

What if Education... Podcast

Humanities' alternative model for academic development

Monika Theron - Host

Think about how higher education is currently organised and now try to think how it could go beyond disciplinary specialisations where locally situated scholars, workers, artists, activists, community-based practitioners and associations contribute to education through participatory approaches. What can we learn from engaging with them? In what ways can their voice enrich classroom learning and bring meaning to academic quests?

These are the questions that the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) and the Humanities Across Borders (HAB) program are trying to answer.

Hello and thank you for joining me on today's podcast where we will all be addressing how one can incorporate an alternative model for academic development within humanities.

I'm joined today by Dr Philippe Peycam, Dr. Aarti Kawlra and Orraya Chawnan. But as always, let me have the guests introduce themselves. Philippe, shall we start with you?

Philippe Peycam

Hello. My name is Philippe Peycam. I'm the director of the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) here in Leiden in the Netherlands. And yeah, I'm an historian by training and have been involved in setting up a number of projects, including the Humanities Across Borders (HAB).

Aarti Kawlra

So hello, I'm Aarti Kawlra. I'm a social anthropologist of South India. I've worked with artisans in and especially weavers in South India. I'm now the director of the Humanities Across Borders (HAB) program.

And yeah, I'm excited to be at this What if Education podcast.

Monika Theron - Host

Welcome ... and Orraya. Tell us a little bit about yourself.

Orraya Chawnan

Hi, everyone. Thank you for having me here. My name is Orraya Chawnan.

Now I'm studying a Master of Arts program in social science, ethnicity and development at [Chiang Mai University](#).

And I used to be a research assistant on the project "[Living in and with the forest](https://www.ias.asia/the-newsletter/article/living-forest-northern-thailand-engaging-karen-youth-participatory-community)". with Humanities Across Borders (HAB). (<https://www.ias.asia/the-newsletter/article/living-forest-northern-thailand-engaging-karen-youth-participatory-community>)

Monika Theron - Host

Great. Welcome. Thank you for joining us today.

Before we begin, I think it would be a good idea to let the listeners out there know who or what is International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) and where does Humanities Across Borders (HAB) fit in? and ...

How does it differ from traditional educational models?

Who would like to take this question?

Philippe Peycam

OK, well, the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) is an interesting species. I would say, because it was created in 1994 with the idea of rethinking the way to study or to engage with what we call Asia.

And it was devised very much as a facilitating platform and not as a cluster group of scholars on working on Asia; a meeting ground, but also anyone really engaged in Asia from Asia. But it has both a national and an international mandate.

It is always based on collaboration. It is within the academic environment, framework.

It's a postgraduate institute, but it has its own autonomy in setting up its own activities, projects, et cetera.

And IIAS in the last few years, has been, I think, focusing its attention on facilitating a number of activities, around five, I would say, functions, broad functions.

One, of course, is research, supporting research on-in-with Asia or Asian context in the world.

But also, on facilitating educational programs, including HAB, not just educational programs taking place at university, but also forms of pedagogy, educational models based on new forms of collaboration.

And IIAS is also supporting activities pertaining to what we call communication and dissemination of knowledge in regard to Asia. It is also very much involved in building new platforms, new networks, new communities on the number of topics related, again, to Asia in the world.

And finally, it is increasingly also engaged in directly reaching out to what we call the community or different groups and social segments beyond the academic one.

So, within this very broad, you know, with this broad array of functions, IIAS has been quite a pioneering institution in setting up programs that have crystallised into things that continue on their own volition.

In the case of HAB, it is creating a collaborative platform across many continents in the way of rethinking knowledge with a humanistic approach.

Monika Theron - Host

How is it different from other educational models?

Philippe Peycam

Well, just for IIAS, I could say that.

I mean, there is a ... there's a great I would say almost luxury in that we have an institution which is a national institution. It's a public institute. And that has this capacity to really engage a different level with different players or actors. And in that sense, I think it is quite unique.

Unfortunately, we don't see so many counterparts twice elsewhere and in particular in Asia. And actually, that's one of the objectives of HAB, which is to facilitate the growth of similar open platforms in different, you know, educational, academic and community contexts.

Aarti Kawlra

I think the most important thing about the way we look at knowledge production in this program is that we begin with what we know. Not with what we don't know.

And I think that's very important, because once we start looking at what we know, we look around, we situate ourselves, we see what is in front of us, behind us, in the context in which we live. We look at ourselves. We look at the relationships we are having around us, and we learn from that. We start with that.

We see that as something that will nourish us to learn more and more and at different levels. And this you know, we are calling it situated learning or experiential pedagogies, which draw inspiration from already existing modes of being in the world. Like people, when artisans or writers, and so on, activists, environmental activists who have certain ways of doing things which look at the world around you, and then you try to make sense of it, you make some meaning of it, and then link it to the wider global processes around you.

And it's just as simple as that. What we see, what other people are already doing, which we tend to forget when we look at textbooks and when we are inside the classroom.

These are some of the pedagogies which we have experimented with in the last four years since 2016, when we first got the grant from the Mellon Foundation for the Humanities Across Borders program.

And now in the second phase of this grant, along with our 19 or 20 partners, IIAS is now working towards institutionalising this program. Like, for example, Chiang Mai University from where Orraya comes from has a long tradition, a two-decade long tradition of working with communities and specifically the Karen community, the Huay Hin Lad Nai community. And she will tell you more about where she did the research as part of our program.

So, we learn from Chiang Mai, we learn from our partners in Africa, we learn from our partners in India.

And we hope that in the next five years, we would be able to have a kind of critical global curriculum that we could co-teach and co-share. But that's still a long way ahead.

Monika Theron - Host

And Orraya, for you? You're now doing your master's at another university, although it's a partner university I hear. How is that different from when you were over here?

Orraya Chawnan

In Thailand we have a formal education, right and informal education. And I mean formal education in Thailand, like when you go to the school or the university, you're just studying in the room and listen to your professor or teacher. And you just OK, just listen. But when I go do the fieldwork - informal education - I just ... go. In this case, in the Karen community, like you go to this community. You go to sleep with them, eat with them, go to the field, go to plant the rice, go to do everything that they do, you know. And I think this is very different from the formal education.

And you said how it's different from the Netherlands?

I think that the Netherlands is a new experience for me. I can identify them like informal, informal education too. These are real people you know, is a real thing, that I listen, it's a real thing that I can touch. I feel something.

Monika Theron - Host

Do you have a particular example that you would like to share with the audience? From the methods, the HAB methods, that you've experienced and that, you know, just to give a bit of a bigger picture of...

Orraya Chawnan

OK. First time I did my internship my teacher sent me to the Karen community and after that, after the bachelor's degree, my teachers said: "You must go to the Netherlands". And so, I did this experience. ... (laughing) OK. OK, thank you.

When I go to the Netherlands, it was a short school experience, just five days of training. They bring me to the Leiden University, and they teach me everything that they can. And this workshop is like a tool to help me understand them and can observe them. Like I can compare the different things from the community in the forest and the city in the Netherlands, you know.

It's really a different place, different weather, different culture, and they can talk. I mean, HAB, they can talk like: "OK, I need this. There you go. OK, this one, this one."

We can talk. But in Thailand sometimes Thai people don't talk, yeah don't explain things.

In the project they have an [accession card](#). You must write on an accession card when you go to the field. That's why they trained me; you know ... Like what did you see? What did you learn? What did you touch? Filling in a picture ... the feeling you get when you talk to people, something like that.

That's the Saturday market, right. In Leiden. And they go to the markets and bring me with to observe.

And I see one couple – like a grandma and grandpa - and I just “Oh, can I take a photo with you guys?” and they “Oh OK, yes”. ... And I think this is a good opportunity to talk with them. And I go to them and say, “What is this?” ... They pull out a fish on their hand, and I just said: “What is this?” and they: “Do you want to try?” ... “OK”, and they give it to me. ... very funny ... And in the end as Netherland’s people, they very nice.

Monika Theron - Host

OK, thank you. ...

So, you have Leiden University that's attached to your model, I would say, or at least a part of it. How much resistance did you have to deal with to get where you are, or are you still experiencing it? And is there a way around it for others to perhaps, you know, follow suit?

Philippe Peycam

Uh, yes. It's a good question.

Well, we have too yeah... The whole idea of this project is very much to establish a link between the existing university environment, such as Leiden University, for instance, and these communities, these groups, including their own surrounding communities, in terms of knowledge production, knowledge making, knowledge sharing and et cetera.

So that means addressing directly or indirectly structural issues which have to do with, for instance, disciplinary fragmentation of knowledge or also the in the larger context, the separation between what is supposed to be considered as academic and not.

Obviously, it is complicated, but the good things that we find, a number of people, individuals in general, who understand the need for the university to re anchor itself in its civic function.

And that's a thing, a big challenge for all universities, especially in the world we are living in today. And I think the Leiden University, I mean, at least the people who are now in charge, are very much aware of that.

As I said, a number of individuals within the university are very much involved or supporting IIAS and beyond that, we have a direct collaboration for this program with the Leiden University College, which somehow has a bit more room for rethinking pedagogical educational models.

Monika Theron - Host

Okay. And from a cultural perspective, how is ... how welcoming is your approach from other cultures? Because you are trying to transfer knowledge not only in a .. . European country.

Philippe Peycam

Yeah, absolutely.

Well, I think ... I mean, the question would be why the Mellon Foundation chose IAS to undertake this this kind of program? And there you can see that somehow this institute, because of its very inclusive and open platform, has been able to facilitate the sharing of knowledge, whilst at the same time acknowledging the multi-centrality of its production.

We work always collaboratively. We never undertake anything by ourselves alone. So, the whole philosophy of this program is very much as Aarti was mentioning, to really embed this process of knowledge production and sharing within the local context in a situated way. And as a result, therefore, knowledge becomes meaningful and civically relevant for everyone who is involved. So, we recognize the multi-centrality of knowledge and yet also its universality when it comes to asking the questions, basically.

Monika Theron - Host

Yeah, that's a good point. ...

On the website of Humanities Across Borders (HAB), it says: "Ours is a movement in the humanities that sets out to propose an alternative model for academic development for students, faculty and administrators."

Is there a one size fits all model or is this something that you adapt as you go along constantly?

Aarti Kawlra

So, ... One important point is that it's not just with scholars, not just with faculty. It also includes administrators. So, in conventional collaboration's, it's usually ... the administrator's role is only to just sign the agreement between two scholars and then just to facilitate within a single discipline. Whereas in Humanities Across Borders (HAB), the administrators are equally stakeholders of this program. And I think that's very critical.

And every institution has a different model. So, for example, in Chiang Mai University, there is a vice president for community engagement. And faculty have possibility of doing work in the community and then gain some points for advancement.

Similarly, in Africa, we have some partners in [University of Gaston Berger](#), in Senegal. They have an idea of a lab of a community lab where multiple disciplinary scholars work with the local community around certain themes.

So that's the interesting bit about our partnerships. Our partnerships involve institutions that are willing to embed themselves, as Philippe had mentioned. And so, the role of the administrator is as important as the role of the scholar who is engaged in knowledge production.

Monika Theron - Host

HAB's focus is on community engaged or situated learning pedagogies. Have you participated in any of these events? If so, what was your role and what did you learn?

Aarti Kawlra

So, Humanities Across Borders has a number of collaborative education formats, ... as we call them. You know, they're already being experimented by IIAS in various contexts, especially the urban context, which has been already working on multistakeholder roundtables, which take place in situ, or in the urban setting that they are discussing the issue around.

And also, IIAS has already been working with graduate schools where those graduate schools don't take place in universities, but inside special settings ... like they had the school in Kyoto in the city of Kyoto, or we had a school again in Chiang Mai, where we looked at a graduate school on kraft, where students from all over the world came.

So, IIAS was already experimenting with these collaborative education formats where students and faculty come from all over the world and come together in a new learning context.

So, you go to the learning context rather than to bring the learning context into your classroom.

These kind of experiential education formats were already being tried out by IIAS. And at HAB, we took them, and we started experimenting with them with all our partners in different geographies. So, we held workshops. For example, we did a writing and a reading workshop in Chennai where we invited filmmakers, artists, young scholars, young photographers, in addition to environmental activists who came together, and we discussed the question of so many other issues in a very open atmosphere. ... And we got a kind of taste of how you think and write critically when all these multiple perspectives are brought to the table.

For example, another one we did on rice. So, bringing together farmers as well as consumers of rice and also local people who want to preserve the various varieties of rice to see what you can do about a certain ecology in Assam, where there are communities that are having kind of ethnic conflict between them. But how rice can become a medium of conversation and a shared value, which brings people together. ... Together at a table. So, you can talk about various other issues as well.

And so how can we learn from these models where you can then not only bring other perspectives, multiple perspectives, but also to see how you can continue conversations when mostly these conversations always break down, when it comes to multiple ideologies or political interests and so on.

Monika Theron - Host

And were there any results after the conversations? Because that's always the question, right? You always have conversations, but then, no ... no one ever finds out what the results are.

Philippe Peycam

Well, I could say that ... whatever HAB is doing is really based on what people have been doing. We are not inventing anything. In fact, we are very much just putting into conversation, into contact initiatives that have been developed locally by academic activists or civic people or groups. So somehow, they have developed their own ecology of knowledge, development, knowledge sharing themselves. And to some extent, some have been able to institutionalise this, some less so. And that's the one of the challenges of the program, is to help these initiatives to be more than just individualised, localised, isolated initiatives.

So, what we have in mind is, ... First of all, I would like to say we don't want to quantify impacts because we can't ... it doesn't work like that. The testimony of Orraya is a good one. It's ... how can you quantify what she wants to do in the future? But the point is really much to build a critical mass of these collaboration's and being able then to develop the instruments that make them accessible and reproducible, potentially for institutions and people.

And also, even before that, for them to think that it is possible to do that. And that's, I think, the biggest problem, bigger challenge.

In many ways people are trapped in their own specialisations and also, as I mentioned earlier, there are these implicit hierarchies that are there, that for instance don't recognise, for instance, the knowledge of somebody who works on the street as opposed to a big urban planner.

Everyone has something to contribute, in that sense.

So, it is repositioning ... uh, also the university as a much more socially responsive and accountable body within the social framework, social context. So, yeah. I don't know to what extent we will achieve revolutionary, transformative solutions, but at least we want to push this experiment. And we've been very lucky that a major foundation has given us the chance and we've been also lucky to find responsive people everywhere, including in Leiden.

Monika Theron - Host

So, with all this in mind, eventually you have to show something. How do you do that? Do you document it, do you do videos, do you do podcasts? What's the plan? How do you make sure that everybody else has access to your results?

Aarti Kawlra

Yeah, that's a good point. I mean ... So, what we've done is we've kind of anchored our engagement through the idea of building a curriculum and a humanist model of curriculum. Now, this curriculum is grounded around 4 syllabi tracks.

These 4 syllabi tracks are *Food*, which is something, you know, universal, universally valuable and meaningful. *Place*, or place making. *Craft* or craft making and *Words* or words as we use them. Words in different contexts.

So, these are anchoring points which allow us to enter into methodological engagement, knowledge, production and eventually dissemination.

Most of our work has been, you know, going to a place, talking to people, walking. ... Walking is one of our most important pedagogies, videos, photographs. Listening is yet another. We have built a digital storytelling tool online where we use these multimedia assets. These then become the

elements of conversation. So many young people like Orraya and Chiang Mai. We have young scholars and early career faculty who have been using this digital storytelling tool to do fieldwork and to actually document their fieldwork.

So, for example, from Mali, we have some students who sent us photographs of cowhide designs from West Africa. Each design has a specific word, is related to a certain lineage of linguistic usage and has some relationship with communities. So, we start with a word, and it takes you to migration of communities, it takes you to pastoral communities.

And this digital storytelling tool is one of the ways in which we want to eventually build a repository of oral histories and narratives, which will then be used by our partners for teaching and learning.

Monika Theron - Host

Orraya, what do you use? What how are you contributing? ... I don't know. Are you doing verbal communications or are you sending photos just to document your findings?

Orraya Chawnan

I think first ... the communication ... is very easy to talk with them.

I have a lot of the pictures when they, go to work, stay in the home, do the food and I have a lot of videos. And I write a report ... like a data base for my teacher. The everyday life of them.

I save it on One Drive, or email and key on the word. Sometimes you go to the accession card on the Humanity Across Borders website and my teacher will analyse them.

Monika Theron - Host

OK. ... So, I'm sure we've touched on a couple of these points already, but maybe in case we haven't. What does the future of HAB look like?

Aarti Kawlra

Yeah, I haven't really thought about it because I've been so, you know, concerned about how we get it off the ground, especially now during the pandemic.

Yeah, it's a kind of a dream I have. And a vision or... Yeah, the dream is to see that in a classroom that we break all the barriers. And ...

I'll give you one example. When we had a conference and a faculty from Myanmar, Mandalay University. We were having a discussion on Humanities Across Borders (HAB) and for her, the main important point was that ... Look, we go to the community, as and when we like, we have the resources, we just call them, and we land up on their door. And they accept us. They don't take ... even not necessarily ... appointments.

And we found that when we had to do the reading Leiden school, we had to take so many appointments with everybody here. But when we go in Asia, Africa, there are no appointments. Anyway, that's not the point.

The point was that they cannot come. The university doors are not open to them. There is a guard in every university, in every university that I've been to, there is a security gate.

I think HAB is just creating these border crossing spaces, as we call them. A curriculum is also a border crossing space. And I hope that we have more such spaces and people can go in and out and see that this is a place for them as well, not just for scholars or experts, but also for people who live around the university and not just the physical aspect of the university, but also the substantive knowledge production aspect.

So, yeah, my dream is that we have more and more such spaces.

Monika Theron - Host

The greatest challenges so far. ... Do you have any that you have learned from and can move on from or it's still blocking you, perhaps?

Philippe Peycam

I think the greatest challenge is to me, the way institutions are set up and the difficulty to change mindsets framed by institutional models. To me, it's a big challenge. ...

Monika Theron - Host

I mean, everywhere in the world or just in specific parts of the world?

Philippe Peycam

OK, I was especially thinking of universities and academia.

There are many segments of societies we all involved in, but I find one of the most conservative and difficult to change, is the university. And yet it is necessary that it happens. And you want to do it with people, not by excluding. You need to be inclusive.

So, it's a fascinating topic. And the universities as a model is a recent model in human history. And as it is framed today, it is very much the European Humboldtian model, as we call it, since the 19th century, ... 18, 19th century ... enlightenment, et cetera.

Europe claimed that it knew everything better than the others. And also, it was much more aristocratic, ... you know, society. Now we are living in a different world, including with the new forms of communication that you ... online. So, everything is much more accessible and open now. So how the university can adjust, adapt to these challenges without losing its ... I think it's, relevance and especially its civic relevance.

Monika Theron - Host

And for you? Do you have any additional challenges?

Aarti Kawlra

The main challenge is really to, as Phillippe mentioned, ... just talking to people with a certain mindset. I mean, we are experiencing that in every ... in every respect in the world today. But scholars particularly ... you know.

There's a kind of academic mindset which is driven by publications, which is driven by this whole machinery of the university, which allows a certain role for advancement and so on and so forth.

And ... So you have to be really a scholar whose kind of somebody on the outside with a spirit of opposition or a ... you know ... spirit of inquiry and the ability to really be free from all this; and yet be within it. Because you cannot participate in this education process without the universities.

We are not saying that we throw the baby with the bathwater, but there is a need for individuals who have the courage to stand and be kind of alert to changes, alert to ossification, alert to so many things around us, which we are living in a dynamic world. And we cannot become complacent about knowledge production.

We need to be alert about all these things and not become comfortable through the processes that academe provides for us.

So, finding such individuals has been a challenge.

Philippe Peycam

Yeah. What I would like to say ... that within this very heavy structure, that are universities, there's a lot of great people and great knowledge. So, it is trying to find new spaces that can enable them to cultivate some aspects of their knowledge and engagement that are not always valued properly.

I think if we can help doing that through HAB ... and, you know... if these spaces can really take place and be acknowledged by the universities as important for them to change and to move, you know, beyond the traditional role, then I think there's a lot of potential.

So if this can be harnessed, somehow, I think that through HAB, that would be a big achievement.

Monika Theron - Host

OK, I'm going to bring in my futuristic angle, which I like to do into the show. So, bear with me.

So, let's say it's 20 years from now when hopefully all the technical restrictions are an afterthought, or at least within education. And we have the ability to teleport experts into classrooms to engage with students and teachers alike on a day-to-day basis. No matter where and when, expert advice has become open and accessible to anyone, when given the platform.

The question is: Do you think that this form of accessibility to knowledge and expert opinion will be valuable? ... Because how can one validate such expert opinions, if they are so many? ... And in this future, where is the filter for good information versus bad information?

Aarti Kawlra

You know, it's the difference between looking at a map or asking somebody on the street for the knowledge of where to go.

I feel that people will need to ask ... will need to have a connection ... look into somebody's eyes and say ... and get a sense of the other person's ... the body of that person ... the direction that he said go left not right or, you know. You need that connection.

Of course, it's all there. You can pick it up even online. So I can see a whiff of that already. But how many of us would love it if somebody says: "Come, let me show you".

Monika Theron - Host

But if ... even if it was an A.I., for instance, then you don't necessarily know whether you have that ... Well, it's not necessarily a personal connection. Right?

Can you trust that expert opinion? Who filters that knowledge, whether it's accurate or whether it's not accurate?

Philippe Peycam

Well, I think that's the role of the university. And that it goes back to ... The big challenge of the university is to give science, give meaning to things. And then if we have experts being a or in flesh experts ... personally I don't like the word expert, because that creates already some strange sense of, you know, an accountability socially... But if the university is able to generate, uh, people who specialise in any forms of knowledge but who do it in a more ... again, in a more socially embedded responsible way, then I would hope that this kind of big dichotomy and this risk of being governed by this ... this algorithm or something that think for us become the norm.

And obviously this is the challenge. And it is also clear that there are some trends that would push us towards this direction.

The economic system, as it is today, goes always towards more concentration, monopolisation, and we have to build capacity to resist this impulse. And again, that's where I think the role of the university is to generate people who can specialise keeping a certain distance from this ... potential, I think, dangerous trend.

Monika Theron - Host

I feel that the trend is ... is digital, is AI. People are trying to make algorithms for everything. And I'm wondering, you know, do you even think about it, that that might be a direction that you will have to go into? And how would you, you know, incorporate that?

And the same thing for Orraya, or at least when she's doing her research ... will that change perhaps 20 years from now? And will that change be welcomed or not?

Orraya Chawnan

OK ... This is the Karen people who live in the forest. Right. But they would be like us here and they can talk Thai ... and just a few Karen can speak Thai well.

And in this community the villager goes outside... I mean, or go to the market, go to the do the thing they want ... you know shopping, order the online shopping. ... You know, like us.

But I think they know how to live with the forest, and they know how to live outside too, because they are really smart ... you know... really very smart.

They know how to use it. I mean, the information on the internet, or Google or the twitter ... they know it. ... they know the good, the bad and how to choose the good one to apply or adapt in their life.

They will talk a lot about the directory or the Internet or everything that the government wants to give out ... something like that. They always talk and discuss about this one ...

Just be careful to use it you know, because the information is really fast, you cannot know everything.

Aarti Kawlra

What Araya mentioned and I think just to say that it's when we are able to make a choice, you know, when there are multiple truths or falsities, then you need to make a choice. ... And so how do you make that choice?

I think that's what she mentioned that people will have to make a choice. And it's the ability to make that choice that we are really looking at through education and through a humanist model of education.

How can we make that choice? And that choice, that is meaningful for yourself. It will have implications. So, you need to make a choice not only for yourself, but also for the society. So that's why the choice is most important.

Monika Theron - Host

Yes. I think that's also good to bring in to ... I mean, I'm sure you've already got it in your programs ... but that it is an important point that you still have to have your own opinion. You still have to have your own choices of what information you ...

Aarti Kawlra

... Pick and what you use and what you disseminate. ...

Philippe Peycam

It's not just still. ... You must have. So that's what I think these programs are meant to bring to the front the diversity of experience and agency. People she describes the Karen are completely powerless in front of so much bigger transformation taking place.

So how ... at some point their voice can make a difference or not. So these are the challenges.

And the question about technology, to me, it's ... there's a problem because it becomes an end in itself. It becomes an almost a new religion. There's a messianic approach to this technology that it will solve everything. And everything is about technology. I think we need to question this.

First of all, who will benefit from this this belief and who won't? There will be always people excluded. We will need to know that.

So how can we enable, again, technology to be just a means, an instrument and not, you know, a drive that drives our life ... in the kind of a very passive, powerless way?

So, yeah, I don't know if it makes a connection. ...

Monika Theron - Host

No, no ... it makes a connection. Yeah.

And then Covid, of course, threw everything in the works, right?

Because certain things you used to rely on and function with, were not available. And then suddenly technology became your life, which was like the worst and the best thing that could have happened ... to certain people.

Philippe Peycam

Yeah. And it revealed also the tension ... points of tension, that are at play in society. Now, we know more clearly, OK, we can do everything virtually, but is that what we want and who will benefit from that? Who will be left out?

But now we need to know, what are the ultimate consequences?

What was fascinating for our program ourselves is, last year, we were in the process of writing the proposal to the Mellon Foundation to continue the program. And we were pretty much on set in how we would like to do it. And then the outbreak started. I mean, the lockdown and then the foundation itself became embroiled in all this debate. And when we came up with the first proposal, they told us, OK, well, maybe now we need to change the budget because there's maybe no need to travel anymore. And we said: "wait ... no ... we can't do that".

So, we need OK ... we need to incorporate online, when necessary, but we need to be master of this process.

Luckily, a number of institutions said: "wait, wait, we want people to go back to school when it would be possible", etc.

And I think this, again, revealed the extent to which we have to be very much alert, to the risks of falling into some trends without thinking. And I think at a more rooted level, what HAB is doing, is very much enabling people to recognise, acknowledge different experience, different people, and to incorporated it, so that we can think as real citizens, as inclusive citizens and positioning ourselves in relation to all these different parameters.

It's utopian, maybe, but we need to, I think, we need to do it very much. Even more so now.

Aarti Kawlra

And also, when ... you know that the pandemic put a spotlight on our everydayness of our teaching, and especially this online teaching, it kind of showed us the routineness of our work. And we were able to hear ourselves speak and think much more than when you do in a classroom ... There's a kind of romance of going to the university or romance of having a tutorial with your students and so on. But it broke all that. That romance was completely broken. And you were sitting in front of your computer with dis-alienated, disembodied ... in a disembodied way, trying to deliver your lectures. Then that spotlight becomes on what you say, how you say it and to whom you're saying it. So that's ... that's quite something.

Monika Theron - Host

Well, there you have it. Another interesting view on how education could be or should be taught, some lessons learned and hopefully some inspiration in the way you look at teaching or learning.

Thank you again to my guests, Dr. Philippe Peycam, Dr. Aartie Kawlra and Orraya Chanan.

If you have any comments or questions, you would like to forward to me or the guest speakers today, or if you would like to join me on one of the What if Education podcast. Please send us an email and I look forward to welcoming you on the next podcast.