

The Shape of Hope: Troubling Activism in an Academic setting

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Proposal type: Paper presentation with Poetry Performance

Over the past fifteen years a six months core module working with life stories has formed part of the Health Promotion Masters' students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). The relevant module called the Personal is the Professional, facilitates interactive and dialogical learning spaces for students to share and deconstruct their personal stories collectively to increase insight and the ability to respond to their own and other's contexts. This process is facilitated using a Critical Reflexive Model. The model focuses on four aspects explored by students in a carefully facilitated dialogical space: the deconstruction of power, emerging values and how these inform identity, individual and collective agency linked to responsibility, and performance of self in daily life and in a work context. For the purpose of this presentation attention will be given on what has emerged in relation to Power as one of the loops in the model. Power is unpacked in the Foucauldian sense where it is ever present. The challenge is to be aware of how it is used, the intention and the effects. We start with the self but take it through to social action. Not power over but power with. Not power for self but for the collective through social activism in a troubled world. I bring myself in as researcher and educator and how Apartheid asked for particular action. Then through critical analysis I discover I have to let go of my story to stay close the stories of the "born free" generation. Those born after the end of Apartheid who now face an epidemic of femicide and other forms of violence like xenophobia as part of their daily lives. During the module the students get caught in their own cycles of violence which requires deeper exploration. How does this happen when their intervention is called "Breaking cycles of Violence – Building Unity"? What is the shape of Hope?

The following poem constructed by one of the students during the module illustrates the context.

*Vicious and inhuman acts surround us
Isolated with no-one to run too
One nation under God, if He exists He will have to beg for my forgiveness
Lafa elihle ilizwe (Death of a beautiful nation)
Enough is enough
No to xenophobia! No to Femicide!
Cries that echo through the land of our forefathers
End immediately*

*Ubuntu kaze baphelelaphi (Where did ubuntu go)
No more pain
It ends now, or it will end us
The world is in our hands
YOU, ME, WE - CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!
Sithabile Nomzamo Sithole*

Question the paper addresses: What it means to be an activist and whose values we represent?

Key words: Activism; Poetry; Academia; Narratives; Reflexivity; Auto/biographical

References

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