

# Public Universities with a Public Conscience:

## A Proposed Plan for a Social Pedagogy Alternative in the Time of Pandemic

*Drafted through a national discussion in South Africa amongst concerned academics, April 2020*

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Endorsement: <https://bit.ly/public-education-plan-endorsement>

### ABSTRACT

- Our contextual analysis shows that the current unilateral implementation of online teaching and learning by education institutions will result in an academic disaster and will exacerbate the COVID-19 humanitarian disaster. Neither teaching staff nor students possess the means to make this shift right now. “Going online” immediately will simply widen existing inequalities and make meaningful learning impossible for the vast majority of students.
- We propose a different approach: Social Pedagogy. This approach is consultative, inclusive, and sensitive to the contexts of students, teachers and their communities. It works toward a mutually supportive framework that will carry our pedagogic work through the current crisis, into a period of just recovery, and a more equitable future.
- We are guided by four principles:
  - Inclusivity and participation
  - Equity and Equality
  - Transformation and decolonisation
  - Academic development and progress with integrity
- Key requirements include: Immediate cessation of formal online curriculum roll-out; state-level intervention in resourcing and infrastructure development; academic, financial and accommodation protections for students; and labour protections for education workers.
- We propose a model for structuring the academic year in three phases, with timelines that take into account realistic capacity and provision of resources, as well as the unfolding of the pandemic and associated social restrictions:
  - Phase One: Dialogue with students, teachers and communities to collaboratively map the context, and to appropriately adapt curricula and develop pedagogic strategies for the delivery of a socially just programme.
  - Phase Two: Roll-out of a supportive, structured but flexible learning process that employs (a) subject-specific knowledge drawing on existing curricula, (b) adapted teaching materials that engage with the material and social effects of the current crisis and (c) formative assessments.
  - Phase Three: Return to campus-based teaching when deemed safe. Feed the material and experience of Phase One and Two into the formal curriculum. Continue with formative assessments and restructure summative assessments for fairness and academic integrity.

## 1. Preamble

We are educators in the post-school education sector across South Africa. We have come together in various fora over the past month to discuss principles, practices and possibilities for learning and teaching in South Africa during and after the COVID-19 Global Disaster. We are committed to our students, to our institutions, our communities, to developing critical intellectual cultures and to equal education as an essential service. The analysis, principles and proposals put forward in the sections below reflect these values and have in mind ALL students, especially marginalised students, teaching staff and administrators, parents, and communities, and aim to redress the structural inequities in our post-schooling system. This analysis and proposal builds on scenarios put forward by the Black Academic Caucus<sup>1</sup> and the C-19 People's Coalition<sup>2</sup> Post School Working Group.

In offering this proposal, we seek the input and feedback of students, teaching and administrative staff, unions, parents and communities as we look forward to its further development and implementation.

## 2. Context

Today, students, teaching staff, administrators, parents and workers are anxious. This is understandable given the grave uncertainty produced by severe tensions between COVID-19 and its viral calendar on the one hand, and the multiple formal calendars that we construct in our lives - and those that are constructed for us. As we write, reports suggest that our COVID curve is likely to peak in September 2020 – three months after original projections of a peak in June 2020. This means that we might be at the tail-end of the virus around October/November.

Psychosocially, the unfolding pandemic will mean dealing with soaring infection and death rates for students, staff and all our families in months to come. The country is likely to be in multiple forms and stages of mourning; mourning the loss of loved ones; the loss of long-practiced modes of mourning; of income; of daily meals; of social contact; of the social environment of face-to-face learning. The psychosocial impact of living with and dying from COVID-19 will be further compounded by the structural and physical violence endemic to our society.

In ours, the most unequal country in the world, where communities are faced with multiple and constant crises, universities are offering a combination of online learning and “alternative strategies” for students to continue with their studies. To this end, lecturers and students have been instructed to prepare for online emergency remote teaching and learning from 20 April.

This move to online teaching and learning ignores the realities of the majority of students, teaching staff and their communities. These realities are not conducive to teaching and learning as they are marked by inadequate spatial and living conditions, lack of proper infrastructure, reliable electricity, data, technology, and access to food and water. The move to online teaching and learning ignores inequalities engineered by colonialism, apartheid, capitalism, patriarchy, homophobia, xenophobia and neoliberalism. It reinforces nationality, class, race and gender inequities. Current “alternative strategies” being put forward will mark, stigmatise and ghetto-ise many of the most vulnerable and marginalised communities. “Going online” and providing “alternative strategies” will render the economically deprived the proverbial sacrificial lamb while the privileged few benefit and move

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<sup>1</sup> BAC Scenarios: <https://bit.ly/bacscenarios2020>

<sup>2</sup> C19 People's Coalition: <https://c19peoplescoalition.org.za/>

ahead with the curriculum. A conversation about emergency online teaching<sup>3</sup> between the SA Human Sciences Research Council and scholars in China, Italy and Germany reveals that the consequence of “going online” in these countries has deepened both the digital divide and already existing inequalities in education. In our much more unequal context it is not only unrealistic but inhumane to continue with the formally planned online curriculum for 2020.

In line with calls around the world to acknowledge this crisis as a portal moment<sup>4</sup> to begin to address overlapping global crises - socio-economic inequalities, climate catastrophe and the Coronavirus pandemic - we call for a social, economic and political response that promotes a just recovery<sup>5</sup> in the interests of ALL – people and the earth. What we need now is a response grounded on values of equity, ubuntu, human dignity, compassion, respect for human life, nature and the environment. While South Africa is managing the viral infection curve, the social inequality curve that our current responses are exacerbating needs to be of equal concern. Our efforts to flatten the viral curve must not sharpen the social inequality curve.

We therefore appeal to leaders in post-school education, to our fellow educators, students, parents and communities to take on board this proposal so that we may craft a contextually appropriate and compassionate way forward.

### **3. The Approach: Social Pedagogy**

A social pedagogy is one that promotes inclusive participation, equality and justice, and prioritises people within the environment.

Defining a Social Pedagogy for Pandemic Covid19:

- The pedagogies employed during the pandemic must allow for students to be active citizens and engage in a socially responsive way. This requires us to adjust our teaching based on unfolding experiences within the context of a pandemic in a manner that links teaching and learning with communities, within the global context.
- This entails building on the education for liberation trajectories of people’s equal education and the free education conceptualisations generated from the #FeesMustFall momentum
- Preparation for this pedagogy will involve a programme of dialogue, resourcing, and development engaging teachers, students and our respective social, economic and political environments as well as state and institutional partners.
- This consultative process allows teachers and students to continuously develop and review methods as the process unfolds.
- Assessment prior to returning to campus or school-based teaching must be formative for the purpose of contributing to a programme of just recovery. Further formative and summative assessments after return to campuses and schools will ensure academic integrity and fair progression.

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<sup>3</sup> HSRC 7 April 2020: <http://www.hsrc.ac.za/en/events/seminars/coronavirus-lessons-from-china-and-europe>

<sup>4</sup> Arundhati Roy, 3 April 2020: <https://www.ft.com/content/10d8f5e8-74eb-11ea-95fe-fcd274e920ca>

<sup>5</sup> 350.org Open Letter: Principles for a Just Recovery: <https://350.org/just-recovery/>

#### 4. Core principles:

This plan is informed by the principles of equality and justice through inclusive participation in academic development and progress with integrity.

- **Inclusivity and participation:** All decisions about the form and revised schedule of the academic project and about necessary support mechanisms are to be done in deep consultation, dialogue and close collaboration with the core constituencies: students, teaching and administrative staff, unions, parents and communities.
- **Equity and Equality:** All students are given an equal opportunity to participate in the learning process. No roll-out of learning processes until digital equity is addressed for the means to study and learn, with particular care given to resourcing historically disadvantaged institutions. Solutions must be guided by the circumstances of students with the least access and security.
- **Transformation and decolonisation:** The methods, means and content of academic engagements should play a transformative role and move us toward a more just and equitable teaching and learning environment, while furthering the process of decolonisation, and building on the experiential learning of education struggles for liberation in South Africa and globally.
- **Academic development and progress with integrity:** The aims, methods, means, content and any assessment of academic engagements must equitably and sustainably hold and support all involved in post-school education at this juncture, with compassionate values that promote contextually appropriate development through this portal period; these values are evident through reflective, rigorous and systematic processes that support experiential learning.

#### 5. Key requirements and conditions

- Immediate cessation of formal online curriculum roll-out.
- State responsibility for equal education: direct state intervention is required in providing the necessary infrastructure, in partnership with institutions and private sector.
- Academic, financial and accommodation protections for students.
- Labour protections for staff including part time and occasional teaching and administrative workers.

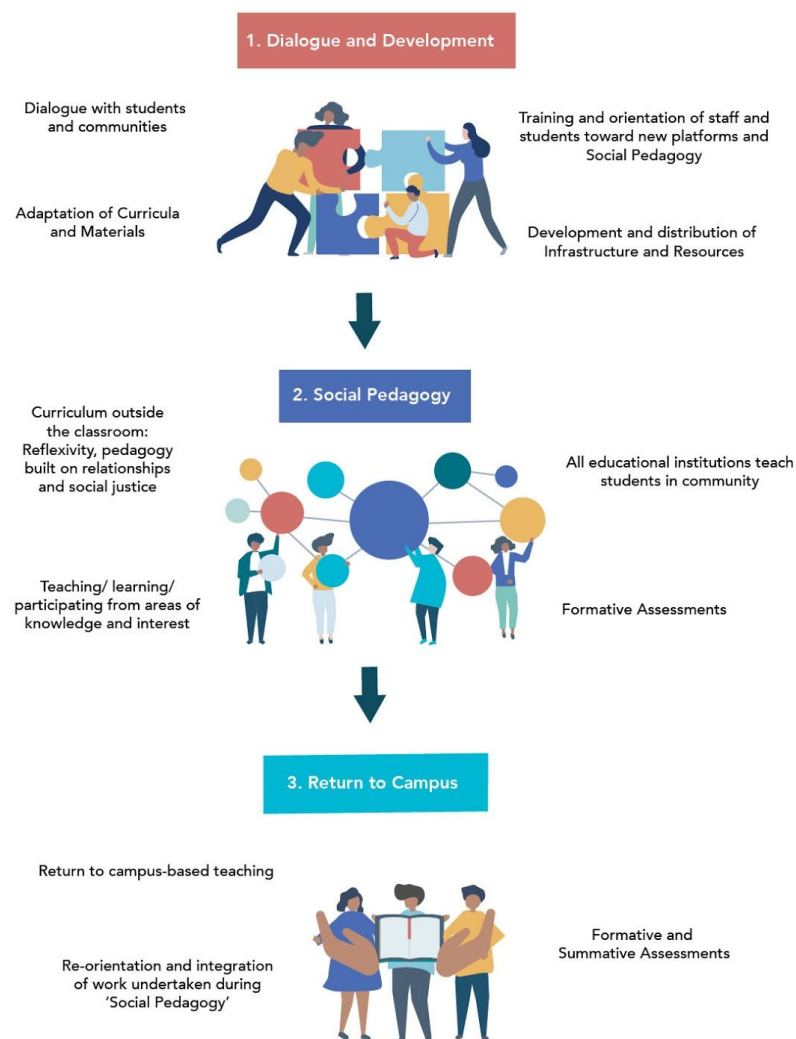
#### 6. Scenario: National Plan for Social Pedagogy

**This scenario rests on the following premises:**

- No post-school education institutions are structurally, systemically and otherwise capable to continue the academic year 2020 online in a socially just manner that provides adequately for students with the least access and security.
- The originally envisaged 2020 academic year is no longer possible, and so must be reimagined.
- We should now prepare a pedagogy that allows students to learn as they shelter in place.

- When face-to-face teaching is possible again, curricula will continue in modified forms to suit their new time frames.
- We undertake a national project that allows educational institutions across all SAQA bands to keep students engaged in social pedagogies until campus and school based teaching is possible again, either in September 2020, January 2021 or as determined by relaxing of COVID-19 restrictions.
- This will require a conversation and planning that links with the basic education sector with regards to entry, progression and exit of learners.
- State and institutional infrastructure development and resourcing as described under “Key Requirements” must be implemented alongside Phase One.

## Social Pedagogy: National Plan



## **The National Project:**

All timelines are contingent on the unfolding of the pandemic, its social effects, and mandatory restrictions.

### **Phase One: April-June 2020: Dialogue within communities as staff develop social pedagogies**

- Practical, participative research toward developing a social pedagogy model suitable for all communities within South Africa through consultation with all relevant stakeholders. Stakeholders include students, parents, communities, CSOs, community education centers, unions, and workers, as well as state and institutional partners.
- The focus of this phase is:
  - Collaborative context mapping that includes existing needs, resources and crisis responses within communities of practice and place.
  - Adapting curricula and learning new technologies and pedagogies required to best deliver a socially just curriculum.
  - Developing and sharing subject specific or generic guides to facilitate social pedagogy across all disciplines.

### **Phase Two: July-September 2020: Sheltered-in-place learning**

- Using and sharing material developed in Phase One, staff roll out social pedagogy adapted to suit each specific study discipline.
- The primary tasks are to allow students to reflectively observe and investigate their experiences of the present moment in terms of the knowledge, skills and values they learn in formal settings; and for teachers to learn and practice social pedagogy within communities, under lockdown conditions.
- Staff work toward an adjusted curriculum and assessment structure for roll-out during Phase Three.

### **Phase Three: September-December 2020 or into 2021: Return to campus-based teaching**

- Students and staff return to campus-based teaching.
- Staff engage work produced under Phase Two through individual and classroom feedback.
- These projects also re-orient ourselves – academically, physically and emotionally and educationally - in respect of discipline specifics as we return to the curriculum.
- Staff institute a re-worked curriculum for two semesters designed to complete the academic year within new timelines:
  - Option One: complete 2020 in two mini-semesters during the 2020 calendar year.
  - Option Two: complete 2020 and 2021 academic years through four mini-semesters in the 2021 calendar year.
  - Option Three: Shift the entire 2020 academic year to 2021, dedicating 2020 to disaster support and just recovery.

Click here to add your endorsement and comments, and to be part of the process going forward:

<https://bit.ly/public-education-plan-endorsement>

**Endorsement from national academics group, writers and collaborators 17 April 2020 17:00**

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