: our long childhood in which our brains are wired through cultural activity to think in the most amazing ways, our complex social organisation, our incredible development of language, our curiosity and need for explanation, and the amplification of our powers through tools. He speaks of us humans as culture-clothed beings, hopelessly ineffective without the prosthesis provided by culture. He argues that we exist inside our cultures and we are the creatures of our cultures, even while we are transforming our cultures and through that process being transformed ourselves.

In this sense Bruner speaks of cultures as knowledge amplification systems. We develop ways to constantly increase the cultures store of knowledge while we develop the prosthesis; the methodologies, language, tools, technologies and technological products to increase or amplify our power. His argument is that the more closed a culture, the more inward-looking, the more it will restrict the search for knowledge and the more it will prevent its people from having access to it and so diminish the life chances of that people.

There are cultures today we know where knowledge is kept from certain categories of people like women or the poor or the disabled or those outside the dominant party or those of certain religions, or those outside the guild. There are cultures where certain matters are placed outside the realm of intellectual scrutiny, or where only certain knowledge is valued. Our own experience with HIV/AIDS is perhaps an example of last named.

There are cultures where tradition is everything and where new knowledge is shunned. There are cultures where ideology is everything and the only truth is the truth that supports that ideology. There are cultures that are profoundly anti-intellectual, and hostile to those who seek truth, and have throughout history rejected and even persecuted the knowledge bringer, even up to today.

One paradox about our species is that openness and closeness, or knowledge production on the one hand, and knowledge rejection on the other, can exist in the same culture and in the same individual at the same time, where some things are not open to intellectual scrutiny while simultaneously truth is being vigorously and bravely pursued and encouraged in others. I think here of the first few years in the life of curriculum 2005

There seems to be evidence throughout human history that suggests that cultures that lack the capacity or the will to significantly amplify their knowledge and disseminate this widely are in danger of greatly reducing their chances of making adequate responses to the challenges facing them. There is no denying that human cultures have been challenged throughout history and that some have declined dramatically while others have found ways to survive and yet others, to flourish. But the warning of history that

there is no status quo, and sometimes even the most vigilant are overcome by some or other dramatic social or environmental change. Our human history is the story of the rise and fall of cultures or at least of their rise and constant change, if they have endured. Cultures that endure appear to be those that are hugely adaptable, hugely flexible, deeply connected to context, aware of what faces them in all its complexity and with the skill and imagination to respond rapidly.

It is in this respect that Goodlad, writing about the challenges facing schooling argues that the school is the biggest unit of change, and that schools should be empowered, within enabling frameworks to respond to their challenges as they are closest to the data. Uniform responses from a remote site, unconnected to the context is a high risk strategy, and not recommended in this post-modern world.

There seems little doubt that the challenges that now face us are unprecedented in human history, not least because the old frames of nation states and multiple boundaries no longer exist and we are now subject to formidable forces that are often not under our direct control. The crashing of our currency a few years ago because of world-wide sales by young speculators on computers all over the world, is an case in point. We are also deeply challenged globally because there are so many for us and the natural resources that helped us previously to sustain life with a minimum of effort are no longer as readily available, and some of these, will in the lifetime of our children, be depleted. I think here of fossil fuels and perhaps even of forests and perhaps even fish.

In this regard Nixon speaks truth when he says that “we are not so much masters of change but beset by it”. It is with us constantly, it comes at every angle and it is everywhere. HIV/AIDS, SARS, the resurgent tuberculosis virus and others that will contest with us for life are at us all the time. This is the truth of nature. Only the resolute and creative are likely to endure. Politics and ideology and belief in destiny are simply not enough. We need to be a brave, thinking, resourceful people, and our HE institutions must lead the way.

Bruner’s conception of cultures has special significance for HE institutions because, given their specialised mandate of knowledge production, preservation and dissemination, it follows that where they exist in a culture, they, with few exceptions worldwide, form that culture’s premier knowledge production organs. It follows again that if there is indeed a link between knowledge, understanding and the hopes of a culture based on the decisions that the culture must make to survive and to develop and grow, especially within times of great turbulence and uncertainty, that Higher Education institutions, and Universities in particular, are indeed the heart of a people, its duty bearers with respect to this critical life-giving function, constantly pumping fresh thoughts and ways of doing into the culture to feed it and nourish it and give it life. Of the University Alfred North Whitehead says : “ A university is imagination, or it is nothing – at least nothing useful. The whole art in the organisation of a university is the provision of faculty whose learning is lighted up with imagination”. I shall return to this statement later.

Proposition 3: South Africa does not quite trust and does not quite respect its HE sector:

HE institutions are social institutions, created by cultures in response to the cultures fundamental challenges. It is their function to assist the culture to endure through providing knowledge to inform decisions. But social institutions arise also in response to the question of how these problems are to be resolved. If this proposition holds then HE has a weighty responsibility indeed and the initial question for HE institutions in post-apartheid South Africa is whether our people can be secure that HE can bear its burden with confidence. Do we have confidence in our HE institutions, do we respect them, do we trust them? I believe that there is much ambivalence in this respect, as can be gauged by the loneliness of HE in its struggles for its space. Who speaks for it? Who rushes to the ramparts to defend it when threatened?

In 1997 South Africa turned its mind to its Higher education system, or lack thereof, and their role in our culture. The landscape was a complex one with 36 Higher Education institutions many created for reasons other than the production and dissemination of knowledge for national development, and many situated in the most unlikely places. All of them shaped by apartheid, all of them with deep but varied transformational issues confronting them, academic, democratic and political; many in desperate financial difficulty and with woefully low throughput rates, many without strong student development or academic development policies and practices, and many with no real plan for transformation with respect to the core mandate of the HE sector, or other, more peripheral aspects of transformation. I explain this distinction later.

In 1977 South African HE institutions, especially its universities, were amongst the most en fettered and unaccountable on earth, with no national system of institutional assessment, (Technikons had SERTEC but its touch was quite light). There were but weak systems of personal assessment, especially with respect to teaching, and with few penalties for failure. Democratic South Africa did, I believe, not have great confidence in them, did not deeply respect them, could not live with them in that state and began to map out an agenda of change.

Proposition 4. Government has decided to govern.

White Paper 3, published in 1977, outlined the vision and goals for such an HE system. Its task was “to redress past inequalities and to transform the higher education system to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities” (Quote National plan page 5).

The Higher Education Act followed in the same year. This provided the regulatory power for the Minister of Education, who could now engage with the higher education sector and its stakeholders with greater legal authority.

It soon became clear that a fairly significant shift was occurring with respect to that relationship. The period before 1997 has been spoken of as an essentially political period

when, through fairly intensive interaction with stakeholders, the Minister of Education sought to engage with all the different power interests and win the support of the majority for the transformation of the HE sector. In order to accomplish this the ministry engaged in wide consultation with a view to creating distance between the apartheid old and the democratic new, as quickly as possible. Badat and others have spoken of this time as a period of symbolism, where the purpose of policy was largely visionary and ideological and political, with no deep thought to the challenges of implementation.

It can be argued that this period was indeed necessary to develop a new vision for HE and to employ the appropriate rhetoric to establish the prospect of a “brave new world”, so as to win the allegiance of society and align their thoughts and aspirations with that of the state. Transformation became, and to some extent still is, the defining concept of that era, the battle cry or mantra for every engagement.

The publication of the White Papers and the Higher Education Act in 1997 heralded a shift towards more substantive considerations, towards developing the thoughts and the mechanisms for changing HE institutions to fit the purposes outlined. In this process the state began to play a more directive role, some would say, a decidedly interventionist role, sometimes called, perhaps euphemistically, a steering role. This new role seemed to confirm the belief that government, and perhaps society at large, did not believe that HE institutions had the capacity or the will to conceptualise and manage their own transformation as patriots in accordance with the new vision and in a professional partnership with DoE

At the policy level a shift in the relationship between the Ministry and DoE on the one hand and society and the HE “stakeholders” in particular on the other, now also became apparent. It could be stated that in this regard the most important change was the creation of the CHE which would now serve as a surrogate for deep and narrow consultation with the HE sector. The role of the HE institutions themselves in the consultative arrangement was thereby changed with SAUVCA and CTP perhaps the chief casualties here.

In this process, the HE institutions, while being entrusted with a life-giving mandate from the country, were reduced to the status of, at worst, just another stakeholder, and at best, a special stakeholder, structurally forced to seek the favour of the DoE for attention, its voice formally mediated by the CHE.

Currently there exists no set of protocols and structures between Government and the HE institutions which consistently and necessarily brings the state and its major knowledge production apparatus, the HE institutions, into dialogue on policy and implementation. There is no dedicated formal space where they can engage in a spirit of joint responsibility for the attainment of the nation’s knowledge goals. This is not to deny the fact that consultations do occur. It points only to the special, trusting, partnership that ought perhaps to exist.

The cry that government’s hand in higher education is too heavy is not unusual in history. In 1978 the President of Johns Hopkins University wrote in *Daedalus* that, “On the

campus, yesterday's partner (the federal government) now appears increasingly as today's oppressor, indispensable, but stingy, and even more intrusive". (Keller 25.) In 1980 Harold Enarson, president of Ohio State wrote ,“The Universities today are under siege....The cumulative weight of federal and state encroachments is crippling the university, sapping morale and destroying the very quality and accountability they were designed to foster”.

While conceding that there was some truth in these cries, George Keller writes of American universities that:

“ Still, most ..universities have lacked adequate planning, strong internal management, and a transparent set of academic objectives. Higher education has drifted. And in a time of new austerity and growing importance of higher learning and research, drift needs to be replaced by thrift and purpose. If educational institutions are to reverse, or at least slow down the trend towards interventions in their affairs, they must shape their destinies in ways that are acceptable to the public and its elected leaders.” 25

Government has a responsibility Keller is arguing. The South African government is now proclaiming that it has a responsibility and that it will occupy that space. Through its process of institutional restructuring, rolling plans, programme and qualifications mixes, the introduction of a new funding framework, and the creation of the Higher Education Quality Committee, government has, since 1997, moved to the centre of the frame.

Proposition 5. There is much that does need fixing, but who are the fixers?

The view of the South African public and our elected leaders held of South African HE institutions in 1977 must have included many of the concerns raised by Keller above, with essentially South African issues around access, equity and redress added. Amongst the charges were that there was little accountability and HE institutions shaped their own agendas without reference to national goals and the interests of society. These agendas often including the maximisation of that institutions resources, often using dubious practices to claim a greater share of the Higher Education budget. They were also hugely wasteful and the limited resources of the country were not being used as effectively as efficiently as they could be. There were also misgivings about the relevance and quality of the academic programmes, including teaching and research. Equity issues also loomed large with race and gender profiles of staff and students a special concern.

We cannot accuse our Minister and his Department with being tardy with respect to addressing these matters. In fact, the concern often expressed is that they have gone much to quickly, and have cut too broad a swathe, often forcing onto the sector changes at an impossible, bewildering and disempowering pace.

Since 1997 the HE sector has experienced change upon change, often change of the change. There is the general feeling of being overwhelmed by change without, it is believed, an adequate understanding by government of the complexities accompanying change and the need for these changes to be hugely and expertly supported. There is also

the concern that the changes may not yield the intended results, as centrally planned changes have a chequered record at best. The fear is also that the changes will not be owned by the sector and the festering resentment may produce a number of unintended consequences which may comprehensively defeat the desired objectives.

What are the major frameworks and policies since 1997 which we are willed to successfully implement? Chief amongst them are:

1. White Paper 3 of 1997 which sets the framework for HE's duty to South Africa, the provision of high level human resources, the development of a culture of public debate, the production of new knowledge and the dissemination thereof, based on the principles and values of accountability, autonomy, effectiveness and efficiency, democratisation, development, academic freedom, quality and equity and redress.
2. The Higher Education Act, Act No 101 of 1997, which sets the regulatory framework for HE.
3. The creation of the Commission for Higher Education (CHE) as the statutory advisor to the minister on all HE matters. The CHE would also perform the function of the ETQA for HE in accordance with the frames set by SAQA.
4. Focus on institutional planning leading to the regime of three year institutional rolling plans and the programme and qualifications mix
5. The alignment of HE programmes with the NQF resulting in the interim registration of all HE programmes with SAQA.
6. Requirements that all new HE programmes be accredited to qualify for funding
7. Institution of the HEQC and the development of a policy framework, processes and instruments for quality assurance in HE.
8. The development of NSFAS to provide subsidised funding for needy students.
9. The development of an Academic Policy for Academic Programmes and qualifications in HE (Still incomplete).
10. The start to the process of incorporating nursing, agricultural and education colleges into HE.
11. The restructuring of the HE landscape
12. A review of institutional governance
13. The proposal for a new HEIAS.

14.The development and implementation of a new funding formula.

15.The Development and implementation of a new HEMIS system.

16.The HE PLAN

There are many other but these are the big broad strokes. The naming of them does not begin to describe the complexities of implementation and the human resource capacities and capabilities needed to carry it off successfully. Between them these policies and frameworks represent perhaps the most comprehensive restructuring of Higher education in modern history. The modern world has not seen anything like it. This represent a great leap in some direction, and will demand levels of courage and skill, particularly from the management of the HE institutions, that will test the very best. The outcome is hugely uncertain but the chances of success are dramatically enhanced if all the soldiers are filled with passion for the cause and are prepared to die for President and country.

Management theory suggests that when major change is contemplated we must do our best to bring the critical mass of the people along. They should understand and accept why this is happening and that a successful outcome offers huge benefits that will contribute greatly to the common good. One thinks of Henry V in Shakespeare's play who exhorts his soldiers to enter into a hugely unequal contest with a much superior foe. The matter was dire, the future of England was at stake. He asked the God of battles to steel his soldiers hearts and then roused them to passion with words that touched their hearts and they fought like demons, and won the day.

Are the champions lined up for this HE battle with hearts of steel? Is the critical mass behind, aching to be up and at the foe, or is the mood sombre and morale low?

One must seek champions who will go out and preach the good news and who will expertly manage the changes, consistently increasing the confidence of those who must implement, the changes and those who will be impacted upon by them. Who are the Henry's here, and how are they marshalling the forces, and will the battle be won? History will judge how well we fared.

Proposition 6 : We have not lost our belief in magic

When we think of change, our inclination is to think of changes to structures, and to access to decision-making only. This is what we more often than not call ownership or transformation. This is no doubt a legacy of our struggle, of our exclusion from such process for so long and of the neo Marxist theory of structural causality, the belief that changes to structure are both necessary and sufficient for development. For a time in the 80's any attempt to keep the matter of agency and the matter of experts on the agenda

was considered heresy and marked one as closet liberal or an unreconstructed danger to the revolution. Words like quality and standards and expertise was abolished from our language as were oversight and inspection.

There are signs extant that we are still inclined in this direction. Curriculum 2005 spectacularly started its life from this premise. Knowledge would be acquired through the magic of doing away with content and text books and teaching. Through the Socratic method we could release the knowledge already within each South African, simply because he/she is South African, with little thought to how that knowledge got there or would get there. It was an expression of anti-intellectual to the nth degree. The belief was that you did not have to be inducted into the discipline of mathematics and its methodologies and its theorems and propositions and assumptions in order to do maths and so build dams or large buildings, or tunnels.

You did not have to slave away like ordinary mortals throughout the world, for hours every day seeking access to the ways of knowing and understanding and explaining. You did not have to understand that the explanatory power of the different disciplines was different, but together gave you a battery of ways to think and to support your arguments and decisions and actions. Somehow, just by the magic of changing the curriculum, for instance, knowledge would be released. Kader Asmal's place in the history of South African education is assured because of his heading off this lemming-like charge to educational disaster.

Aspects of the recognition of prior learning take us in the same direction. The promise of moving from a sweeper to an engineer, just on the basis of one's experiences in the engineering shop is a cruel one indeed. No need for chemistry and physics and mathematics and statistics, just experience would do.

The awful truth is that the acquisition of knowledge is hard, hard, hard work. This belief that one can begin the process of knowledge production ab initio, and that there are ways to know, at the highest levels of principle, which one can acquire simply by being part of a certain group or a political party or a nation or having been successful in political revolution is not uncommon. An example of this is in 1919 when the Communist Youth set out to reject all knowledge created in the past, all knowledge that predated their people's revolution, and believed that they could develop new, unique ways of gaining access to knowledge. We did the same with the popular conception of people's education advanced by many in the 80s.

Lenin dismissed as "theoretically wrong and practically harmful all attempts to create a special culture and to use it as a basis of development and education." He added that "far from rejecting the most valuable achievements of the bourgeoisie epoch, Marxism has, on the contrary, assimilated and refashioned everything of value in the more than two thousand years of human thought and culture."

What Lenin accomplished was the rescue and the affirmation of knowledge itself by defeating the arguments that sought to confuse knowledge and the disciplines by which it

is produced with the regime under which it had been produced, and the pernicious use the regime may have put it to. In this way he restored the authority of knowledge and preserved it as a legacy for his people.

Because we had no Lenin, we failed for some time to contest with those who would reduce all relationships to power relationships. The HE sector was effectively intimidated into silence, with the exception of one or two voices, as anti-intellectualism and hubris almost won the day. Again I site the first version of curriculum 2005 and also the silence around HIV/Aids. The FETC provides us with another moment of danger. Again we may be trapped into not respecting our youth and by hiding from them the real challenges associated with HE studies, and the huge personal sacrifices, particularly of time, that are necessary for adequate preparation for HE entry, and the depth of the HE challenge once one has gained access. We may not patronise our youth. They are destined lead this country one day.

HE institutions are especially vulnerable, particularly with respect to admission requirements. The argument is that anyone can learn anything so to insist on a level of cognitive preparedness is to wish to exclude and to render the HE institution elitist. This argument leans too heavily on the past, when whites dominated at higher education institutions. Given the demographic reality in this country, within the next few years all HE institutions will be almost completely black, and the issue must simply be: who has the most potential, who can best benefit from HE education, who can best assist this country to endure through participation in HE. It will be wonderful when that day occurs.

Proposition 7: The HE plan is a good framework for HE delivery but a not uncomplicated one, or one and one often do not make two.

The primary purpose of the HE plan is to ensure that the HE system contributes towards the achievement of the transformational goals set out in the White Paper 3, and outlined in the Higher Education Act, and presented in greater detail in the National Plan For Higher Education.

Stripped of the rhetoric, a set of national challenges for the HE sector based on the National Plan could look like this:

1. Produce new knowledge through high level, high quality basic and applied research, in line with the developmental goals of our country.
2. Disseminate knowledge and skills through quality teaching, writing and practice, including community
3. projects, in line with the developmental goals of our country.
4. Develop the nation's capacity for innovation, especially through technology, in line with the developmental goals of our country.
5. Manage the individual institutions effectively and efficiently.
6. Manage the finances of the institution so as to ensure sustainability.
7. Develop proud, self-confident students ready to take leadership and to be key agents for development in their communities.

8. Increase the number of students entering higher education from 15% to 20% during the next five years.
9. Increase the number of black students entering higher education.
10. Increase the number of women entering higher education.
10. Increase the number of handicapped students entering higher education.
11. Broaden the social base of HE by increasing access of workers, professionals and adult learners
12. Improve the pass rate in individual modules/subjects.
13. Improve the pass rate of black students.
14. Shorten the time to undergraduate degree or diploma (completion of a course)
15. Shorten the time to undergraduate degree or diploma (completion of a course) by black students.
16. Increase the number of students in post-graduate programmes.
17. Increase the number of black students in post-graduate programmes
18. Shorten the time to post-graduate degree.
19. Shorten the time to post-graduate degree by black students
20. Increase the number of students in selected areas of study, like science, mathematics and accounting and professional programmes.
21. Increase the number of black students in selected areas like science, mathematics and accounting and professional programmes
22. Increase the number of women in selected areas like science, mathematics and accounting and professional programmes
23. Increase the number of black personnel in the system.
24. Increase the number of blacks personnel in senior positions in the system.
25. Increase the number of women personnel in the system.
26. Increase the number of women personnel in senior positions in the system.
27. Increase the number of handicapped personnel in the system.
28. Increase the number of handicapped personnel in senior positions in the system.

The challenges are not presented in order of priority, except 1 to 6 above, which speak to the essential mandate of the HE sector; its reason for existing and its sustainability. Fundamentally though, the qualification University is dependent only on the first two, knowledge production, preservation and dissemination. Stripped of all the others, an institution still remains a university, stripped of these two, it is something else.

There are many other challenges not listed, which may be deemed to be as significant, but I believe that in order to continue to be a HE institution, all of them must pass the tests implicit in 1 to 2 above. It cannot shine at the others at the expense of these. To do so is to betray the culture and rob it of its treasure, the knowledge it needs to survive.

What is significant about this list is the tension between various sets of challenges. They do not all answer to the same logic. Mass education in large classes for students who are hugely disadvantaged and who have had school experiences that do not adequately prepare them for HE is not the profile that supports the expectation of rapid throughput and huge efficiencies, which will be rewarded under the new funding formula.

As stated earlier, I have a view that the demographic realities of South Africa will result in all HE institutions being largely black, both with respect to students and staff within the next ten to 15 years. This will happen without any pressure being applied as white staff being to retire in ever greater numbers and, given the decline in white birthrates, fewer and fewer white children will enter the school system. Given this scenario, I believe that the greatest challenge to HE education during the next few years is to improve the management and sustainability of each institution and to develop the future staff to the highest levels of academic and administrative excellence, by whatever means possible. The very best teachers and managers, taken from wherever we may find them across the world and in South Africa, to teach and mentor the very best and brightest of the next generation should be engaged for this task.

In making this argument I am reminded that after the second world war the USA recruited the best scientists from Europe, German, Polish, Czech and many others to drive their scientific projects and give them technological superiority while transferring their knowledge and skills to next generation of leaders, managers and scientists. If HE during the next ten years, could create for South Africa thousands upon thousands of scientists and managers and leaders to match the world, South Africa could secure its place as a giant amongst nations. This would mean of course that the academic project would take precedence over everything else.

Our students must be assisted to understand their destiny, to be responsible for the intellectual life of the culture, to secure its well being through their knowledge and skills, and to accept, with courage and commitment the induction into the ways of knowing that will empower them to empower their culture.

Our schools will not be ready to prepare our students for some time yet. The proof of the damage done by apartheid to family and community and to schools and schooling is painfully clear when we witness our students' often hopeless struggle to close the gap necessary for success at HE level. We know that tests done throughout Africa have shown that despite being in the best resourced education system in Africa and the envy of most of the developing world, our students, in general, cannot match the achievements of their African brothers and sisters. HE must take responsibility for finding students with potential and supporting them through high school and into the HE institution. HE cannot escape this burden if we are to break the cycle of failure.

Proposition 8 : Mergers are sometimes necessary, but the reason s must be compelling: or Mergers are hell.

I am an experienced mergerer. I merged 4 Education Department into one. I merged a Pre-primary College with a Teachers College. I incorporated Teachers Colleges into HE institutions. I merged 18 Technical Colleges into 6. Mergers are hell.

Research has proven that during and for some time after a major change like a merger, productivity and quality drop quite alarmingly. Some never recover their former levels of

performance, and the desired positive impact of the merger will not materialise. The Human Resource challenges are oftentimes intractable, especially if the conditions of service of the different merge partners are markedly different. We have done it now and we must change our focus to ensuring that they succeed. If they do not, the knowledge production and dissemination project of our country will have been dealt a mortal blow, from which we may not recover. Merging institutions will require much, much dedicated and hugely talented and resourceful assistance. Here is a partnership issue if ever there was one, with the entire sector with all of its skilled mobilised in support of these new institutions. It could be the Henry V moment. We could mobilise our troops for this battle. We could steel their hearts and inflame them to passion in this dire cause.

It will be interesting to see if some gains are realised, especially with respect to the academic project.

Proposition 9; Approached with wisdom and care, the quality assurance regime could hasten the transformation of Higher Education.

South Africans are wary of the notion of quality, and rightly so. One's conception of quality shapes the enterprise and determines what is valued. Mala Singh is right to warn about allowing the market to dominate our quality discourse.

But it would be folly to imagine that there are ways to abstract ourselves from our context, and create our own sense of quality without reference to context. India and China will not cease to produce graduates of the highest order, ready and able to engage with their world, locally and internationally, while waiting for South Africa to resolve its position on quality. The challenges social and material challenges facing South Africa await quality responses from its graduates or we will not endure. Quality in education is not an amorphous thing. Our world is not without thoughts about this, and the impact of quality in higher education; knowledge production on the culture is often transparent. But again, it is not a gift from the Gods, but the consequence of assiduous, determined activity. Hard, hard work, must be our mantra. Perhaps our commitment to this will be our greatest transformation victory.

Proposition 10: Student Development in the broadest sense is, mistakenly, not a priority in the HE transformation plans

Note: I spoke about this from notes made in pencil before my speech. I must still add it to the paper.