Cheryl de la Rey Dedication – A tribute

Professor Cheryl Merle de la Rey, vice chancellor and principal of the University of Pretoria since 2009, hails from Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. She matriculated from the Parkhill Senior Secondary School in Durban and received the degrees BA, BA (honours) and MA in psychology from the University of Natal (Durban). Her Masters dissertation was on the role of security of social identity in intergroup relations. The PhD, which she obtained in 1999 from the University of Cape Town, was titled ‘Career narratives of women professors in South Africa’.

After a stint as a secondary school teacher, she was appointed lecturer in psychology first at the University of Durban-Westville where she served for six years and then as lecturer, senior lecturer and associate professor in psychology at the University of Cape Town where she also served for six years. She was first co-editor and then editor of the South African Journal of Psychology for a period of three years. In 2000, she became the executive director of the National Research Foundation, after which she was appointed as deputy vice chancellor of the University of Cape Town in 2002. This position she held for 6 years. After a brief term as chief executive officer of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), she became the vice chancellor and principal of the University of Pretoria, 2009 to the present.

Professor de la Rey is a registered research psychologist, a member of the Psychological Society of South Africa, the Academy of Science of South Africa and the International Women’s Leadership Association. She serves on a number of committees and boards, mostly related to tertiary education and research.

Her own research in the field of social psychology focuses on race and gender, which immediately brings to the fore issues of power. Her work on race and racism includes academic racism. Her work on gender focuses on the construction of gender, consciousness-raising against gender oppression, gender-based violence and abuse, on the one hand. As a student, she worked in the rape crisis system and gained first-hand experience of how many women across all social classes are confronted with a threat to their safety. On the other hand, given the direction her own life has taken, another focus of her gender work is on women’s leadership, with topics such as gender and the construction of knowledge, how successful women in the public, corporate and business sectors cope, and how they often collide with the glass ceiling. Her contribution was not confined to research and theory. Few women are willing to pay the price that comes with shattering the glass ceiling. You were and have done so spectacularly. For that, we thank you.

Another research interest of Professor de la Rey is identity and intergroup relations. From the perspective of culture, power and difference, her work contributes to the reshaping, reclaiming and renegotiating of identity in South Africa. In the field of peace psychology, she published on reconciliation in divided societies and, combining this with her gender interest, also on women and peace-building in South Africa. In an interview with the Pretoria East Record on Woman’s Day, 9 August 2015, she said: ‘When women stand together they would make a powerful statement’.

Ten years into democracy, she reflected on South African psychology, wrote on truth and healing, on the psychosocial rehabilitation of the country and on psychology and the public good in a developing society. Social issues addressed in her research included the death penalty, poverty alleviation through partnership and teenage pregnancy, among others. As her career moved from psychology to leadership in higher education, her work focused on issues such as science and technology, the employability of university graduates and the role of universities in shaping public policy. In 2012, she became the well-deserved recipient of Rhodes University’s ‘Psychology and Social Change Award’.

1. Pretoria East Record, 9 August 2015, ‘Tuks vice chancellor on family, feminism and Women’s Month’.
Amidst the abundant evidence of a highly successful academic career, to which undoubtedly most of her time and energy were devoted, there are glimpses of the person Cheryl de la Rey and some of her special loves. Her love of nature: she is a trustee of the World Wildlife Fund. And her love of sports: she published some academic articles on women road runners and, in 2006, was the speaker at the Queensland Rugby Club in Brisbane, Australia, on the role of rugby in the South African national identity.

Appointed at the University of Pretoria a year after its centenary celebrations, she was the new and different face of the institution entering into its second century. In her inaugural address in 2010, she referred to religious institutions and universities as two of the oldest social institutions still surviving today. Survival is only possible if institutions are resilient and can adapt to change – ‘through times of conflict and depression and times of peace and prosperity’ (p. 2). South Africa does not only find itself in the flow of rapid global change but also has to deal with what she calls ‘an additional level of change’ (p. 3). Particular challenges are faced by this divided and fragmented society, with its great divide between wealth, innovation and religiosity, on the one hand, and poverty and crime, on the other (pp. 3–4).

To meet these challenges, Professor de la Rey has led the University of Pretoria to focus on human capital development so that graduates can be prepared for their role in constructing a more harmonious and equitable society. With the holistic approach of a psychologist, she sees education as more than academic training. It is also about the quality of the student’s experience and graduates who are equipped for the rapidly changing world in which they will be making their contribution. Her goal has been:

to create an environment where we will re-evaluate some of our traditions, continue those of which all of us are proud, discontinue those that do not promote a culture of inclusivity and respect for human rights and, instead craft new socially inclusive future traditions. (p. 9)

The recent student unrest on university campuses is closely related to sociological factors such as demographic change and the need to transform how we think about knowledge and the institution. Since 1994 the ideal has been the democratisation of education. The objective is affordable and accessible education for people of all socio-economic sectors. The demand for free education and insufficient government subsidy result in an impossible situation. Professor de la Rey’s life’s work in sociology and psychology with her passion for social cohesion equipped her for authentic leadership in tumultuous times, however difficult the task.

After 100 years at the University of Pretoria, entering into its next century, the Faculty of Theology, with its vision of life in its fullness and mission of life-giving theology for all, hopes to be a gateway to such a future.

It is with great appreciation and gratitude that we present this volume to Professor Cheryl de la Rey.

**Papers and publications: Professor Cheryl Merle de la Rey**

**Publications**

**Books**


**Chapters in books**


- 1998 (co-author), ‘Shifting the publications game: The case of a textbook project at a historically black university’, Perspectives in Education 17(2), 71–86.


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Other publications

- 2015, ‘Should global league tables consider community engagement? Yes they should argue, Antony Monaco and Cheryl de la Rey’, *World University rankings blog*, to be viewed at http://timeshighereducation.co.uk/blog/world-university-rankings-blog-should-global-league-tables-consider-community-engagement

Papers presented, keynotes delivered and addresses

**Academic international conference papers**

• ‘Leadership for Reconciliation’, Invited address International Perspectives on Peace and Reconciliation Conference, University of Melbourne, Australia, July 2003.
• ‘Business, Graduate Employability and Higher Education Investment in Africa’, Policy discussion paper submitted to the Continental Summit: Revitalizing Higher Education for Africa’s Future by Tinyiko Maluleke, Natasja Holtzhausen, Cheryl de la Rey and Jennifer Mckellar, Dakar, Senegal, March 2015

International and national keynotes and invited presentations
• ‘Recruitment and retention of women staff: Is there a glass ceiling in South Africa?’, Invited speaker, Institutional Cultures and Higher Education Leadership: Where are the women?, Conference organized by HERS-SA, CHE, Department of Education and Higher Education South Africa (HESA), Cape Town, South Africa, March 2008.
• ‘The Challenges of Women in Research in Higher Education’, Speaker at the Launch of the Women in Research Association (WIRA), Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town, South Africa, August 2008.
• ‘Challenges facing South African Higher Education’, Guest speaker at the St Augustine College Graduation Ceremony, Johannesburg, South Africa, August 2008.
• ‘Relevance of Science and Technology Education for Economic Development’, Keynote Address, launch of the Moses Kotane Institute, Durban, South Africa, January 2009.
• ‘The strategic role of Student Housing in the promotion of Student Development and Success’, The Southern Association for College and University Housing Officers-Southern African Chapter, Student Housing Annual Conference and Exposition, Durban, South Africa, August 2010.
• ‘Gender Equity in the 21st Century’, Oration at the Edith Cowan University, Perth, Australia, October 2010.
• ‘The significance of Higher Education, Science and Technology in developing countries’, Public Lecture, University of Technology, Jamaica, January 2012.
• ‘The role of Rugby: SA national identity’, Queensland Rugby Club, Brisbane, Australia, March 2012.
• ‘Opening address at the ASSAf Humanities Conference’ with the theme, Living the world, reading the world, understanding the world: The Humanities reach out, CSIR, Pretoria, South Africa, June 2014.
• ‘Education, science and technology in Africa: Creating a synergy to generate jobs and create wealth’, Australia Africa Universities Conference, Australia National University, July 2014.

References