

Dieter Lünse führte das Gespräch zum Thema „Anti-Bias“ mit Vanita und Ben Richard aus Südafrika anlässlich ihres Besuchs in Hamburg beim ikm im Jahr 2020. Ben Richard arbeitete bis zu seiner Pensionierung als Englischlehrer, Vanita war sowohl als Lehrerin als auch in der Lehrerfortbildung tätig. Sie schrieb ihre Dissertation über das Thema „Anti-Bias in Südafrika“. Im folgenden Gespräch geben sie einen Überblick über die Entwicklung dieses Programms in ihrer Heimat seit 1996.

### **Round table with Ben Richard and Vanita Richard**

**Dieter:** Yeah, I'm working here [im ikm] for a long time. I think since 1998 and I invited you to come.

**Vanita:** I'm Vanita and I'm retired at the moment but doing flexy work, freelance work. So I work in education and I have hooked up with the previous minister in the province. She is very passionate about curriculum change. I think in South Africa that's what we need. So rather than focusing more on diversity, is focusing on how do you get curriculums strengthened. We can have more discussion around diversity. Or we raise learners with the idea that they have the values and the ethics so that they have the freedom to think about themselves. We work in three provinces currently, but we have huge challenges in South Africa, and I think from the time we started, we had a great deal of hope and there was a lot of Anti-Bias work continuing. I think it's dwindling, not enough is being done and I think the priorities have changed, the priorities are around funding, around poverty, around housing. But I think in our own way it is that work you do, when you talk to values of humanity and you talk to values of trust and respect and integrity, automatically you're talking to diversity and you're talking to humanity.

**Ben:** I'm Ben, short for Benjamin. I remember coming here in 2001 and I first met Dieter spending a week in Hamburg. At that time - I'm semi-retired now - I was full time in the education department, the provincial department, and because it was the early days and we had just come out of a kind of very oppressive, race driven society and there was a lot of emphasis on how do we reconcile and how do we bring people together. There was this newfound hope because we had Mandela and we had political figures that generated a new hope and a new dream for the country. So, there was that spirit to bring together. And because our education system was so organised in racing lines that coming together needed a lot of work. Because we had people coming together for the first time Vanita and I – all our schooling was in Indian schools, from primary school to high school to teacher education to university, it was all structured. We had a new democracy and all this integration needed to happen and obviously there is a lot anxiety and fears. But I think currently, I think that initial

hope that we had in people wanting to come together, there is, sad to say, I think there is an element of fear and mistrust and people are now getting back more out of fear into their closed communities and to talk about land distribution and so people who have possession of the land feel threatened, want to have economic regress. Those that have been in the economic positions of power feel threatened. So instead of an openness to begin to share and create some form of equity there's a lot of polarisation. And this is where the struggle comes in and I think our political climate at the moment is such that is not helping a great deal.

And initially I think the kind of systemic change that we try to bring in the department – and like Vanita is saying, because of priorities for infrastructure and things like this, Anti-Bias and diversity seem like soft options, so there is not enough dedicated money for those projects. The only kind of projects that are happening now are more crises driven. When there is a racial incident at a school or something then you have to go and manage that without a kind of a preventative, long term approach that deals with why and try to prevent that.

I think the danger is, when an incident happens and then media is there and politicians are running to the schools, different political parties want to go and see something. They are not interested in the problems. It's a worldwide phenomenon. We can change individuals, personal capacity and the kind of situation we find ourselves in, but world leaders, are taking the world in a different direction. I think the challenge for us is not to get frustrated but continue working in the sphere of influence that we have. I think, that's the least we can do.

**Dieter:** The inspiration I think was in 1999.

**Ben:** I think, in 1994, when the country changed, then the task was to bring various education. The biggest shared task was to integrate the different education departments, because you had a separate education department for coloured people, a separate education department for Black Africans and that was further divided into Zulu, Xhosa, Tswana. And then you had separate education department for White people, to learn Afrikaans and English and then you had an education system for Indians. So, you had all these separate education departments from nursery, primary, High School, college and University and all of these had to come together. So Vanita was fortunate, when we got a point into the provincial education department at head office, so in some ways we were in positions where decisions were being made. And we did have sporadic incidence of racism emanating in schools, because now schools no longer could deny access to learners. And there was an influx of Black learners seeking admission to previously predominantly White, English-speaking schools, Afrikaans-schools and that caused a whole range of tensions. So, initially because I was in senior position in the office of the deputy director general I was sent to these schools. And then we said we have to do this in a systematic way. And that's when

we started to have trainings and workshops for school leadership, Black principals and so forth. And then that programme started in 1996. We rendered for about five or six years. Then there was a political change. Every five years there was a new minister of education and the priorities changed. So sadly enough I mean if we had continued I think we could have made great steps. But I think there's an understanding now, that there is a need for that. But nobody is actually saying – putting the kind of resources and effort and money into it. Because there are other priorities, the infrastructural needs, the great deal of poverty, the teacher training needs and most of our students want to go to university so there's a huge influx to universities and the universities are struggling. It's only in the last two years now, that education at universities had become free.

**Vanita:** I think that there are many programmes on Anti-Bias and anti-racism but if you don't work with the personal first, you don't work with people understanding and unravelling their own biases. I think it's a journey that we go through, through our entire lives, because we've all been socialised differently and we have to keep reflecting on why we think in the way we do, why we make the certain kinds of assumptions. I think currently the programme that we see is more intellectual, but it's not doing the deep personal work that we need to unravel. It's hard to do the deep personal work, because you need psychologists in the group etc., because there is some painful, very painful stories. Especially now more so around gender. Because women were doubly oppressed. First in the system and then culturally and as women, actually three times. And so, you see the effects of oppression.

**Vanita:** For us, it's to influence the individual first and then look at how it emerges in the team. So, we work with school leadership. They are the ones who can inspire and motivate. So it's just to get them to understand their role and talk about agency a great deal and about moral purpose - why am I here and what can I do. So, it's a long process to get to see some traction, but I think it's important to do the personal work.

**Ben:** ... because it's a process and it's a journey. So easier option is to have a power point presentation so people can take away a package and bring home. But as soon as you want to say, fine – but to go deeper into, none of us is born with prejudice, none of us is born with discrimination – we are depending on the families in which we grow up in the religious institutions that we grow up, in the communities in which we grow up. We are socialised and many of these things we learn unconsciously, in the way our parents behave, our grandparents behave. I mean, I share a story, I grew up in a home where my mom did all the work. And as a boy growing up in that family, nobody taught me – nobody sat me down and said, this is women's work. Because I saw my father in a particular role, I saw my mom, even though she had a full day's work, when she came home she had to cook and wash and clean. My father came home from work and he sat and read the newspaper. So you grow up

in that and then you believe that's the way life is. Until you begin to learn differently and then you change. I grew up in a community where the police system was White People, because I grew up in a village and the Indian people worked in the fields. You saw the White manager and our mothers and sisters worked in the White families' homes. You dared not walking through their street. So you grow up believing – as you grow up and you begin to meet other people and engage with other people, you realise internalised oppression, you begin to believe that you're less than. That impacts on your live dreams, you don't set your dreams so high. When you go to school as a Black child being taught by a White teacher where the expectation is not as high for you, then you begin to believe that you are not capable of achieving the highest. Unless you find a teacher who believes in you, who says, no, you can do anything you want to, that's why educators have such an important role in children's lives.

**Dieter:** What I observe in schools is that a lot is done on a superficial level. But then they make a special project and greet everybody in different languages, which is good of course as a first step. Sometimes it stays with this and doesn't go further. And it happens very seldom, that a school board sit together and really reflect on, why is this within the system and really go in depth and look okay, who do we emphasise, to go to High School and why. And in which case to gender always within our argumentation, when actually it's not really necessary. And these kind of questions. So we always try to push the teachers in this direction.

**Ben:** What you say is so important, because the pressure and the obligation is always on the one who comes into the country. To learn the language, to learn German, but there's no obligation for us to learn the other language. So whoever is coming into the system, has to learn and speak the dominant language of the country. And then the same with educators, I mean, you've got a diverse population and then look at the pressure on the learners, they come in from different languages and then to survive in that new educational environment, to be competent, you've got to fit in and assimilate in the culture and in the language.

**Vanita:** But if we work with the youth and really instil, then we have a new generation, and that's where we need to look. We have to work with the old generation, because we have to bring systemic change, but we must bring real change with the youngsters, with the youth. I think, it's very difficult because there are so many young people and how to you reach all of them except through teachers etc. Working with the local level we have to concentrate on leadership in the schools. Each school can make a difference. If you change the leadership of the school, you influence so many learners and I think that's the way to go. Because when you're thinking bigger it's often really, really frustrating. And policies don't make the change, we talked about technical and adaptive. And we have to work with the adaptive.

**Dieter:** I must say, in Germany Black and queer are much more represented and organised and visible than when I was 20.

**Ben:** For me the important thing is to focus on the area that we are in control of and in power of. I think sometimes when you focus on the bigger picture, when you look at what's happening around the world, it can immobilise you into a point where you just get so disillusioned, you don't want to do anything. And I think the greatest thing is influencing one person at a time. And I think it starts with family first. In the way how we raise our children and how we influence our friends and sometimes that is the hardest part. Keeping quiet when we find something that's a miss in our small circle, we don't speak up. But addressing it at that point, despite. This is where the greatest change could happen. Our early work, time consuming, process driven, experiential had long term benefits because those are the people we still are connected to, because you did something together that was life changing. It wasn't an academic, intellectual discussion, but it was about understanding deep down, where people are coming from and understanding the pain and also acknowledging that in that safe space with no judgment, no playing.

I think the Anti-bias approach is a nice generic basis for understanding discrimination and oppression, that includes all aspects of life whether it's class, gender, disability or race. But at some point in time one has to become more focused, either on gender, women and child abuse, poverty, or xenophobia. And it may vary from school to school depending on the migrant population.

In South Africa especially in the rule of schools, girl learners stay away for a number of days each month during the menstrual cycle because they don't have access to sanitary bags. The need was to provide them that so that they can attend school. There's a huge effort now to provide free – you know, so you are meeting a need.

**Dieter:** I have a question concerning Anti-Bias. It has this core phase where we had the small groups exchanging experiences about discrimination. And then we collected feelings and actions. In my group we were talking about being discriminated as a woman or as a religious person. And that's always very intensive and it's very good to see that feelings are more or less similar. We also had people who criticised this because they said "you can never compare somebody blamed for his glasses with somebody who experiences discrimination". This is in a way true as well, never the less I continue to do this because it's so important to make people understand experience this and to experience the other role as well and so I won't but still it's true that you can't compare.

**Ben:** I think it's encouraging because different people experience discrimination in different ways. I mean the danger is to place a value or hierarchy of which is less and which is more. But to acknowledge for that person that it's real at that point and not to diminish that

experience. So how do we create a safe space, so that there's no blame or judgement, just to get the person to share in itself is important. So how do we create an environment first. We experience discrimination at different levels and what for me may be discriminating may be not the same for you. But I need to be in a space to acknowledge that you experienced that. And how do we support each other in the process without diminishing one's personal experience.

What we found very valuable in the early days of the Anti-Bias-Approach was to acknowledge the two levels. I think there is the intellectual level in understanding about the concepts and the theory. We had the discussion about religion. So that's the one level so when I go it makes intellectual sense with the theory of oppression, discrimination. But the deeper level is also about the feeling level, the emotional level, because as part of the people there's also what's happening on the inside within me.

In the Anti-Bias sometimes we spend too little time on the rules and introductions. And it took an entire day just for people reflecting and sharing and that's the building ground for the safety and maintaining that safe space, keeping reflecting on that safe space. So, if somebody says something out of turn, in a very gentle way call it out immediately. Or when you don't want to call it out in the group have a quiet conversation with that individual outside of the group. That's the kindest way we facilitate and create – and you'll find that people open up because we have created a deep trust in the group. And sometimes we don't spend enough time in building and we just want to get into the concepts and get into the ideas. The Anti-Bias, even though we had a programme in a way but there was no rigidity, like from nine to ten we're gonna do this, at ten o'clock we stop, we do the next section. So while there is structure, but there was a flow, because we knew what we were gonna go to in the end of five days. So if some session took two hours instead of the half hour we planned, it's okay. But sometimes we can be so time conscious and we bypass the important things that are coming and we don't have time to pick it up later.

**Dieter:** Teachers most of the time say we don't really have the space to ask the students, how does it feel to be blamed? And work on this emotion.

**Ben:** The other thing also is making space for ourselves, for those of us who are doing the work. We don't make space for ourselves, so that we can come together and just support each other. Because sometimes listening to the pain I think is difficult and yet we go away. There is no organised structure where we can come together and just be able to share openly right now what we are feeling.