

Health-promoting schools:**Evidence, strategies, challenges and prospects**

An international colloquium organised by the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies, University of British Columbia, and hosted by the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Studies

Theme: “Many voices, one song”

Venue: Wallenberg Research Centre, STIAS

**Opening address by Prof H Russel Botman,
Rector and Vice-Chancellor, Stellenbosch University**

9 November 2011

Thank you, Therese. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Honourable guests, distinguished colleagues, from my side, welcome to Stellenbosch, one of the most beautiful campuses in the world ... and hopefully also one of the most relevant.

Relevance is mainly what I want to emphasise – making an impact on the lives of people.

That is why this colloquium is important – not only to you and your institutions, but ultimately to the communities you serve.

The conversation that will be unfolding in this room the next two days matters because your work matters – to the people everywhere who stand to benefit from it.

Your first constituency is the many children around the world who can be reached by health-promoting schools. And through them, the rest of the community.

Seen this way, health-promotion in schools is hugely important – and rightly so. As Norway’s Dr Gro Harlem Brundtland once put it when she was Director-General of the World Health Organisation:

There can be no real growth without healthy populations. No sustainable development without tackling disease and malnutrition. And no hope for the spread of freedom, democracy and human dignity unless we treat health as a basic human right.

Let me share some of our experiences at Stellenbosch University with you.

We used to have a Student Health Service – so that our students could see a nurse or a doctor or a dentist when necessary. But at some point we realised that we also needed to include staff. So, we reshaped it into a Campus Health Service.

And then we realised that there was another important dimension besides health, namely wellness – which includes not only physical aspects, but also social, physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual and financial wellness.

The point I am making is that educational institutions – be they schools or universities – have responsibilities that extend far beyond learning and teaching.

In the 1960s and 70s, the Brazilian educator Paulo Freire came up with the concepts of a critical pedagogy and a pedagogy of hope to capture the idea that the role of education is not to maintain the status quo, but to change the world for the better.

He worked in adult education, but his ideas have also found application at school and university level.

Let me quote another inspiring figure, Nelson Mandela. He said:

Education is the great engine of personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine, that a child of farm workers can become the president of a great nation.

Again, this speaks to the power of education, but also to its scope and task.

Here's my final quote of the day. It's by Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells, who by the way is a fellow of the Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study (STIAS). He defined the role of the university as that of an "engine of development".

All of these influences helped shape a comprehensive programme at Stellenbosch, called the HOPE Project, which is about the University playing a relevant role in society by putting its academic excellence at the service of society

The HOPE Project has 5 themes, which were derived from, amongst others, the UN's Millennium Development Goals. They are:

- The eradication of poverty and related conditions
- The promotion of human dignity & health
- The advancement of democracy & human rights
- The maintenance of peace & security; and
- The creation of a sustainable environment & a competitive industry.

These themes have found expression in a number of academic initiatives. There are currently more than 30 of these, and the list keeps growing. Several of them involve the University working with schools and school-going children to achieve developmental aims.

We have a **School Partnership Project**, through which we are helping to build sorely needed capacity at schools in our region.

We have a **Youth Sport Initiative**, which involves children in after-schools programmes. This takes them off the streets and provides them with life skills.

There is also the **Living Legends Programme** of our Frederik Van Zyl Slabbert Institute for Student Leadership Development. A top South African tennis player, Jeff Coetzee, accompanies our students to schools – where children get tennis coaching but also learn self-confidence, financial literacy, respect and communication skills.

And we have a **Kick TB Campaign**, run by the Desmond Tutu TB Centre in our Faculty of Health Sciences. Activation teams visit schools and hand out match-quality soccer balls illustrated with strong TB/HIV awareness messages.

In these and other ways we are building hope in situations where despair is threatening to overwhelm people. Hope is not empty optimism, hope is about realism. It asks of us to consider what we need to do today to make tomorrow better – for society at large.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is what you are doing through focusing on health-promotion in schools. You are building hope, and in that way making a relevant contribution.

This colloquium is well placed to also build crucial partnerships between people and institutions in different parts of the world doing this work.

Well done to the organisers, the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies at the University of British Columbia. And well done to our own STIAS for hosting this event.

We want to learn from your insights about reaching out to schools, so I am looking forward to the outcomes of your discussions. Good luck for the next two days. Have fun!