Project Information

Short Title:	Transformative Education/al Studies
Lead Investigator:	Prof Joan Conolly (Durban University of Technology)
Co-Investigators:	Prof Thenjiwe Meyiwa (Walter Sisulu University); Dr Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan (University of KwaZulu-Natal)
Description:	
	In this project, educators/postgraduate students in Higher Education will reflect critically on their learning, teaching, assessment, curriculum and/or educational professional practice in a variety of ways with the multiple benefits of improving the quality of their practice, earning the award of a senior degree and earning research outputs in the form of publications. This will simultaneously impact positively on the quality and rate of under- and post-graduate throughput and research outputs.

Details Of Research

Problem Identification

1. **Introductory Statement :**
   Since the birth of South African democracy, and in the current time, Higher Education in South Africa has been, and is, characterised by a number of disturbing factors: poor undergraduate success and throughputs, particularly among students from the previously disadvantaged communities, slow if any transformation of curricula, a poor profile of community engagement and social action, inadequate and subminimum Higher Education (academic / administrative) staff qualifications, an ageing professoriate, and too few new and young researchers.

   2. Originality statement :
   The originality of this research lies in a number of factors:
   2.1 this large-scale critical reflective self-study research into teaching and learning interventions for transformative educational practice in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is the first of its kind in South Africa, and worldwide.
   2.2 this project is simultaneously multidisciplinary and multi-institutional;
   2.3 this research project targets a number of seemingly unrelated educational problems through a single integrated and holistic intervention, which can be interpreted and applied in diverse ways which are context-dependent.

   3. The overarching research question, which when applied idiosyncratically yields a broad spectrum of insights and outcomes, is: "How do I transform my educational practice as ….?" This research question can be applied in the individual's direct educational context, with innumerable responses and insights, as can be inferred from the following examples :
   3.1 "How do I transform my educational practice as a teacher of science to first year learners from a disadvantaged educational background?"

3.2 "How do I transform my educational practice as the extended curriculum project co-ordinator in a newly merged university of technology?"
3.3 "How do I transform my educational practice as mentor of first generation Higher Education academics?"
3.4 "How do I transform my educational practice as a novice teacher educator in Higher Education?"
3.5 "How do I transform my educational practice as curriculum developer in the dental technology programme in Higher Education?"
3.6 "How do I transform my educational practice as community service learning co-ordinator in an undergraduate programme with a diverse student profile?"
3.7 "How do I transform my educational practice as supervisor of masters and doctoral studies in Higher Education?"
3.8 How do I transform my educational practice as a writing tutor in a writing centre for non-mother tongue speakers of the language of instruction in Higher Education?"
3.9 How do I transform my educational practice as a first generation academic with first generation learners?"
3.10 How do I transform my educational practice as a post-graduate student of learning and teaching styles in a multicultural and multi-linguistic Higher Education learner cohort?"

4 Intention, boundaries and parameters :
This project will bring together a multi-institutional, multidisciplinary group of experienced and novice Higher Education educators interested in researching and making a significant contribution to transformation of educational practice in HEIs in South(ern) Africa and will draw upon the expertise of longstanding and acknowledged national and international specialists in the broad field of critical and reflective self-study. Transformation will occurat the site of practice in real time with applied interventions. The results of such interventions will inform policy and procedural recommendations of the institutions in which participants are educators.

5 Justification :
This research is needed because it addresses the pressing need to transform teaching and learning in the Higher Education sector. The report by Scott, Yeld, and Hendry, "A Case for improving Teaching and Learning in South African Higher Education" (2007:2), "indicates not only that the improvement to Higher Education might be less significant than initially thought, but that in terms of throughputs the Higher Education system as a whole is not doing very well. Of even greater concern is that student performance continues to be racially differentiated. Black students do worse than white students in most disciplinary fields and African students have performed worst of all. As the authors indicate, these outcomes undermine the gains made in terms of access and raise a number of issues about the quality of the educational process and the possible reasons for the unsatisfactory results."

Significantly, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) has identified Teaching and Learning as a key criterion for evaluating the quality of Higher Education programmes (see HEQC, 2005/2006a). Noteworthy elements of this criterion that relate to quality, as well as to the issues of access, relevance, and equity that are vital to the development of the Higher Education sector in post-apartheid South Africa, have been identified. These include: a) using diverse pedagogic approaches appropriate to the learning needs of students; b) offering teaching and learning that is relevant and responsive to the needs of individual students and the requirements of social development; and c) providing supportive and accomplished supervision of students' research (HEQC, 2005/2006b; HEQC, 2005/2006c). The Teaching and Learning criterion also gives weight to the provision of institutional support for Higher Education staff who wish to improve their educational practice (HEQC, 2005/2006a; HEQC, 2005/2006b).

This project will contribute to the scholarship and practice of learning and teaching in the Higher Education sector by focusing on the vital role that educators play in transforming learning, teaching and assessment practice and curriculum development and design. Another key contribution of the project will be its complementary focus on the academic value of educators' scholarly inquiry into their own teaching and learning practice. Moreover, it will allow critical investigation into what forms of knowledge are of value in South Africa across a wide variety of situations/disciplines/fields.

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Scott, I., Yeld, N., & Hendry, J. (2007). Higher education monitor: A case for improving teaching and learning in South African higher education. Pretoria: The Council on Higher Education.

Rationale and Motivation
Literature review:
Self-study research in the field of Education has thus far mostly been initiated and conducted by teacher educators and teachers who study their selves "in action…within [their] educational contexts" (Hamilton, Smith & Worthington, 2008, p. 17) with the aim of improving their own professional understanding and practice as well as contributing to public conversations and knowledge about the scholarship and practice of teaching and learning (see, for example, Loughran, Hamilton, LaBoskey, & Russell, 2004; Mitchell, Weber, & O'Reilly-Scallon, 2005; Samaras, 2010). However, self-study is now increasingly being undertaken by practitioners and scholars working across the human and social sciences (see Pithouse, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2009c) who have a common commitment to exploring how study of the self "might illuminate significant social questions and make a qualitative difference to shared human experience" (Pithouse, Mitchell & Moletsane, 2009b, p. 2). This project will build on and expand the body of self-study research to date and also draw on work done in a number of other key areas of educational research that focus on the transformative potential of educators' scholarly inquiry into their own educational practices, identities, and contexts. These include teacher research (see Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993; Loughran, Mitchell, & Mitchell, 2002), practitioner inquiry (see Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2004; Robinson, 2009), action research (see McNiff & Whitehead, 2006; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006), critical pedagogy (see Giroux, 1988; hooks, 1994), and reflective practice (see Schön, 1983; 1987). These approaches are consistent with recommendations made by the HEQC for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions by promoting and supporting educators' reflective self-evaluation (HEQC, 2004) and by recognising and valuing the scholarship of teaching and learning (Boyer, 1990; Scott, Yeld, & Hendry, 2007). Another key academic source for the project is work that emphasises how collaboration and interaction among Higher Education students and staff can enhance research productivity and quality (see, for example, Babchuk, Keith, & Peters, 1999; Hafernik, Messerschmitt, & Vandrick, 1997; Landry, Traore, & Godin, 1996; Pithouse, Mitchell, & Moletsane, 2009a).

Self-study including autoethnographic, psychological, sociological methods allows for a critical

interrogation of Higher Education epistemologies, which can contribute to the development of a uniquely African approach to social transformation and growth.

References:

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Originality and importance of the research contribution:
This large-scale, multidisciplinary and multi-institutional, self-study research into teaching and learning interventions for transformative educational practice in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) is the first of its kind in South Africa, and worldwide. Furthermore, the project explores the novel concept of using a variety of self-study approaches to address multiple problems simultaneously. It acknowledges that the classroom practitioner is a significant nexus of change necessary for educational transformation. This research is important because it addresses the pressing need to transform teaching and learning in the Higher Education sector.

The conceptual framework/s:
This self-study research project will respond to a range of theoretical influences, including: social constructivist perspectives (see, for example, Bruner, 1996; Eisner, 1998; Richardson, 1997) that view educational practice in terms of individuals constructing and reconstructing their own understandings of the world through interaction with experiences and ideas, socio-cultural contexts, and relationships with others; humanist and phenomenological frameworks (see, among others, Allender, 2004; van Manen, 1990) that place the focus of educational research directly on people and on lived experience, emphasising the fundamental significance of human lives, interaction, and relationships in learning and teaching; and anti-colonial, feminist, and critical pedagogy perspectives (see Freire, 1970; Lather, 1991; Smith, 1999) that call into question the silencing and 'othering' of research subjects or learners in research and educational processes. The project will also explore the Southern African concepts of ubuntu (in the Nguni languages) and botho (in the Sotho and Tswana languages) that view self or personhood in terms of ongoing and relational processes of becoming (Mkhize, 2004a, 2004b).

This study also applies the principles of feminist research, which takes cognizance of reflexivity. Feminist research methodologies are largely based on lived experiences and on reflexivity, first posited by Gouldner (1971), which entails the analytic attention to the researcher's role, and the inclusion of the researcher as a researchable topic. Reay (1996:59-60) describes reflexivity as a continual consideration of the ways in which the researcher's social identity and values affect the data gathered and a picture of the social world produced. Concurring with Reay (ibid) Mauthner and Doucet (1998:121) note that reflexivity entails, "reflecting upon and understanding our own personal, political and intellectual autobiographies as researchers and making explicit where we are located in relation to our research respondents".
Feminist research therefore elides power/status differentials in valuing the experience and knowledge of the participants.

References
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Specific hurdles:
This project addresses the following entry level hurdles. The "Transformative Education/al Studies" project addresses …
• the theme of "teaching and learning interventions that shape the qualitative outcomes of education" explicitly at the level of Higher Education with the possibility of impact across the entire education spectrum;
• the national priorities specifically "the lack of preparedness of students and staff; the nature and organization of teaching and learning at Higher Education institutions, the conceptualisation of the educational process, particularly in terms of the appropriateness of content and assessment methods, and its relationship with different institutional cultures; the extent of professionalism of academic staff; the nature and extent of funding; and the role that system differentiation might have in addressing under-preparedness." (Scott, Yeld, & Hendry, 2007:2) and the lack of transformation resulting from poor throughput, lack of change in the curriculum, extreme changes in the student profile, the global economy and village, systemic problems such as a marked lack of workplace skills in education, commerce, industry, local and national government, and an aging professoriate.
• systemic implications because of its multi-person, multi-disciplinary and multi-institutional nature. The transformations of individual educational practice, research and insight will be magnified through the collaborative nature of the processes of the project, and further will be disseminated through multiple publications.

2. The consortium which makes this proposal includes three South African Higher Education institutions, viz. Durban University of Technology (merged UoT), University of KwaZuluNatal (merged research university), and Walter Sisulu University(merged rural university). The consortium intends including another five institutions, viz. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (merged comprehensive urban university), Mangosuthu University of Technology (UoT), University of Zululand (rural comprehensive university), Universidade Pedagogica and University of St Thomas in Mozambique both in Maputo, Mozambique (African Universities). Thus, the project will include a full range of the kinds of universities in South(ern) Africa at the moment, viz. universities of technology, rural universities, comprehensive universities, research universities and merged universities, and universities in a neighbouring African state, Mozambique.

3. All the studies undertaken in this project will be multidisciplinary, in that every participant will at the very least be examining the interface between his or her area of academic specialization and his or her educational practice. Studies will respond to a range of factors that impact on educational practice, access, quality and achievement in South African HEIs, including HIV&Aids, poverty, unemployment, community and student engagement, social dysfunction, equity and redress, and first generation Higher Education status. Areas of academic specialization will include oral societies, indigenous knowledge systems, feminist studies, gender studies, peace studies, leadership and management studies, ethics and morality studies, participatory studies, teacher education, inter alia.
4. The consortium which makes this proposal includes three women ranging in age from 37

years to 64 years, two white and one black African, all of whom have PhD's, one in Education (with a focus on self-study as a methodology for researching teaching and learning in Higher Education) and two in Orality-Literacy studies, one with a African feminist focus and one with a global oral tradition focus. Two are professors, and one is an NRF rated social scientist. All have published, all have supervised successfully at the postgraduate level, all have inter/national profiles and have edited at least one book and/or journal.

Research Aims and Objectives
Research aims and objectives:
The project aims at initiating, supporting and disseminating critical reflective self-study research that explores diverse educational problems with the aim of promoting transformative educational practice in HEIs, with the threefold effect of …
1) raising quality of learning, teaching and assessment by transforming educational practice, and thus impacting positively on the undergraduate and postgraduate level throughput.
2) locating curricula culturally so that learners can learn more easily and effectively and so that they are responsive to social and individual needs, which will also have a positive effect on the undergraduate and postgraduate level throughput.
3) and simultaneously increasing the number of masters and doctoral qualifications and peer-reviewed and accredited publications among HEI educators to meet the minimum requirements for educator qualifications and academic performance within Higher Education in a uniquely Southern African 'voice'.
4. Making an original and significant contribution to the research area of the scholarship of learning and teaching (Boyer, 1990) by researching and publishing on the process and results of the Transformative Education/al Studies project.

Boyer, E. 1990. Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate. New York: Carnegie Foundation for the Advancements of Teaching.

Workplan/Research Activities
Research activities, in which all participants are simultaneously experienced or novice HIgher Education educators or Masters or Doctoral students researching their higher education teaching, learning and assessment practice, viz. 'practitioner-researchers'.
1. Weekly workshops will be held in each participating institution for the development of the self-study research and publication capacities in those involved in each institution.
2. Suitable conferences and seminars will be identified for submission of abstracts, and papers, posters and workshops will be developed for presentation.
3. All participants will be encouraged to participate in practitioner-researcher list-serves and use other social media to engage in critically reflective conversations about their educational practice and influence as widely as possible inter/nationally.
4. Two fairly small inter-institutional developmental workshops will be held for the project participants. The first will be towards the start of the project and will be focused on learning about self-study as a methodology for researching (and transforming) educational practice. The second will be held midway through the project and will be focused on learning about and providing support for writing about self-study research for peer reviewed publications. This workshop will also involve planning for the project publications (books, journal articles etc.).
5. A larger, more public, conference will be held towards the end of the project at which participants will present their self-study research. There will also be an open call for presentations by other researchers who are using self-study and related methodologies to research transformative educational practice in HEIs.
6. The proceedings in 5 above would be peer-reviewed for a Department of Education accredited publication.
7. Participants in the project would be simultaneously working for the award of masters and doctoral degrees, and writing for publication in peer-reviewed and accredited publications.
8. A project website will be developed. This site will have a public section where the project, its workshops and conference, and its publications will be publicized, as well as a section that would be restricted to the project participants. In this restricted section, participants from the

various institutions will hold electronic discussions of their research and writing as work-in-progress.

9. The project leaders/ facilitators and invited expert reviewers will undertake a critical reflective project evaluation and will produce a comprehensive project report which will form the basis of several peer-reviewed publications to disseminate the results of the project.

2. Milestones

1 2011 and ongoing throughout the project - the development, maintenance and evolution of the website.

2 2011 and ongoing throughout the project - the development and maintenance of critically reflective conversations in the public domain using social media and list-serves.

3 2011 and ongoing throughout the project: Weekly workshops will be held in each participating institution for the development of the self-study research and publication capacities in those involved in each institution.

4 2011 and ongoing throughout the project: At the various stakeholder institutions, Higher Education practitioner-researcher students will register for masters and doctoral degrees, as part-time students, which implies three years for masters degrees (graduating 2014)and five years for doctoral degrees (graduating 2016). Such postgraduate students will include students already registered for their postgraduate studies, those pre-registered and those still to be recruited. These students will be practitioners from the across the whole Higher Education sector. These students will be supervised by participating staff members at the various stakeholder institutions.

5 2011 - the first 'Transformative Education/al Studies' workshop to which all students pre/registered for self-study research and other stakeholders will be invited.

6 beginning 2012- the second 'Transformative Education/al Studies' workshop to which all students pre/registered for self-study research and other stakeholders will be invited.

7 end 2012 - A larger, more public, 'Transformative Education/al Studies' conference at which project participants will present their self-study research. There will also be an open call for presentations by other researchers who are using self-study and related methodologies to research transformative educational practice in HEIs.

8 Mid 2013 - Project evaluation and writing of project report which will form the basis of several peer-reviewed publications on the overall process and results of the project.

9 end 2013 – Publication of proceedings of the conference in 7 above.

Workplan - Approaches/Methods

1. The effectiveness and appropriacy of self-study for transformation of education/al practice and the achievement of higher degrees:
There is widespread acknowledgement in the Higher Education sector of the pressing need to transform teaching and learning in HEIs. As researchers such as Fullan (2001) and Hargreaves, Earl, Moore, and Manning (2001), among others, highlight, institutional policies and programmes for educational transformation are unlikely to succeed unless they are accompanied by educators' active and wholehearted involvement in developing and evaluating strategies to accomplish such change. However, the demands of research output and publication can limit the amount of time and energy that these educators can devote to cultivating their pedagogic expertise and transforming curricula. One way in which academic staff at HEIs can mitigate this tension between their pedagogic and research roles is to engage in scholarly self-study inquiry into their own educational practice and to build supportive communities of scholars who have a common commitment to innovation and development in educational practice at HEIs. This is consistent with recommendations made by the HEQC for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in HEIs by promoting and supporting educators' reflective and critical self-evaluation of their educational practice (HEQC, 2004) and by publicly recognising and valuing the scholarship of teaching and learning (Boyer, 1990; Scott, Yeld, & Hendry, 2007).

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2. Descriptions of data collection processes, analysis and other relevant information: The diverse studies in this self-study research project will employ a variety of methods to produce and collect research data. These methods will bring together a range of perspectives on the educational problems being studied. The methods will include commonly used qualitative research methods such as journal writing, interviews, and focus group discussions. In many instances, in keeping with emerging international trends in self-study research, they will also take on innovative, participatory and arts-based forms, for instance, drama, poetry, story-writing, collage, photo-voice, video-making, and drawing (see, among others, Cole & Knowles, 2008; Mitchell, Weber, & O'Reilly-Scanlon, 2005; Taylor, 2007; Tidwell, Heston, & Fitzgerald, 2009). Significant data will be represented in a variety of forms, including arts-based forms. Data analysis will be mainly interpretive and will be informed by researchers' critical self-reflexivity (see Kirk, 2005; Walford, 1991).Overall analysis of the success of the project can be measured by outputs produced.

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Collaboration

Team members and roles:

Leader of the project : Associate-Professor Joan Conolly, Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, Durban University of Technology, a newly merged university of technology. PhD Orality-Literacy studies with a focus on memory in learning, teaching and assessment of the oral tradition of knowledge. She has a background in literature, drama, linguistics, communication, works in academic staff and student development, and is currently supervising 7 masters and 7 doctoral students. She has successfully (co)supervised 20 masters students and three doctoral students, edited two journals, collaboratively translated 8 books, contributed to three chapters in books, made over 50 presentations at inter/national conferences including four keynote

addresses, and published 6 articles in accredited journals.

Co-investigator in the project : Associate-Professor Thenjiwe Meyiwa, Research Professor, Faculty of Education, Walter Sisulu University, Mthatha. PhD Orality-Literacy studies.

Co-investigator in the project : Dr Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan, Senior Lecturer in Teacher Education and Professional Development in the School of Education and Development, Faculty of Education, University of KwaZulu-Natal. She recently completed an NRF-funded postdoctoral fellowship in the Faculty of Education at McGill University, Canada. Her PhD, conducted at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and funded by an NRF Prestigious Doctoral Scholarship, explored self-study as a research methodology and as a pedagogic approach in teacher education. She is lead editor of an interdisciplinary book on self-study titled Making connections: Self-study & social action (Pithouse, Mitchell, & Moletsane, 2009) and co-editor of the books Teaching and HIV & AIDS (Mitchell & Pithouse, 2009) and Memory and pedagogy (Mitchell, Strong-Wilson, Pithouse, & Allnutt, in press). She is also lead author of a recent article on self-study and teacher development published in the journal Educational Action Research (Pithouse, Mitchell, & Weber, 2009), as well as author/ co-author of a number of other journal articles and book chapters and has delivered refereed conference presentations at local and international conferences. She has successfully co-supervised one completed master's thesis and is currently supervising a number of students' self-study and narrative inquiry research at masters and doctoral level.

Potential Outcomes and Outputs

This project is relevant in the first instance to the transformation, quality and effectiveness of learning, teaching, assessment and curriculum in higher education. It is simultaneously relevant to the disciplines in which each of the participants teach and assess in higher education. This project is thus intrinsically multi-disciplinary. It is intended that the impact on both the discipline of education and the academic disciplines in which the practitioner-researchers conduct their investigations. The scientific products emerging from this project will include : a masters, or doctoral thesis produced by each of the practitioner-researchers, and /or publications in accredited journals; conference presentations, and a refereed conference proceedings; transformed learning, teaching and assessment practice, and transformed curricula; a comprehensive project report and peer reviewed publications on the overall results of the project.

Ethics

Each of the institutions undertaking this research study will obtain ethical clearance from its institutional research committee, and these certificates will be submitted to the NRF. All students registered for self-study research will be required to obtain ethical clearance as per the regulations of the university in question. All to those who participate in any individual self-study will be required to sign an informed consent form, in the language of their choice with an English translation.