

Vice- Chancellor, I have the honour to present, for the award of the degree of Doctor of Education, honoris causa, Stella Virginia Petersen.

In the classic text: Teaching as a Subversive Activity” (how’s **that** for a title?) the authors ask: “What is the necessary business of the schools? To create eager consumers? To transmit ... dead ideas, values, metaphors and information..? To create smoothly functioning bureaucrats?”^[1]

If teaching is to be a truly subversive activity, it is none of these.

For Stella Petersen, teaching was a multi-faceted mission. In her 38 years at Livingston High School, she made it her mission to nurture her pupils and their dreams; she encouraged them to dream and to think of themselves as worthwhile - despite what the apartheid regime had to say - and she inspired them through her **own** achievements and intellectual pursuits.

Her education included a BSc in Botany and Zoology from UCT; a Senior Teachers’ Certificate, a Bachelor of Education degree as well as two Masters Degrees (one in Science from UCT and one in Education from the University of Syracuse). It was well known amongst her pupils that she was a graduate of an American University as well as the first black women at UCT to graduate with a Masters’ degree in Science. Her students appreciated that she could have gone on to Doctoral studies and other achievements in her own right, but instead, she chose to use her expertise to teach at Livingstone High. Thus, she committed the rest of her working life to nurturing, inspiring (and pushing) her students.

If you were one of Stella Petersen’s pupils at Livingston High, the day began with extra maths lessons at 7.30am, there were previous exam papers to work on at home; there were talks given by her old pupils on Quantity Surveying, Radiology, Engineering and Medicine. She brought College and University application forms to the school. She helped the students to fill in the forms and to look for bursaries. There was a classical music appreciation society, a movie club, debates on topical issues, the Pioneer Club for interaction with pupils from African schools, dances, concerts, cultural exchanges. Even the school pond was a breeding ground for Mrs Petersen’s experiments.

She took her role as a teacher very very seriously, but she also made sure that her lessons were much more than describing the anatomy of a bird or the structure of a leaf. She took on the task of **really educating** her students: about their own oppression and the disgrace of apartheid; about the ideals of non-racialism and making a meaningful contribution to their communities, and about themselves as rightful citizens of the world.

Stella Petersen’s teaching was a truly subversive activity. Where the curriculum was intended to crush and oppress, she subverted it to liberate; where it was narrow and constrained, she broadened and expanded; where it was intended to keep her students uninformed, she subverted it to enlighten and illuminate.

Stella Petersen, today we celebrate and honour your courage and integrity, your commitment to your students and your noble profession, and your commitment to teaching as a truly subversive activity.

Vice-Chancellor, I have the honour to invite you to admit to the degree of Doctor of Education, honoris causa, Stella Virginia Petersen.

1. Postman, N. Weingartner, C., Teaching as a subversive activity. 1971: Penguin.