

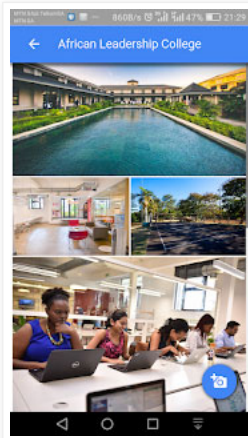
# Thierry M. Luescher

Personal Blog and Website with Links to Open Access Publications on Higher Education in Africa - Student Experience - Student Political Affairs - Institutional Research - Higher Education Policy and Politics Research

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Saturday, 20 May 2017

## Teaching and Learning Principles for Decolonised Social Sciences in Africa



I came across this article in *The Conversation Africa* Edition, which is a semi-academic news/short feature online publication well worth reading.

The article talks about the efforts in a new university in Mauritius to design a decolonised approach to teaching and learning social sciences. It's different: in the South African context since the #RhodesMustFall student activists made the notion of a decolonised curriculum popular every other wannabe intellectual manager-academic appropriates the idea, and university third stream research funding offices have their feeding frenzy on new money from the grant making world throwing good money after a good idea at the wrong people and approaches. Oh don't you worry, there will be many more books (of the ilk of #FeesMustFall produced by Booysen et al). But please, keep your hopes down that any of these "research projects and book outputs" result in anything like a curriculum (or fee structure) that is any more transformed/decolonised than pre-2015.

Well, what do the Mauritians say that is so different from the SA story? For one, they are actually seeming to apply their minds quite thoroughly, and in a forward looking way. Not playing the blame game, but creatively seeking out solutions.. The article is not detailed, but there are more than some good hints. In South Africa, the discourse on decolonization (and in that it is similar to the transformation discourse of the post-2000 era) is held within a racialised frame of understanding the world - keyword: whiteness. That's appropriate to a point, but SA is now so "post-rainbow" that the whiteness discourse, along with related ones in other even more politicised spaces and with respect to topics, such as land redistribution, unemployment, inequality, poverty and wealth, is actually feeling racist (and here i refer to the expanded definition of racism, not that which claims Africans can't be racist...).

In contrast, the article about social science education at the new African Leadership University takes a different, surprising approach, basing their 'decolonised' social sciences curriculum in 7 principles that thoroughly affirm diversity in so many ways, along with social justice components that are essential for a decolonised African university curriculum. Keywords: open access, reciprocity, multilingualism, internationalism, knowledge production rather than consumption, student-centred, orality along with literacy, literature along with other artefacts of African social reality, and so forth...

Read it here: <https://theconversation.com/what-a-new-university-in-africa-is-doing-to-decolonise-social-sciences-77181>

And here is an article about the launch of the University in 2016:  
<http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20160331161118251>

at [May 20, 2017](#)



Friday, 5 May 2017

## Human Sciences Research Council - One month on

It is quite fascinating to work at a new place; and while I have not yet had my 100 days of settling in, there are some observations which I can make, comparing this to my earlier institutional homes.

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Now about that, Burton Clark has remarked over 30 years ago, that an interesting aspect of the academic profession is that academics are more tied to their disciplines, subjects or fields than their institutions. It is quite easy for a professor in, let's say, chemical engineering education to move from the University of Cape Town to Virginia Tech in the USA, but for the same [Prof. Jenni Case](#), it would be almost impossible to move from UCT Chemical Engineering to, let's say, the Department of Archaeology in the same institution. That, however, does not mean that there are no important differences between Engineering Education at UCT and Virginia Tech (and Jenni has already had a glimpse of that).

In the same way, being a political scientist working in the field of higher education studies, it has been relatively easy to move from the national [Council on Higher Education](#) (i.e. the statutory advisory and quality assurance body in SA HE), to the Institute for Post-School Studies at the [University of the Western Cape](#), then to the Directorate for Institutional Research at the [University of the Free State](#), and eventually into the HE Unit of Education and Skills Development at the [Human Sciences Research Council](#). In all these cases, my major responsibility has been to conduct higher education policy-relevant research as an engaged scholar. The emphases of course are different: The CHE was focused very strongly on national level, policy-relevant research. At UWC, my research (which was mostly linked to the [Centre for Higher Education Transformation/CHET](#)) was mostly 'blue-sky': studies into the contribution of higher education to the development of citizenship competences among students. Conversely, at the UFS, the focus was decidedly institutional: my researchers and I mostly dealt with matters that would ultimately advise rectorate and the university council, like the language policy review, the student affairs quality enhancement review, the review of student governance, the institutional culture studies.

Here at the HSRC, the scope and focus is honed by South African national developmental priorities, variably widened to consider the broader continental and international context, or narrowed to 'drill down' into subsystems and institutions. This does not preclude my involvement in larger projects, of course, especially my passion in publishing projects (such as the [UNESCO-IASAS Handbook on Student Affairs and Services](#), or my work on [African University Presses](#) and into [Student Politics](#), including most recently the [#MustFall student movement of South Africa](#)).

What is somewhat different here at the HSRC is that researchers are treated as professionals *and* knowledge producers in a different way than an academic at the universities where I have previously worked. The difference is that your autonomy to research what you want is somewhat conditional upon your ability to generate funds for that; otherwise, there are enough opportunities to do 'consultancy-type' research for, e.g. the [Department of Higher Education and Training](#), or [Department of Science and Technology](#), and so forth, who have diverse data and policy-relevant research needs. It is a more 'managed' (managerialist?) environment, perhaps. We'll see.

I have never had the 'luxury' to research just what I like - even as a student - I have always done a combination of 'bread-and-butter' research and 'love projects'. So far, I have never had the questionable pleasure of a full-time permanent (tenured) professorial appointment of the old-fashioned kind (and given the teaching loads these days, I'm quite happy to be able to pick and choose what I want to teach and who I want to supervise without having to fill that quota!). What I've done, being quite frugal, is to occasionally finance my own sabbatical; and of course, I have been able to crowd out time during my normal work hours and after-hours, to pursue passion projects. That's the good thing when your job is also your passion and hobby. Anyhow, one month on, and I am getting to know the HSRC and its peoples, structures, functioning. Soon, I will have more to say about the way forward with the new unit on HE that I am leading within the Education & Skills Development programme. I might just get attached here. :)

at [May 05, 2017](#)



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