

Paul Roos Gimnasium 150
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In 1902 al het sekere seuns in hierdie skool bietjie van 'n houdingsprobleem gehad. Die Afrikaner by Stellenbosch Boys' High School met die hoogste punte in 'n onderhoud vir die Rhodes-beurs het gesê nee dankie, na die hel met die imperialis se ponde, ek wil van hom niks weet nie.

Paul Roos se eie #RhodesMustFall.

Toe, soos nou, is die naam van 'n Boereleier in grafitti gebruik toe 'n Transvaalse seun tydens die Anglo Boere-oorlog "Lank lewe oom Paul" uitgekrap het in die klipteëls van die seunsbadkamer se vloer. *Damn the Queen* het kort daarna gevolg. Vandag is dit *Damn oom Paul*, of natuurlik *Oom Jan*. Weer verset jong mense hulle teen wat hulle as 'n verdrukkende orde beleef.

Ek is gevra om iets oor die politiek en die ekonomie te sê en ook natuurlik iets oor Paul Roos se geskiedenis. En in die opskryf van ons geskiedenis was dit altyd ondenkbaar om net die regters en advokate, die ministers en ambassadeurs, die wynmakers en die finansiers, die bybelvertalers en die argitekke te eer, selfs al het so baie van hulle ook die grense in hul eie omgewings geskuif, soos Johan Rupert, of Michael Jordaan, wat op 36 baas geword het by FNB en daarvan die wêreld se innoverendste bank gemaak het. Hierdie skool, waar 'n groot premie geplaas word op tradisie en soms ook op gebondenheid aan reëls, is 150 jaar al ook 'n broeiplek vir rebelle, vir skrywers en digters wat ons nuut laat dink het, pianiste en komponiste wat ons nuwe dinge laat hoor het, skilders, beeldhouers en fotograwe wat ons op nuwe maniere na ons wêreld laat kyk het, en mense met houdingsprobleme wat alarm gemaak en daarop aangedring het dat ons dinge anders begin doen.

Die rebelle was meestal in hul tyd ongewild.

Nóg Anton Lebowski nóg Koos Kombuis nóg talle van die sakemagnate wat lank gelede dalk teësinnig die Jolla Bolla hier voor die Japie Krige-saal gedoen het, was destyds "hoofstroom", al het baie skoolrebelle op hul oudag genoeg ge-mellow of dalk selfs vervelig genoeg geword om "hoofstroom" te word... Dit strek ons

onderwysers oor die jare tot groot eer dat daar nog nooit 'n jaargroep sonder sy stroomop-swemmers was nie. 150 jaar al. Natuurlik maak die meer as 50 Springbokrugbyspelers ons baie trots. En tog: as dit hier net oor rugby gegaan het, was hierdie nie Paul Roos Gimnasium nie. Iewers, ek dink reeds by die skool se stigters, het die besef posgevat dat die sterkste spanne en veerkragtigste koalities, in die klaskamer of die raadsaal of die politiek, en natuurlik op die sportveld, mense saamsnoer wat nie presies dieselfde dink of lyk nie, verskillende vaardighede het, en dinge nie eenders doen nie. Daar's min sporte waar sukses vereis dat almal op dieselfde oomblik presies dieselfde doen. Rugby is so ver daarvan as wat kan. Van meet af aan het rektore ook gewys veelsydigheid maak saak – Paul Roos sêlf het rugby en Latyn ewe goed verstaan.

Hierdie moes nooit 'n plek word waar 'n A in matriek bepaal wat jy werd is nie. In 1907 Willie Hofmeyr, our former rector, wrote: *“We cannot refrain from once more laying stress on the fact that success at examinations is not our highest ideal, and from raising our voice against the prevalent tendency to judge a school by examination results only. The practice is a common one, more especially among those who know least about education, because the examination test is so convenient. But at best it is a poor test, either of a boy or a school; and it is a test of only one side of education, and that, the shallower side. Education in its wider sense, where it includes the formation of character, is far too subtle a thing to be judged by so superficial a test; and to those especially whom we may be addressing now for the last time, those boys who are leaving the School, we would say that we shall judge them, and this School, not by the way they pass their examinations in the first place, but by the kind of men they become.”*

Dit is omdat ons onder ons maroen baadjies almal anders is en omdat onderwysers soos Corrine Lloyd of Anette Austin en Johan Hugo destyds of mev. Stark by Wiskunde en selfs lang Sakkie Swart by Biologie geduld gehad het met ietwat onkonvensionele jong mans dat Paul Roos oor die jare matrieks opgelewer het wat konstruktiewe ontwrigters was, wat bereid was om kanse te vat en die moed gehad het om 'n ander toekoms te verbeel.

En dit was lanklaas so belangrik om 'n beter toekoms te verbeel.

Verbeelding is dringend nodig.

Verbeelding is nodig by die universiteite want standbeelde val en plek-plek bars ongeduld uit in geweld en op kampusse brand bande en geboue en skilderye. Daar is woede oor verwagtinge waaraan nie voldoen word nie en soms is daar plein en simpel kriminaliteit, gepleeg deur jong heethoofde wat alle gesprek verwerp. Sommige van hulle, of dit nou in #RhodesMustFall of #AfrikaansMustFall of die EFF by Mafikeng en Tuks of selfs Open Stellenbosch is, sien in revolusie slegs die belofte van groot winste, sonder om moontlike reuse verliese vir hulle, vir ons en vir toekomstige geslagte te verreken. Hulle ken nie oorlog nie, daarom is hulle nie daarvoor bang nie.

Party van die studente se verwagtinge is onredelik; ander weer geldig. Geeneen van ons durf myns insiens hoop om ooit in 'n omgewing te wees waar geen kunswerk of boek ons aanstoot gee nie. Kuns, selfs uit 'n vorige era, is artefakte wat ons met 'n ander tyd se waardes konfronteer. Dit daag 'n nuwe generasie studente uit tot 'n gesprek oor wie hulle is. Dit daag hulle ook uit om iets nuuts te skep wat beter is. Die verwagting dat alle simbole uit 'n vorige era daarom bedek of vernietig moet word, is vir my moeilik om te sluk want om die verlede uit te wis is geen waarborg daarvoor dat ons dit nie herhaal nie. As old boys van hierdie skool is 'n deel van ons plig om 'n toekoms te help verbeel waar talentvolle studente 'n wêreldklasopvoeding kry al is hul ouers arm. Dit gaan 'n kreatiewe balans verg tussen verkennend praat, mekaar probeer verstaan, en vuiste teen vandale bal. Dit gaan heelwat verbeelding vereis.

We need imagination to know how to respond to those who insist Afrikaans must disappear as a language of instruction on the few campuses where a demand for Die Taal remains. Is monolingualism the most creative solution our generation can conjure, 20 years after adopting a world class constitution which urged us not only to “recognise the injustices of our past”, and work to correct them, but which held out the promise of unity through diversity, not uniformity?

We need imagination in our ranks and especially among boys who have yet to matriculate here in how we engineer a more equitable economy too, where strong growth lifts the weakest first. Some like Sampie Terreblanche say this was always inevitable; somehow we've managed to prioritise the formation of new elites in this country, instead of really lifting ordinary people up. 17 million South Africans receive social grants but that's no reason at all to feel good about ourselves as South Africans, because thousands of mostly black dysfunctional government schools still condemn all but the most resilient and brilliant poor kids to a life of poverty and low quality work. *We can't afford, for reasons of pragmatism and justice, to judge our economic success by how well the most well to do do.* Some young economist from

the benches of Paul Roos will have to figure out how to give the least well off a demonstrable stake in the kind of economic activity which we value.

We need the imagination of our forefathers to deal with kids who just can't pay. Consider the example of a young student in the earliest years who was temporarily expelled from the Gymnasium due to unpaid fees. William Milne, our school's third rector, saw talent in the boy and pardoned him.

His name was Jan Smuts.

If, for another 150 years, we want to remain a leading, relevant and respected school, we will need imagination to prepare our boys for jobs that do not yet exist, and prepare them too for the disappearance of jobs that exist today.

How do we teach boys to use technologies that have not been invented and to solve problems we cannot even anticipate today, asked Andreas Schleicher, head of the directorate of education at the OECD club of rich nations, in a recent TED talk. So we need imagination to create and make best use of devices that are unimaginable to us. Even the youngest old boys in this room matriculated in a time before Twitter.

If you didn't, don't rub it in.

We need imagination to deal with a world economy where graduates are looking for jobs and employers say they can't find the skills they need. Where 1.8 billion young people who grew up in the smartphone age and in the shadow of financial meltdown are finding it harder to get a good education, a permanent job, a home of their own and a mate with whom to start a family. In a recent special report on The Young, *The Economist* argued millennials are an oppressed minority, held back by their elders.

We are those elders.

Yes, young people are richer and likely to live longer than any previous generation. On their smartphones they can find all the information in the world, and porn... If they are female or gay, *The Economist* said, they enjoy unparalleled freedoms in most countries. They are brainier than previous generations, eat better and study longer. But much of their talent is being squandered. In most parts of the world they are at least twice as likely as their elders to be unemployed. Over 25% of youngsters in middle-income nations and 15% in rich ones are not in education, employment or

training. The job market is more competitive than ever, and in many countries the rules are rigged to favour those who already have a job. As school, we must be aware of this changing world. Frustrations are clearly not limited to South Africa's youth.

Schleicher, the OECD education guru, echoes the wisdom of Willie Hofmeyr, our one-time rector, when he concludes that better grades do not translate into better skills, better jobs, and better lives. Employers today do not ask what young people know and what knowledge they can reproduce. For that there's Google. They ask whether kids can extrapolate from what they know and apply their knowledge in novel situations.

So we need teachers with imagination and school administrators who are willing to reform. It's a difficult thing, educational reform; Schleicher joked it is like moving a graveyard. "You just can't rely on people out there to help you with it."

Paul Roos's creative reformers realise and will realise excellence for some is not enough. They know the poor should also do well at school. They focus not only on the brightest students, because that would cause disparities in performance to grow. They know improving the quality of teaching starts with excellent teachers, and of those we are lucky to have had many.

They invest, like in Finland, in schools where the difference will be most keenly felt. They attract the strongest principals to the toughest schools and the most talented teachers into the most challenging classrooms, and they pay their teachers well.

Productive habits are first taught in school. This is also true of teamwork and leadership. We should learn by catching curve-balls ourselves and teach by throwing them to our boys. Teaching facts is not as useful as it was in the age before Google. Adapting to change and learning fast matter much more these days, as any of you who has recently had to employ somebody might know.

Soos wat Nicholas Nassim Taleb wys in sy boek *The Black Swan*, maak dit wat ons reeds weet al hoe minder saak. Dis eerder ons vermoë om op die onverwagse te reageer wat sal bepaal of ons sukses behaal. Hy noem voorbeelde van sulke Black Swans: skokke en groot gebeurtenisse met impak wat niemand sien kom nie, al sê almal agterna "Ek het jou mos gesê". 9/11 was 'n "Black Swan". Ook die val van die Berlynse muur en die vrylating van Mandela sonder om die ANC of die land meer as

'n week waarskuwing te gee. Of natuurlik die aanstelling van die stomme Des van Rooyen as finansminister. Vir drie dae. Ons het dit nie sien kom nie.

Die Guptas het dalk wel.

Suid-Afrika is vol Black Swans. Kyk net na die politiek. Wat as die ANC se steun in 'n verkiesing onder 50% val? Wat as jong mense *en masse* weier om te stem? Wat as die DA skeur of die EFF die mag oorneem in 'n groot munisipaliteit of selfs provinsie? Wat as een van daai korrupte kredietgraderingsagentskappe soos Moody's of Standard & Poor's ons skuld na rommel afgradeer en uitlanders padgee met hul geld? En verby ons grense: Wat as die 92-jarige Robert Mugabe se dinastie voortgesit word deur sy 50-jarige vrou Grace? Wat as Iran die rooi knoppie druk?

Of hier by ons: Wat as 30 jong mense by Paul Roos se hekke saamdrom met plakkaat en spuitverf en selfone waarop hulle die slagspreuk #PaulRoosMustFall die wêreld vol Tweet?

Teen geen van hierdie skokke kan ons ons heeltelmal pantser nie en padgee is makliker gesê as gedaan: Selfs Australië het sy gevare, so vergeet maar van Perth. Baie min van ons kan dit in elk geval bekostig: 'n Steak kos R700... Maar ons kan onself en ons jong mense kondisioneer om die onverwagse te verwag. Om nie maklik van stryk gebring te word nie en aanpasbaar te wees sonder om agter elke gier aan te hardloop of summier van rigting te verander as die wind anders begin waai.

Oor die hipotetiese #PaulRoosMustFall: Daar is gegewens in ons skool se geskiedenis, waaronder die lang jare waartydens net wit seuns hier kon studeer, apartheidspolitici wat hierdie gange bewandel het, die geld en bevoorregting en gehalte-onderrig wat ons van so baie ander skole onderskei, wat die skool kwesbaar kan maak vir politieke aanvalle. Daar sal vrae gevra word oor toelatingsbeleid, ook in die howe, en oor die impak wat Paul Roos buite die skool se onmiddellike ouergemeenskap het.

Ons sal nooit al ons kritici tevrede kan stel nie, en dis fine. Maar ons kan versigtig kyk na daardie dinge wat ons skool kwesbaar maak vir kritiek, ook van opportuniste. Ons kan ou tradisies teen die eise van 'n nuwe era meet. Ons kan kies om ons heeltel bloot te stel aan uitdagende idees en aan mense wat anders dink. Dit maak ons meer vlugvoetig.

Ons kan 'n top-skool wees wat nie 'n kokon van uitnemendheid word nie. Ons kan ons seuns blootstel aan gewaagde boeke en riskante sprekers. Nooi hulle in.

In 150 years, we have not tamed uncertainty. All of us know we never will. But our forefathers weren't so bad at reacting to change, and making it happen.

They survived wars and the introduction of the telephone. They saw huge political change, from Boererepublieke to Union and a Republic. They lived through the assassination of a prime minister, the first man on the moon, and the doubling of computing speeds every two years since the 50s. They chose to open up the Rhodes Scholarship just in time to girls, even though our school nearly lost the scholarship in the late 80s, when most Rhodes Scholars turned against Paul Roos. They made Paul Roos one of only 51 out of 1983 formerly white schools whose parents voted to open up to all races and become Model C. They anticipated government indifference and softened the impact of a funding freeze by investing heavily in teachers, classrooms, a world class aquatics center, and dizzyingly impressive sporting facilities at Markötter.

We have many achievements on which to build.

But it is not our past which will determine the trajectory of this school's next 150 years. It is the choices we make and the kind of men we send forth into the world.

ENDS