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## Editorial

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### Liz Botha and Hennie van der Mescht

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The 2005 Kenton Conference, held at the beautiful seaside resort of Mpekweni and hosted jointly by Rhodes University and the University of Fort Hare, addressed itself to the challenges of re-examining what we mean by (in)equity, democracy and quality in education in South Africa. Delegates were treated to 126 papers, workshops or poster sessions. Twenty-seven of these turned into papers submitted to this special edition of the *Journal of Education*, and six of these are presented here.

Wally Morrow's paper on teachers' work is a strong opening to this journal, as indeed it was for the conference. Morrow's experience on the Ministerial Committee for Teacher Education strengthens his attempt to recapture what has arguably been lost amidst the plethora of policy development, namely the essence of what it is that teachers do. Morrow strips down the apparently neutral and unproblematic material elements contained in the *Norms and Standards*, and presents a case for a clearer focus on the formal (essential) nature of teaching and an increased sensitivity to variations in context. Morrow's paper is a reminder of the core business of schools, perhaps a difficult concept to hang on to as we constantly re-invent notions of curriculum, assessment and quality assurance.

But of course, quality teaching and learning can only take place in a wholesome and positive environment, and Lorraine Lawrence's paper narrates how such an environment was brought into being in a sample of disadvantaged 'best practice' schools that participated in the Eastern Cape Department of Education's Imbewu School Transformation Programme. Using narrative enquiry, Lawrence reports on one of the primary schools and demonstrates how transformation is indeed possible, and above all a value-driven activity that profoundly alters attitudes and relationships. The paper is an eloquent answer to those in the business of change and development who believe in quick fixes.

In a Higher Education context increasingly dominated by commodified output and economic incentives, Jean McNiff and Ana Naidoo's exploration of an alternative conceptualization of research raises important questions. In arguing for an inclusive epistemology based on 'living' theories rather than propositional thought, the writers propose a research programme that focuses critically on their own practice as academics, while at the same time remaining true to democratic and humanitarian principles. The paper provides an example of how members of the programme work towards internal and social

validity. This is exploratory research on an initiative in its early stages and it would be interesting to keep track of the programme so that its effects may be noted and evaluated.

Higher Education is also the context for Cecilia Jacobs' paper in which she addresses an issue that is at the heart of teaching and learning in South Africa. The problem of learning in an additional language has long been exacerbated by notions of 'academic development' which somehow lie outside the domain of discipline knowledge. Jacobs draws on fieldwork to show that through sustained interaction with language lecturers, disciplinary specialists are able to make their tacit knowledge of the literacy practices and discourse patterns of their disciplines explicit. As such, the paper provides insight into the conditions necessary to make collaboration between disciplinary experts and language practitioners, and thus the use of cross-curricular approaches, possible.

The ubiquity of the notion of sustainable development (SD) in contemporary discourse makes Lesley le Grange's exploration of 'needs' both refreshing and timely. Le Grange argues that consideration of 'future needs', in particular, provides a lens for critical engagement with the essentially problematic notion of SD. While not providing clear pointers or 'answers', the paper provides a theoretical basis for teachers and lecturers to engage critically with a concept which is central to the New Curriculum Statements. Teaching about SD from a needs perspective is likely to provide opportunities for class interaction, debate and discussion in a variety of learning areas.

Jacqui Dornbrack's longitudinal study of 'difference' in an ex-model C school provides rich insights into particular challenges of organisational dynamics in post-apartheid South Africa. Dornbrack used a range of qualitative data-gathering techniques to construct a space where teachers could engage with the effects of gendered and racialised stereotyping. Her data represents lived experience within particular incidents and hence brings into sharp focus a level of organisational life that lies at the heart of current interest in social justice.

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# What is teachers' work?

Wally Morrow

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*Teaching is impossible.* (Shulman – 1983)

## Abstract

This paper asks why conscientious teachers are chronically overloaded. Its central claim is that a failure to recognize the distinction between the formal and material elements of the concept of teaching provides a main part of the answer. An analysis of the *Norms and Standards for Educators* shows how, by failing to distinguish between the formal and material elements of the concept of teaching, it projects a conception of teaching which contributes to the overload of schoolteachers. The paper then contrasts the *Norms and Standards* with *A National Framework for Teacher Education – 16<sup>th</sup> June 2005*, which puts a formal definition of teaching up front. The latter part of the paper moves to a discussion of the functions of schools, and proposes that both caregiving and the teaching of the young are crucial in our context; with caregiving becoming increasingly salient in the light of poverty and the HIV and AIDS pandemic. But we need to pose the question of whether caregiving should be regarded as part of the formal work of teachers, or whether others should be employed for this work, enabling schoolteachers to focus more sharply on their defining function.

## The job of teachers is to teach

But Shulman tells us that teaching is impossible. If this is true then we have a bizarre situation. Most of us here (and thousands of others) have devoted our lives to an impossible activity, and many of us have spent years of our lives on the (impossible) task of trying to teach others how to engage in an impossible activity!

Surely Shulman can't mean what he says? After all he himself had the reputation of having been a teacher of some note and, surely, this included teaching? Perhaps his statement that teaching is impossible is merely a polemical device to emphasize something else?

Of course this is the explanation. Here is the quotation in context:

Teaching is impossible. If we simply add together all that is expected of a typical teacher and take note of the circumstances in which those activities are to be carried out, the sum makes greater demands than any individual can possibly fulfil.<sup>1</sup>

What we need to notice here is Shulman's easy conceptual slide from the word 'teaching' to the word 'teacher'. His first sentence says that *teaching* is impossible, but the next sentence refers to all that is expected of a typical *teacher*, and the circumstances in which teachers work. So he really must mean that given current (USA 1983) expectations of teachers and the circumstances in which they work it is not possible for them to teach. But perhaps this is a parochial comment about teachers' work in the USA in 1983? Perhaps the situation is different in other places and at other times?

In the dark ages (South Africa 1962), when I first began my career as a teacher I was soon so overwhelmed by the work that I ceased to have any life outside of teaching. My training had somehow conveyed to me a conception of teaching that proved to be impossible in practice, and a source of constant professional guilt. I had gained the idea that good teaching involved being responsive to each of the individual pupils for whom I was responsible – to get to know their quirks and uniqueness and to gear my teaching to those. In particular I had been taught that a key element of successful English teaching was for each pupil to write at least one piece each week, and for me, as their teacher, to comment in writing on their individual efforts so as to provide sensitive formative feedback to each budding author. Had I been responsible for, say, fifteen pupils I suppose these tasks would have been feasible, and I might even have had a few hours left over for a personal life of some kind. But I was teaching seven classes, with an average of 35 pupils in each – a total of some 245 pupils. Even to learn all their names was a major task – never mind being responsive to all their individual uniqueness and providing well-targeted feedback to each of 245 written pieces each week.

And, then, in preparing this paper, I came across a website<sup>2</sup> about a National Agreement in the UK, signed by employers, government and unions in January 2003, called 'Raising Standards and Tracking Workload'. This Agreement was an 'acknowledgement' that schools have to deal with a number of issues, amongst which were:

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<sup>1</sup> Lee S. Shulman (1983) 'Autonomy and obligation – the remote control of teaching' in *The Wisdom of Practice: Essays on Teaching, Learning, and Learning to Teach*. Jossey-Bass: San Francisco (2004) p.151.

<sup>2</sup> [www.teachernet.gov.uk/remodelling](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/remodelling)



- Workload is the major reason cited by teachers for leaving the profession;
- Over 30% of a teacher's working week prior to the National Agreement was spent on non-teaching activities;
- Teachers generally had a poor work/life balance.

At the heart of this Agreement is a concerted attempt to 'free teachers to teach' by transferring to support staff administrative and other tasks not intrinsically related to teaching. 'Cutting unnecessary burdens on teachers is essential to ensuring a valued and motivated teaching profession.'

These are three examples, at 20-year intervals, in vastly different places, of a widespread problem: conscientious teachers are constantly chronically overloaded. But what causes this problem, and why does it remain stubbornly unresolved?

Let's go back to the beginning. The job of teachers is to teach. This seems obviously true and quite straightforward. It is probably true although it is not at all straightforward.

When Shulman tells us (1983, p.151) that teaching is impossible he is thinking of teaching as necessarily embedded in the accidents and contingencies of "expectations" and "circumstances" (context?) In my early days as a teacher I was overwhelmed by my work because of a disjunction between the conception of teaching with which I was working and the number of pupils in relation to whom I was attempting to embody that conception. And the UK project of 'Raising Standards and Tracking Workload' assumes that we are quite clear about which activities are 'non-teaching activities', and about which burdens are 'unnecessary burdens on teachers'. The ringing cry that we need to 'free teachers to teach' has considerable appeal – but it all depends on what we mean by 'to teach'.

Our problem is that we are here embroiled at the intersection between a concept of what it is to teach and the institutional and other contextual realities of the situations in which those whose professional task is to teach try to carry out this activity; or the intersection between the idea of teaching and the roles and responsibilities we ascribe to those employed as 'teachers', and the conditions in which they are expected to carry out these roles and responsibilities. And it is difficult, as the example of Shulman's slide from 'teaching' to 'teacher' shows, to disentangle these two strands in our thinking. And it is especially difficult if we are skeptical about 'theory' or 'abstract concepts' and are taken with the 'practical' idea that 'learnerships' provide the royal road to learning how to teach.

## Teaching in South Africa

It is sometimes claimed, that in post-1994 South Africa we have developed a bold and imaginative (a ‘magnificent’) set of education policies – admired across the world. But our problem is lack of ‘implementation’. Why do we have this problem? Who is to blame?

Well, in the first place we have some educational institutions (at all levels of the system) that remain stuck in Apartheid traditions and have not yet embraced ‘transformation’. Thus, for example, they persist in implementing exclusionary admission policies and ‘non-democratic’ modes of management and organisation.

But, in the second place we have thousands of deficient schoolteachers, teachers who do not have the competences, or perhaps the willingness, to implement our policies capably. Educational change depends on what teachers do and think,<sup>3</sup> but we have a huge problem when such a high proportion of our teachers have not yet accomplished the ‘paradigm shift’ they need to if they are going to be competent implementers of our fine policies.

It is not that we have not made considerable efforts to overcome these problems. We have, for instance, prioritised the issue of educational management. We have offered many ‘workshops’ for education managers, and literally thousands of ‘educators’ are signed up for Advanced Certificates, Honours degrees and even Masters’ degrees<sup>4</sup> in the field of educational management. Indeed in some cases the offering of education management programmes has proved to be a lifeline for Faculties of Education in the face of declining numbers of recruits for initial teacher education programmes. And in respect to teachers, we have devoted massive human and financial resources to overcoming their ‘deficiencies’. We have concentrated on training, or retraining, maths-science-technology teachers, and poured a king’s ransom into this field. Over the past years we have ‘released’ teachers from their normal duties for a week at a time to attend ‘workshops’ focussing on accomplishing the needed ‘paradigm shift’<sup>5</sup> and training them in the ‘implementation’ of the Revised National Curriculum Statement. But although

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<sup>3</sup> M.G. Fullan (1991). *The New Meaning of Educational Change*. London: Cassell, p.117.

<sup>4</sup> We must keep at bay the thought that a reason for the popularity of such programmes amongst teachers is that they aspire to find a career path that will provide a route out of teaching and into ‘management’. (We all want to be ‘managers’!)

<sup>5</sup> A ‘paradigm shift’ in a week!

we can claim some successes,<sup>6</sup> we don't seem to be moving very fast,<sup>7</sup> and while we persist in intoning the inspiring slogan, 'The Right to Quality Education for All', we are faced with the haunting thought that the quality of schooling for, perhaps, 80% of our population might actually have deteriorated over the past decade.

Let's take a quick tour through some elements of education transformation in South Africa. At the bottom stands Outcomes-Based Education – OBE – originally marketed as **the** (only) alternative to 'Apartheid education'.<sup>8</sup> At the root of OBE is the entirely sensible idea that the way to assess the success of any teaching is in terms of its 'outcomes' for learners. What matters at the end of the day is what the learners learn. But this sensible idea is suffocatingly wrapped in a range of other matters, which piled on top of each other, take the workload of teachers towards impossibility.

Teaching needs to be freed from the dominance of 'textbooks'. Teachers themselves need to design learning programmes, sensitive to their learners and responsive to their contexts, and develop appropriate resources and other learner support material, in order to achieve the nationally mandated learning outcomes. It is, after all, 'obvious' that there can be different 'learning pathways' to the same outcomes, and teachers need to map out suitable pathways for their own learners. 'Process' is all-important, and the old-fashioned emphasis on 'content' is merely a hangover from pre-OBE paradigms, especially 'Apartheid education'.

There is then the nightmare of 'continuous assessment' – known as CASS by the *cognoscenti*. The idea is that teachers need continuously to track the progress of their learners in order to provide them with constant 'formative feedback' – that is feedback that will enable each learner to understand how to improve their progress towards the pre-specified learning outcomes. CASS is often considered as a 'supplement' to 'formal examinations' – and this is reflected in the use of 'year marks' in computing the final grade for a course. In some cases CASS is understood as a more reliable form of assessment of learner achievements than high stakes 'summative examinations', and indeed that it should replace these hazardous examinations. There are, of course,

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<sup>6</sup> See DoE *An assessment of 10 years of education and training in South Africa* available at <http://education.pwv.gov.za>

<sup>7</sup> Because we should be deeply ashamed of them, we need to bury in a little footnote the devastating results of the TIMSS studies and the depressing indications of the Grade 3 and Grade 6 systemic studies.

<sup>8</sup> Wally Morrow 'Scripture and practices' in *Perspectives in Education*, 19(1), March 2001.

hazards in the case of CASS as well. Frequently ‘continuous assessment’ turns out to be little more than an unbroken stream of tests, projects and exercises that merely spread the misery – learners are constantly under the burden of knowing that everything they do will be ‘assessed’ and might have consequences for their eventual ‘success’. And teachers tend to be driven to such frenzy about ‘assessment’ and ‘portfolios’ that they have little time to ‘teach’. But these hazards, we say to ourselves, are likely to be the product of teachers’ not understanding the true purpose of CASS; with more ‘workshops’ and training we can overcome them.

And then there is ‘learner-centred education’, another half-truth. Of course any effective teaching needs to take account of the learners for whom it is intended. But what does ‘take account of the learners’ encompass? On the one hand we know that it is useless to try to teach quadratic equations to learners who do not yet have a grasp of the number system; or to teach computer literacy to a learner who thinks that a laptop is a kind of dance. But it is also true that teaching becomes, if not useless then at least less likely to succeed, if the learner is suffering from the trauma of having recently lost a parent to AIDS, or whose friend has been abducted on the way to school, or who comes from a household so destitute that they are lucky to get something to eat more than twice a week. This list could go on. The question is, does ‘learner-centred education’ imply that ‘teaching’ includes taking account of the detailed conditions and circumstances of the personal lives of learners? And what happens if a teacher has not one pupil<sup>9</sup> but a couple of hundred?

And, then, we need to think about the conditions in which a high proportion of schoolteachers in South Africa try to teach. The HIV prevalence rates, the Poverty Index, the levels of adult illiteracy and widespread unemployment, the lack of functioning and maintained school buildings and equipment, the failure of the delivery of stationery and books, the breakdown of school feeding schemes, the increasing linguistic and other diversity of pupils, never mind the levels of gang-related activities, are not merely statistical abstractions to be included in Annual Reports of government departments. They are indicators of harsh and inescapable realities faced by many schoolteachers on a daily basis. The miracle is that any teaching takes place at all.

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<sup>9</sup> J.J. Rousseau can be regarded as the inspiration for 250 years of thinking about ‘child-centred education’ – at least in the Western World. *Emile* is premised on the idea that there will be a ‘Tutor’ for each pupil (a 1:1 Pupil:Teacher ratio!), and he adds, for good measure, that: “A tutor is not bound to his charge by the ties of nature as the father is, and so is entitled to choose his pupil. . .” (As quoted in W. Boyd (1956). *Emile for Today*, London: Heinemann, p.20).

## The Norms and Standards for Educators and the inflated role of teachers

The *Norms and Standards for Educators*<sup>10</sup> remains the ruling policy for teacher education and the recognition of qualifications for the purposes of employment in education. But it entangles the two strands of our thinking – a conception of teaching, and the roles of those employed as teachers – and, partly due to that, inflates the work of teachers beyond the capacity of all but the exceptionally talented and obsessively committed. Let's examine the evidence.

The *Norms and Standards* announces that it will use the word 'educator' to refer to the full range of employees in the education system:

The term *educator* in this policy statement applies to all those persons who teach or educate other persons or who provide professional educational services at any public school, further education and training institution or departmental office. The term includes educators in the classroom, heads of departments, deputy-principals, principals, education development officers, district and regional managers and systems managers (p.9).

We are already in trouble. The homogenising of these different roles in the education system – from teachers to district managers – occludes the central role of teaching<sup>11</sup> in any education. The phrase 'educators in the classroom' – which, presumably refers to teachers – assumes that teaching takes place only 'inside classrooms'. And more corrupting than these troubles is the use of the word 'educator' for the diverse employees of the Department of Education.<sup>12</sup> The trouble here is that this move completely smudges the word 'education', disperses its moral aura and deprives us of our chief justification for committing a significant percentage of our public resources to schooling.

Thinking, now, of teaching, consider the way in which the *Norms and Standards* has generated a conception of teaching, articulated in terms of 'roles', which has seeped into the whole education system:

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<sup>10</sup> *Government Gazette* #20844 – 4 February 2000.

<sup>11</sup> "Teaching is and has always been at the centre of all education and educational reform." Shulman (1992) "Research on teaching" op. cit. p. 364.

<sup>12</sup> I once argued (at Wits during the 1970s) that the Transvaal Education Department should, for the sake of conceptual clarity, be called the Transvaal Department for the Administration of Schooling – it was doubtful whether it had anything to do with *education*.

The policy describes the *roles*, their associated set of *applied competences* (norms) and *qualifications* (standards) for the development of educators. It also establishes key strategic objectives for the development of learning programmes, qualifications and standards for educators. These norms and standards provide a basis for providers to develop programmes and qualifications that will be recognised by the Department of Education for purposes of employment (p.9).

Seven roles are specified:

1. Learning mediator
2. Interpreter and designer of learning programmes and materials
3. Leader, administrator and manager
4. Scholar, researcher and lifelong learner
5. Community, citizenship and pastoral role
6. Assessor
7. Learning area / subject / discipline / phase specialist.

(pp.13–14)

These roles are “meant to serve as a *description* of what it means to be a competent educator” (p.13).<sup>13</sup> The roles are elaborated in “a manner appropriate for an initial teaching qualification”, first, in a brief description on pp.13–14, and then in considerable detail on pp.15–22, in terms of three interconnected kinds (p.10) of *Applied competence – Practical, Foundational, and Reflexive*.

But this ‘description of what it means to be a competent educator’ is lethally ambiguous. It is attempting to do at least two logically distinct things at the same time: to specify the requirements of an employee of the Department of Education – something like a high level ‘job description’ – and to provide a formal definition of teaching (educating?) These two different things are run together as if there is no significant difference between them. Earlier in this paper I noted Shulman’s ‘easy conceptual slide’ from the word ‘teaching’ to the word ‘teacher’, and here we have a related problem.

Let’s provide ourselves with a little bit of technical terminology to help us to articulate the problem.<sup>14</sup> We can distinguish between the *material* and the *formal* elements of a concept. The ‘material elements’ refer to the ways in which an object or action may vary without ceasing to be an object or action of

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<sup>13</sup> I am struggling to try to imagine how these roles apply in the case of district managers and others who work in ‘departmental offices’. Learning mediators? Designers of learning programmes? Researchers? But perhaps I have a weak imagination.

<sup>14</sup> Julius Kovesi (1967) *Moral Notions*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. See p.4.



a particular kind: the 'formal element' is the reason we provide for saying that it is an object or action of a particular kind. Without the formal element we would not know how to specify the material elements – a list of the material elements presupposes the formal element.<sup>15</sup>

Kovesi introduces this distinction in relation to those pieces of furniture we call 'tables'. The material elements of tables are 'any characteristics in which the object may vary without ceasing to be a table'. Thus, the materials out of which we construct tables, their shape and whether they have three legs or four are the material elements of tables. By contrast the formal element of tables provides us with 'an answer to the question of why we call a large variety of objects "tables" and refuse the word to other objects.'

Using this terminology we can now say that the 'description' of 'what it means to be a competent educator', which is central to the *Norms and Standards*, fails to distinguish between the formal element of teaching, and its material elements. And this failure carries enormous consequences.<sup>16</sup> What the *Norms and Standards*, in effect, does, is to provide a list of some of the possible material elements of teaching (in terms of the seven roles and their elaboration) and presents it as a formal definition of teaching. And this is one reason why that description comes across as utopian.

A formal definition of teaching (one which specifies its formal element) is not context-specific; material elements are necessarily rooted in specific contexts. But the 'description' of 'what it means to be a competent educator' is context blind, and this is one reason why it leads to the overload of teachers.

The 'seven roles' ignore the reality of the conditions in which the majority of teachers in South Africa work and, in this way, inflates the conception of their workload. For a conscientious teacher this characterisation of their work is likely to be a source of acute professional guilt as they struggle to cope on a daily basis; 'it makes greater demands than any individual can possibly fulfil'. Similarly, it ignores the manifest differences between the institutional contexts in which teachers work. The work of a teacher in an efficiently organised and

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<sup>15</sup> We can note that the United Kingdom National Agreement 'Raising Standards and Tracking Workload' simply *assumes* that we know what the formal element of teaching is.

<sup>16</sup> Consequences for the workload of teachers, and the status of teachers as members of a profession.

functioning school<sup>17</sup> is very different from the work of a teacher is a dysfunction or barely functioning school. The ‘seven roles’ seem to be assumed to be the roles of each individual teacher, and there is no suggestion that there might be a division of labour in an institutional setting which allocates these different roles to different individuals.

Careful readers of the *Norms and Standards* might now point out that it contains another set of distinctions, which show that it acknowledges the difference between a concept of teaching and the job descriptions of departmental employees. In the initial characterisation of Role No.4 we find that “The educator will achieve ongoing personal, academic, occupational and professional growth . . .” (p.13), and in Role No.7 we find a reference to “professional or occupational practice” (p.14). Subsequently, in the section on the Qualifications Framework (p.23 ff) we find that “Although the B.Ed. (Honours) must include some specialisation and focus on research, the nature of these will vary depending on whether an academic, professional or occupational focus is chosen.” And that the purpose of the Postgraduate Diploma in Education is “to accredit advanced and specialised occupational, academic and professional study”. (p.25) But these ‘distinctions’ remain at a rhetorical level; they are not reflected in the ‘seven roles’ nor used elsewhere in the *Norms and Standards*. They do not provide a conceptual framework for the discussion, and, if anything, they further reinforce the idea that there is no significant distinction between the idea of teaching and the ‘job descriptions’ of employees of the Departments of Education.

To clarify what is at stake here consider the difference between the two questions: ‘What is waitrons’<sup>18</sup> work?’ and ‘What is (medical) doctors’ work?’

There is little mileage in trying to provide an abstract answer to the question ‘What is waitrons’ work?’ We have to ask: Which waitrons? Where? In different situations the job descriptions of waitrons is likely to be vastly different. In one restaurant or hotel waitrons might be required to set the tables, in another they might be required to bring the food to the tables, in a third they might be required to open the wine bottles, but not bring the ice bucket, etc. The question, ‘What is waitrons’ work?’, cannot be answered in ‘general’ terms – we would need to consider the various job descriptions of waitrons in various contexts.

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<sup>17</sup> One, for example, that has a timetable on the first day of school, in which the absenteeism of teachers is rare, in which there are school ‘traditions’ which ensure a modicum of orderliness, and the work of teachers is supported by an efficient administrative system.

<sup>18</sup> I assume that this audience will know that for gender sensitive reasons the word ‘waitron’ has replaced the gendered words ‘waitress’ and ‘waiter’.



By contrast we can very well provide an abstract (context-blind) answer to the question: 'What is (medical) doctors' work?' We have a conception<sup>19</sup> of doctors' work (we have some sense of a formal element here) that is not embedded in particular contexts. The work of doctors is to do what they can, in the light of their knowledge of medicine, to contribute to the health and flourishing of those who are ill, injured or diseased. Unless a doctor is doing this, in whatever circumstance she finds herself, she is not doing (medical) doctors' work. We can, of course add, that in specific contexts – say in a hospital – there might very well be other work that doctors will need to do depending, for instance, on the availability of nursing staff and perhaps even equipment.

The question now is: Is the question 'What is teachers' work?' logically more like 'What is waitrons' work?' or 'What is (medical) doctors' work?'. Despite its being context-insensitive, and doffing the cap to 'academic, professional and occupational practices', the *Norms and Standards* treats teachers' work as logically more akin to waitrons' work than to (medical) doctors' work. The baby has been thrown out with the bathwater; Departments of Education, as the employers of teachers, can define teachers' work according to their requirements as employers,<sup>20</sup> and, by a stroke of luck have a ready answer to the failures of policy implementation.

## A National Framework for Teacher Education and the practice of teaching

In the opening section of this paper I mentioned the widespread problem of conscientious teachers being constantly and chronically overloaded. And then posed the question of why this problem remains stubbornly unresolved. One main claim in this paper is that a failure to recognise the distinction between formal and material elements of the concept of teaching provides at least part of the answer. In our teacher education programmes and elsewhere we repeatedly define the work of teachers in terms of its material elements and, because we think we are providing a formal definition, we ignore the restraints of the contexts within which teachers are expected to teach.

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<sup>19</sup> This conception is *not* a generalisation from observation.

<sup>20</sup> For pragmatic reasons they had better take account of what the teacher unions say.

The Report of the Ministerial Committee on Teacher Education, called A Framework for Teacher Education in South Africa – 16<sup>th</sup> June 2005,<sup>21</sup> was an attempt to overcome this problem. In the very first recommendation there is an articulation of the formal element of teaching:

**Recommendation A1**

Retrieve the word ‘teaching’, understand it as the practice of organizing systematic learning, and relocate it at the heart of how we think about, plan and organize the education system.

There are a number of points to make here. One is that there were those in the Department of Education who objected to the words ‘retrieve’ and ‘relocate’. It was said that these words unjustly imply that the Department had lost sight of teaching and did not prioritise it in their planning or recognise that it is the core function of any schooling or education. But we do not need to pause at this dispute as there are more important things to bring to light.

Teaching is characterised as a practice. This carries some weight. To call something a ‘practice’ is to locate it in a history and a tradition; practices are not invented by individuals and anyone who engages in a practice must acknowledge that the standards of success and excellence are neither ‘subjective’ nor imposed by those with institutional and systemic power. They are interpersonal standards agreed by those in the community of practice.

And it is characterised as ‘the practice of organizing systematic learning’.<sup>22</sup> The word ‘organizing’ does not imply anything specific about how or in which setting this organizing is to be done; it is conceptually tied neither to ‘classrooms’ nor class sizes nor to any particular ‘teaching methods’. It might, for example, include preparing learning material, but it might not; it might include live performance in front of a group of learners, but it might not; it might include using a textbook, but it might not; it might include ‘continuous assessment’, but it might not; it might include using the telephone or email, but it might not, etc. The word ‘organizing’ leaves unspecified these material elements – and it is thus, clearly, part of the formal element of the practice of teaching.

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<sup>21</sup> Available at <http://education.pwv.gov.za>

<sup>22</sup> The point of the phrase ‘systematic learning’ is to emphasize that the practice of teaching is not the business of transmitting bits of information – that is a task that is amply fulfilled by the technological accompaniments of the ‘information explosion’. Teachers are into a hiding to nothing if they conceive of themselves as in competition with mass media. The practice of teaching is a practice that centres around the design of learning programmes that foster the gradual development of competences that cannot be learnt in an instant.

Along the same lines, to say that teaching is ‘the practice of organizing systematic learning’ leaves entirely unspecified whether it is individuals or teams that engage in this practice. Individual teachers can teach, but so can teams of teachers making various contributions to a shared goal. And this, again, shows that what we have in view here is the formal element of teaching as opposed to a specification of its material elements.

Teaching is not impossible, but it needs to be differently pursued in different circumstances. But we make it impossible if we ‘define’ it in terms of its material elements while ignoring the actual conditions in which teaching is expected to take place.

The second recommendation brings teachers into view:

**Recommendation A2**

Accept that professional teachers are the essential resource of the education system, and configure our programmes of teacher education (IPET and CPTD)<sup>23</sup> and support systems to reinforce the professional competences and commitments of teachers.

The key thing to notice here is that ‘teaching’ and ‘teachers’ are located in separate recommendations – there is no ‘easy conceptual slide’ from ‘teaching’ to ‘teachers’. Teaching is a practice, and professional teachers are those ‘with the educated competences and abiding commitments to engage successfully’<sup>24</sup> in this practice. An adequate answer to the question: What is teachers’ work? must necessarily include a reference to teaching, but in particular contexts it might include other things as well.

The reason for this is that, unlike the work of waitrons, the work of teachers must be within the boundaries of the formal element of the concept of teaching. Unless someone is doing something that exhibits some characteristic or characteristics of what is involved in organising systematic learning they are not doing teachers’ work, but something else – perhaps the work of clerks, administrators, policemen, counsellors, welfare agents, social workers, gardeners or sports coaches.

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<sup>23</sup> Initial Professional Education of Teachers and Continuing Professional Teacher Development.

<sup>24</sup> *A National Framework for Teacher Education in South Africa – 16<sup>th</sup> June 2005*, p.6.

## The functions of schools, and teachers' work

Part of the reason for the heavy workload of teachers revolves around the functions of schools in our society. We can say that the constitutive functions of schools are, broadly, to provide both teaching and caregiving for the young.<sup>25</sup> There are some views of teaching that do not clearly distinguish between these two functions, but we need to insist that, although there is a sense in which the two functions are related to each other, they are not the same. Organizing systematic learning might, in some ways, involve seeing to the preconditions of learning, but we can rapidly run beyond the boundary of the formal element of the practice of teaching.

The 'traditional' model of schools assumes that the young live in secure family settings. Such settings were assumed to include literate (middle class?) members, and to provide reliable shelter, nutrition, clothing, emotional support, cognitive stimulation, monitoring of health status, protection from violence, etc. And in such an ideal situation the 'caregiving' functions of schools can be secondary relative to their 'teaching' functions; the need for 'caregiving' is likely to be limited to relatively rare cases. And, partly for this reason, it could be assumed that 'teachers' would, by and large,<sup>26</sup> take on the caregiving functions of schools in addition to teaching.

But in our context the caregiving functions of schools need to be dramatically expanded. The reasons for this are obvious to most of us in this audience. They include the disruptions of community safety nets as urbanisation proceeds apace; the increasing rarity of two-parent nuclear families with two or three offspring; the increasing proportion of orphans and vulnerable children in our schools; the high levels of adult illiteracy; the increasing emmiseration of the already poor; the high levels of unemployment; the disastrous impacts of the HIV and AIDS pandemic; the increasing levels of violence and lack of safety in the streets; etc. In many instances it is already the case that teachers are so overwhelmed by these 'caregiving' functions that they have precious little time and energy to devote to teaching.

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<sup>25</sup> We might add that other functions of schools are as symbols of access to the modern world and, in some cases, to be the only stable institutions in disrupted and destitute communities. But my story would become excessively complicated if I tried to include these additional functions.

<sup>26</sup> There were, typically, other employees in the school who could take on some of the caregiving functions. Sometimes there were school 'nurses', and in many cases (as still happens in many schools and universities to this day) people employed, for example, as secretaries provided a sympathetic ear for students in difficulties.

The question for us as a society is whether, if we understand schools as 'welfare institutions' for the young, we expect teachers to be responsible for this function in addition to teaching? Is part of our answer to the question: What is teachers' work? that it includes caregiving for the young?<sup>27</sup>

If we cast our mind back briefly to the United Kingdom National Agreement – 'Raising Standards and Tracking Workload' – we can notice that at the heart of that project is 'freeing teachers to teach', and their main issue is to free teachers of 'administrative and other tasks not intrinsically related to teaching'. While in our context we need to agree that we should develop strategies to reduce the administrative tasks of teachers, perhaps, as in the United Kingdom, by employing competent administrative clerks to do this work, this is only the tip of the iceberg of the current workload of a great number of our teachers. Our context forces on them a range of labour-intensive and energy-consuming responsibilities not 'intrinsically related to teaching'. Given the cost of educating and employing teachers, perhaps we need to consider whether it might not be not only cost saving but more effective on both counts, to employ in schools people whose job will be to be responsible for the caregiving functions of schools.

## Learning to teach

Any teacher education programme<sup>28</sup> is based on two presuppositions, linked to each other: (i) an answer to the question: What is teachers' work? and (ii) a particular idea of the schools or other institutions in which the students will seek employment.

We can again go back to the beginning. The job of teachers is to teach. And this implies that the principal task of teacher education programmes is to teach their students how to teach. But we are now in a position to see that this involves developing an understanding of both the formal and the material elements of teaching; both a constitutive conception of teaching and a set of suggestions for how it might be embodied in a range of contexts and conditions. A teacher education programme that fails to devote sufficient attention to both of these elements is to that extent deficient.

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<sup>27</sup> We can notice how we have come around again to one of the dimensions of 'learner-centred education' – but this time perhaps we should drop the 'education'.

<sup>28</sup> Learning to teach, like learning to read, has no finish line. Learning to teach involves an initial phase – usually, but misleadingly, called 'pre-service teacher education', but it also involves on-going professional development – usually, but again misleadingly, called 'in-service training'. 'Teacher education' encompasses both.

The Departments of Education themselves (reinforced by the *Norms and Standards*), and indeed even many higher education institutions which provide teacher education, have a strong tendency to argue that the only justifiable answer to the question: What is teachers' work? lies in faithfully preparing teachers for the roles they will be required to undertake in schools, especially the 'implementation' of the Revised National Curriculum Statement. And the fashionable idea that 'learnerships' are the royal road to learning how to teach appears to be based on the same answer. But this, as we can now clearly see, is to understand teaching in terms of its material elements. And this is a trap. If my class is 'too big, or the stationery has not been delivered, or there are no desks for the learners, then teaching is 'impossible' and I might as well stay away from school or sit in the sun with my fellow teachers and complain about the corruptions and inefficiency of the Education Department.

Programmes of teacher education typically assume a relatively stable schooling system with relatively predictable roles for teachers in that system. Thus, they train teachers for specific phases of the school system or specific 'learning areas' while ignoring the fact that once they get a job in a school they are likely to have to teach in whichever phase or 'learning area' the school has a gap. In addition the school curriculum – even the Revised National Curriculum Statement – is a transitory organisation of knowledge that can change quite unpredictably. So, unless we think of our teacher education programmes as providing teachers with a deeper understanding of some field of knowledge – deeper than the current school curriculum – we are setting them up for frustration and failure in their professional careers.

A principal shortcoming of most teacher education programmes<sup>29</sup> is that they fail to reflect a distinction between the formal and the material elements of teaching. They, thus, tend to define teaching in terms of a favoured set of teaching methods that presuppose particular facilities, conditions and resources. If students remain mired at this level, the level of the material elements of teaching, they are unable to develop their capacity as professional agents. And unless the students come to an effective practical understanding of the formal element of teaching – a non context bound conception of teaching – they are unlikely to be able to develop the flexible competences which will enable them to teach, no matter how unpromising the contexts and conditions may seem. The key question that those learning how to teach need to learn how to answer is: How can I organize systematic learning in *this* context and *these* conditions, whatever the context and conditions are?

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<sup>29</sup> This was a central shortcoming of the programme to which I was subjected many moons ago, and is a feature of almost all of the teacher education programmes with which I have had some contact.

If we continue to muddle the formal and the material elements of teaching we will continue to produce teachers who will be faced with a suicidal workload, and lack the professional autonomy and flexibility that is and will increasingly be required in the rough and volatile world in which we try to achieve the ideal of providing quality education for all.

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# Using narrative inquiry to explore school transformation: a principal's tale

Lorraine Lawrence

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## Abstract

The paper is based on a research study in progress at the University of Fort Hare, School of Postgraduate Studies in Education. I use narrative inquiry to increase understanding of the meaning of school transformation and the processes and principles involved in turning schools round in a radical way. The study investigates a sample of best practice schools that participated in the Eastern Cape Department of Education's (ECDOE) Imbewu School Transformation Programme. They are all in extremely deprived rural or township contexts. It uses the narratives of principals to understand their perceptions of what happened in their schools during and after the intervention. The paper focuses on one primary school principal, and reflections on the narrative draw out principles and processes that have led to transformation. Based on these reflections the paper concludes by linking them to existing theories from post colonial African philosophy, social theory and educational theory. The aim of the paper is to increase understanding of whole school transformation in a specific context. I recognise that research in other contexts may lead to different understandings.

There are different ways of doing educational research and there is an increasingly rich source of South African writing about the challenges facing large scale curriculum and governance changes. Studies by Taylor and Vinjevold (1999) focus on attaining the important goal of improved learner performance but present arguments that seem to reject the more reflective research offered in Lewin, Samuel and Sayed's (2003) studies from the Multi-site Teacher Education Research Project (MUSTER). The research study on which this paper is based is closer to the latter (although it focuses on principals not teachers). It uses a qualitative interpretive approach to understanding school transformation in very deprived contexts. It suggests that before we can attempt to improve teacher and learner performance, it is important to listen to the voices of remarkable people who have transformed both themselves and their schools' learning environments as a preliminary step to attaining the goal of improved performance. The study is situated in a research paradigm that is discussed in more detail later in the paper. Since the context of the schools in the study is so crucial to understanding the transformation, the first part of the paper describes the educational landscape and the intervention programme, Imbewu, which the schools experienced.

## Contextual background

The challenges of transforming schools in the Eastern Cape are by now well known. The last decade has seen the education system in one of the poorest provinces in South Africa reeling under the almost impossible tasks facing the provincial government and people. Systemic and structural changes involved in bringing together two homeland administrations with the various departments for segregated racial groups that existed in the old Republic has, in itself, been a logistical nightmare. Added to this, the task of implementing a new national curriculum, C2005, in schools that were totally unprepared for the onslaught of new ideas and teaching approaches meant that the first decade of educational change in the province has been one of sometimes overwhelming demands.

Social and educational transformation in the Eastern Cape is taking place in a context of deep rural poverty, high unemployment in rural and urban areas, an increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS affecting all members of the educational community, and the concomitant social problems of crime, alcoholism, child and women abuse and a spirit of depression and dejection.

The schools, like the ones in this study, are largely severely deprived and operating with inadequate infrastructure, resources and teaching staff. In the 1990s, the principals and teaching staff in the schools were largely unprepared for their role in transforming the old schools into the new, progressive centres of independent learning that outcomes based education envisages. Over the last decade strenuous efforts have been made to upgrade and update both managers and teachers but the fact remains that teachers were ill equipped to deal with the old system let alone the new.

In the 1990s, schools and their surrounding communities were also alienated from one another in a way that rendered school life almost untenable at times. Parents did not see themselves as responsible for the school that provided education for their children. School was often seen as 'government' and government, pre-1994, was apartheid. Principals were sometimes seen as collaborators of government and district officials as instruments of government. To move from this dysfunctional and sometimes violently antagonistic relationship to one of school and community working together was difficult to conceive in the last decade.

Whilst all of this is true as a general picture, there have been slow but important changes in the education scene over the last ten years. Teachers are attending upgrading programmes run by the Department and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Principals are receiving management training. There are extraordinary examples, as will be seen in this study, of schools and

individuals working together to turn a school around. The provincial department is running school building programmes to improve some of the worst schools in the province. More schools now have computers and a supply of textbooks arriving each year. However, the progress is slow and unfortunately it is probably still true to say that the majority of schools in the province are struggling with dysfunctional structures and systems (ECDOE, 2005).

The research study on which this paper is based looks at a primary school intervention programme that operates in partnership with the ECDOE. In order to understand the role it plays in school transformation, it is necessary to tell a little of the story of the programme, originally known as the Imbewu Project.

## The intervention programme: ECDOE/Imbewu School Transformation Programme (STP)

The Imbewu Project started to operate in the ECDOE in October 1997 under a joint management team comprising ECDOE, Project Team Co-ordinator, Joint Education Trust (JET), Crown Agents UK, and a local NGO, ITEC. It is relevant to this study that I was a member of the Imbewu team of technical assistants that worked with department colleagues in planning, designing and implementing what became known as the STP. For that reason I did not attempt to evaluate the programme, but I am interested in trying to understand what participating schools felt happened to them during and after the intervention.

Imbewu Project is funded by a partnership agreement between the ECDOE and the British Government Department for International Development (DfID). Part of the Project plan was a training programme for up to 500 of the most disadvantaged primary schools in the province. It started in 100 primary schools and spread to 524 by 2000. The programme funding was approved for a further number of years under new management (a Netherlands based organisation, Arcadis) in Phase 2. About 1 500 primary and secondary schools have now gone through the training. It is in the process of being integrated into the ECDOE's plans for training in schools, and the Imbewu office will close in 2007.

The original Project training programme plan was based on a conventional framework of School Management and School Governing Body training plus INSET for Foundation Phase, and Language, Mathematics and Science teachers up to Grade 9. However, in the first six months of the project in 1997 and 1998, a fundamental change was made to the training programme

framework. The project team dispersed to the four corners of the province to visit the schools and to meet district education officials, school staff and community members. We all returned with the same view. It was not advisable to start management and INSET training in many of the schools. We found schools and communities totally alienated from one another with little contact between teachers and parents. In some districts there was a level of violence that was dangerous. Many schools were regularly vandalised by the community. Infrastructure and resources were generally abysmally lacking. Teachers were demotivated and demoralised and were facing a new national curriculum that involved radical changes in planning and teaching.

It was out of this troubled and demoralised context, an insidious blend of the ravages of apartheid and poverty, that the seeds of a different kind of programme were sown. We came to call the project Imbewu, the word for 'seed' in isiXhosa. We saw it initially as the seed of education. From the context we worked in it became, I think, the seed of transformation.

Imbewu modules are full of metaphors. Out of the recognition that something had to be done prior to the conventional training programme, came the second agricultural metaphor; we had to 'till the soil' to prepare it for the seed. A series of modules was developed that were meant to till the soil – the introductory modules of the STP. They were reordered and revised in the ensuing period but remain essentially the same in approach and principles.

If I have any assumptions about the way transformation happens, they arise from the impact that the introductory modules can have on individuals and schools. It is my strong intuition that the principles, concepts and approaches in these modules encourage empowerment, the growth of self-belief, and a new determination to do something about the schools that is part of a transformed individual and school. This intuition was supported by years of anecdotal evidence which led me to the narrative technique used in this study.

The introductory modules (ECDOE 1998/1999; 2002/2005) focus around:

- An event – a Vision Crafting event, a school and community celebration.
- A concept – Whole School Development, to which is also linked the two modules related to planning, School Development Support (SDS) and In School Professional Development (ISPD).
- An approach – Practice Based Inquiry (PBI) (which is no longer a module in Phase 2, but is embedded in all the introductory modules).

There is also a module on Managing Change in Education that acts as an umbrella for the others.

The modules were presented at workshops in district clusters of school and community representatives, consisting of the principal, teacher change agents and SGB/community representatives. The Vision Crafting event was carried out at individual schools after the workshop.

### Underlying principles in the School Transformation Programme

A number of important principles are deeply embedded in the introductory modules, starting from the initial Vision Crafting module and event. These appear to be instruments of empowerment of individuals and schools, as will be seen in the narrative that follows.

In the Vision Crafting workshop and event, the participants become aware of the collective wisdom of individuals in the school and community, and begin to respect it as a powerful tool for development. The community and its values become an integral part of the school and help to build it. The development of a new 'spirit' in the school and the promotion of the principle of love are crucial in the transformation process. An important principle of Vision Crafting is the nurturing of that spirit in individuals and schools, and this study has evidence that in some schools this spirit has been sustained.

A caring attitude towards one another is more fully developed in the Whole School Development (WSD) and School Development Support (SDS) modules; the concept of a whole person and a whole institution leads to more thinking about what is required for personal, professional and institutional development (the SDS and ISPD modules). The principle of ongoing professional development is strongly emphasized. The belief that people develop themselves is stressed throughout the programme (Nyerere, 1973).

An important aspect of the entire programme is the use of Practice Based Inquiry, an action research approach to training. In Phase 1 participants made an action plan at the end of each workshop. This was shared with colleagues, implemented and evaluated. The team reported back at the beginning of the next workshop. This leads to teamwork, sharing of knowledge, and an internalised planning process. It is intended to build confidence and self esteem as people realise that they can develop themselves and their schools through their own efforts.

The critical outcomes of the STP reflect the same confidence and skills building emphasis. They are close to the critical outcomes of OBE and develop practitioners who are competent:

- Critical inquirers
- Creative thinkers
- Communicators
- Team workers
- Responsible professionals
- Change agents

(ECDOE Vision Crafting Module 1998, p.4)

## The research study: exploring transformation in good practice Imbewu schools

Five years after the end of Imbewu Phase 1, in 2004, I began a research study in Imbewu good practice schools while working at the University of Fort Hare. The study is ongoing and is discussed in more detail in Lawrence and Moyo (2006).

Since my objective was not to evaluate but to listen to people's perceptions in order to understand the transformation process, I chose to use narrative inquiry as my research technique. The study is particularly influenced by writers such as Mishler (1986) and Clandinin and Connelly (2000).

The study therefore uses a subjectivist approach based on a view that people perceive life and experiences in very different ways, and I am concerned to get 'inside people' to understand their perceptions. In this study I am interested in understanding the concept and processes of transformation. Although I recognise the theoretical principles embedded in the training programme, it is my assumption that any theoretical framework will emerge from the study of the schools' experiences. They will be confirmed by practice within a specific context.

I recognise that this study also has synergies with critical theory (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). I have been totally involved in the area of research as a facilitator of transformation. I am driven by beliefs in equity and justice, poverty alleviation and even the apparently inaccessible levelling of the playing fields. It is not possible for me to present myself as neutral or 'politically innocent' (*ibid.*, p.28). I recognise a kindred spirit in Griffiths (1998, p.3), who starts her book on social justice research with the lines, "This is a book about using research for working towards justice, fairness and equity in education".

The crucial influence, however, has come from Clandinin and Connelly (2000). In exploring narrative inquiry, I found a number of key issues in

Clandinin and Connelly. Firstly, they indicate the breadth of sources of data in this form of inquiry, e.g. oral history, stories, photographs, interviews, journals, autobiographies, letters, conversations, and documents; many of these have been used in my study, sometimes almost accidentally as a principal would offer me documents while I recorded the story.

The authors see narrative inquiry as a way of *understanding experience*, which is exactly what I am trying to do; they refer to the purpose of narrative inquiry as providing a “set of understandings by analysing stories” (p.55). This focus on understanding leads to a further characteristic of inquiry, i.e. the collaboration between the researcher and participants over time, in a place and in social interaction. This has been a learning experience for the people in this study, and I am still in the process of eliciting my participants’ responses to the narratives I have developed from their interviews. Those responses are a key to understanding, researching and changing perceptions.

Clandinin refers to searching and researching taking place in a three-dimensional space in which inquirers search, i.e. you move backwards and forwards in time (from past to present and often back to past). You also move inward and outward, i.e. you move into the feelings about events and outward to locate these in the social context in which they happen. I have done this in the study clearly involving my own feelings and responses, but also trying to distance myself and look at the school and its social context as part of analysis. This means that the work of a narrative inquirer is always *work in progress* with different response communities that reflect and alter the work.

The inquirers are not ‘above’ and ‘objective’. They enter the world with their own understanding and they live their own story, as I have done, remembering the story of myself as part of the Imbewu programme and of myself now as a researcher. Inevitably my story is reflected in my perceptions of the principals; we, participants and researcher are in ‘the midst’; we all become part of the history.

### The sample of schools

Having decided to use narrative inquiry as my research methodology, I planned a research study of 10 primary, combined, and secondary schools in the ex-Ciskei and ex-Transkei. They all participated in either Phase 1 or Phase 2 of the Imbewu programme. They are situated in the following areas:

- Two primary schools in Peddie (one is rural, the other close to the centre of Peddie);



- One combined school in Kenton;
- Two primary schools in Rhini, Grahamstown;
- Two combined schools in Mthatha (one rural the other in a township in Mthatha);
- One primary school and one combined school in Libode (one in a fairly rural area, the other in Libode village);
- One secondary school in Uitenhage.

The schools were selected with the assistance of the Imbewu district co-ordinators, once I had obtained permission to research the programme from the ECDOE and the Imbewu office. As I was not aiming to evaluate but rather to understand ‘transformation’, I asked the co-ordinators to select schools that were known to have responded positively to the programme and to have brought about radical changes in relation to school ethos and culture, relations with the community and sound management.

### Data collection

In carrying out this research, I have visited all the schools once or twice and kept field notes of my impressions of the schools. I have also taken photographs, and collected files with histories that the schools have given me. I have recorded interviews with the principals and transcribed these; they are the foundation of my research study.

For the interview, I did not prepare any questions other than “tell me a bit about your life before you became principal of this school” and “tell me the story of Imbewu at your school”. But the interviews always became a conversation as I became increasingly involved and used my knowledge of the programme to ask other unprepared questions. The interview thus follows the approach recommended in Mishler (1986) as a means for allowing the participant the freedom of expression that a more structured interview may lack.

### Data analysis

From these field texts, I have started to write the stories of individual schools. They have become what Clandinin (2000) describes as ‘interim’ texts, between field texts and the final research text. I have shown the transcriptions plus some description and interpretation to some of the principals; their responses will also become part of the study.



Once I had the interim texts I explored what Clandinin and Connelly (p.67) describe as “backing and forthing” that is, moving from the present into remembering the past, comparing the physical space of the schools, and reflecting on any personal feelings and involvement that might be influencing selective memory and perceptions. I am writing a text on each of the 10 schools individually, but as I do so I realise that I can also pull them together in what Craig (2003) calls ‘story constellations’. I also see a way of developing ‘story constellations’ by combining different schools that illustrate a particular characteristic, e.g. schools that are good examples of working together with communities.

In telling the story, the principals all refer to the training programme as Imbewu as this is how they were introduced to it. They have all been offered anonymity but they all requested that their voice be ‘named’ and their school be recognised. I accepted this as part of a study that recognises the social justice research framework and the right of people to be heard in the way that they wish. The names below are therefore the actual names of the principals and schools.

I have selected one story for this paper as it seemed a strong illustration of the extent to which a principal acknowledges both institutional and individual transformation as a result of the programme. It illustrates an experience that has led the individuals to see education as being concerned with the whole child.

## A story of whole school development at Archie Mbolekwa Primary School, Rhini: told by Mr Zola Mothlabane, Principal

### Context of the school

The setting for this story of transformation is one that would defy the strongest will to bring about change. Rhini is a sprawling stretch of informal settlements and larger more permanent buildings along the road into Grahamstown from King Williams Town and Fort Beaufort. The area has all the features of socio-economic deprivation described at the start of the paper. It is facing an increasingly higher incidence of HIV/AIDS.

I visited Mr Zola Mothlabane at Archie Mbolekwa Primary School for the first time in May 2005. The school is on a dusty track road wandering into fairly barren land, and at first appears a little bleak. However, immediately you enter the school courtyard, the atmosphere changes. It is immaculately maintained and there is an energy that is almost tangible. Teachers and principal give you a friendly welcome and learners are in their

classes working. People are busy; they also seem happy. Zola Mothlabane has been the principal since 1987 and worked at the school for several years before that. He is quiet but as he tells the story of his school his eyes begin to shine and his enthusiasm increases; he is passionate about what has happened and I let him flow on like water bubbling over a rock.

The constraints of this paper have led me to analyse the narrative and categorise significant transformational issues using parts of the text to highlight issues rather than presenting the entire narrative.

### Recognising that the school and individuals are transformed

Zola began his story with a memory of the school as it was in 1998, before the intervention. Comparing this with two later comments about the school and his staff clarifies his perception that a fundamental change has occurred.

*Before Imbewu really we were a rigid traditional school. There were no things that you would witness now. We were just an ordinary school you know, functioning properly but with no initiatives in terms of improving the school and. . . we were just banking on the Department to come to our aid. Nothing was happening on our own. . . we were that type of a school.*

Later in his narrative, he talks about the changed spirit of the school after the Imbewu programme. His pride in the school is obvious as he talks about its reputation in the area.

*You know if you are new in this town and you ask where can I take my child to. . . then everyone will say. . . (whispers) take your child to Archie Mbolekwa. . .*

I asked him why this reputation had grown.

*Well I would say. . . looking at the teachers. . . we got motivated teachers – my educators can't be beaten. . . they don't look at the principal. . . even if I go for a course, I know that work will be done. . . they don't work for me. . . they got a responsibility to educate the black child. . . that is important to them. . . and without these children there wont be any work. . . so there is a culture here that we must work. . . you know I am the principal and I am still young and we are all of this age. . . all of us have a lot of energy.*

I am not suggesting that the study has proved that teaching and learning has improved in the school. I am noting the principal's changed perception of his school and the pride he feels in this change. There is a strong sense of motivation in himself and respect for his teachers. This was reinforced when I walked around the school and observed the interactions between principal and

staff. I note also the pride that they are working responsibly for the education of black children.

Zola Mothlabane speaks passionately of the transformation that has occurred at Archie Mbolekwa.

*. . . Man, before Imbewu we were not like we are right now. Imbewu motivated us. . . it came with words of initiate, initiate. . . what are the other words. . . that of putting yourself in another person's position. . . all this vocabulary came with Imbewu. . . it motivated us. . .*

Most of his narrative goes on to explain how this happened and gives concrete signs of radical change in the school.

### Vision Crafting opened the door

Tracing the process of transformation at the school brought a humorous description of their experience of Vision Crafting. He admits laughingly that they were not sure about this event and only went into it because it was funded! He also remembers that not all the staff supported it. However, his description moves into an enthusiastic and clear account of what happened; the school understood what the event was supposed to include and achieve. The headings in bold italics indicate essential principles of Vision Crafting events.

#### ***Coming together and sharing our history and cultures***

*I can even recall we managed to get those who had choirs. . . we were going to have activities on that day. . . our speakers . . . we managed to get them. . . even the parents. . . the turn out was good. . . in fact we are blessed in this school. The parents are very supportive. I can remember there were two or three educators who were not part of this. One of them was sitting just behind the toilets there in his car. . . but we ran the programme in such a way that it was very interesting. . . We started with the history of the school. . . you know fortunately Mr T (the previous principal) had left something in writing . . . at least there was a lot I knew about the school. . . I remember the chairperson of our SGB. . . he also had to do something.*

#### ***Sharing dreams about a better school***

*Then we came to that part where we had to divide the parents to go to the classrooms so that they could go there and DREAM. . . I cannot remember how many groups there were. . . but there were leaders for each group. . . parents had an opportunity of dreaming. . . we supplied them with chalk. . . they were writing on the board and then transferred to a chart. . . they had to give themselves names. . . and then they had to have a scribe and reporter. . . they had to come back . . . and they had a song so that when they were called they sang their song. . . and then come and present.*

***Celebrating achievements together***

*Then fortunately people were served because we had got that funding to prepare for them. . . it was just a nice thing!* (his smile and the enthusiasm in his voice indicated a happy memory of the day).

***Beginning the process of planning to realise our dreams***

*Then it was left to the SGB and the teachers to look at those dreams. . . to try and prioritise them and see which ones we could tackle and what was going to be difficult. . . ja. . . it started then.*

All the principals in the study talk about Vision Crafting in the same way. Affectionate memories of people coming together; sharing dreams for the first time; feeling they all were part of the school. Principals as far apart as Libode, Peddie and Grahamstown use very similar words to describe the experience and its impact. For all of them it was an event that led to something significant happening in their schools and communities.

## The community and the school plan together for Whole School Development

One of the most important functions of Vision Crafting is the bringing together of school and community. Remembering the context of school and community alienation, this was an essential but difficult outcome to achieve in some violence torn districts.

The school and community at Archie Mbolekwa did not simply come together. They began to plan for whole school improvement. And the coming together also improved relationships between the staff and parents. Zola lists a whole range of extremely concrete developmental projects that led to a safer school environment and involved the community as a whole.

*You know we did not know that the parents had a vision about their school. . . because the things they mentioned there were things we also did not think of and we didn't think the parents knew about those things, especially the things they wanted in their school. . . the tuck shop. . . paint the school. . . you know that type of thing. I think a lot of things came out . . . that we implemented you know . . . **we are just now a different school** (I observed the tuck shop and condition of the buildings later in my visit).*

## Developing a more caring school environment

The first step was to build a proper office for the administrator so that she and the principal did not have to share an office. The original office was divided in two. The school then moved into much bigger projects that have centred on the improvement of health among learners and teachers. We were in fact carrying out the interview in one of the most impressive Health Rooms that I have seen in a school. The main focus is on HIV/AIDS education, prevention, counselling and support.

*You know before we were an Imbewu school, we would not have a health centre like this one. . . and when we have. . . some of our learners are losing their parents because of HIV and AIDS. . . now they sit here with them. . . (two comfortable sofas) and there is an educator who has been trained. . . she's a counsellor. . . she has been trained. . . now if there is a learner who is crying because they have lost a parent. . . (voice becoming comforting) they can come and sit here. . . we bought these you know. . . Imbewu opened our minds I can assure you. Yes there's a lot of education here . . . they must know everything about health. . . can you see that (gestures to AIDS posters) in the past we wouldn't have things like those . . . but the learners must know this is affecting their lives.*

The focus on health has also led to skills development for both teachers and learners, as the school has joined the child to child care programme, which encourages learners to care for one another and to recognise peer needs for support with food, hygiene and possible signs of illness.

*There are two educators who have been trained. . . they are in charge. . . there is another interesting programme we are having from this centre which is child to child. . . where learners educate other learners you know. . . about health. . . for example if there is a learner here who is sick. . . the educators will get it from the learners. . . there are class reps in each classroom looking at the health needs of other learners. We planned this ourselves; our learners go to workshops. . . they are in charge of this child to child.*

The strong focus on providing support for children affected by HIV/AIDS is seen also in the development plans for nutrition organised by the school and community. He showed me an impressive garden, unusual in a township school, as evidenced in his proud laugh when he told me.

*We got a garden. . . laughs. . . when we harvest we cook for the children. . . you know this area is poverty stricken so that garden is helping us. . . we were helped by the Mthathi project. . . which initiates gardens. . . they stay for three years, now we take the initiative again. . .*

*Now we have a system here. . . they call it trench gardening. . . you know we are on a rocky place. . . but you will be amazed to see the harvest we are getting. . . only last week we are harvesting beans. . . the plots there are. . . you dig out everything up to your knee level and then you put in cabbage leaves, grass, papers, cardboard then put back the soil and plant.*

The vegetables are used to cook meals in the new kitchen which has also been built and furnished by development planning efforts with the School Governing Body and funds raised through a search for donors in Grahamstown.

He continued a long and impressive list of what the school had planned and achieved. What is significant about them is that the developments cover the welfare of all the school community. They have, for instance, approached Rhodes University for old computers which are now in the staffroom and teachers are being trained in computer literacy.

They have also painted the classrooms to improve the atmosphere for learners and teachers.

*. . . because of our initiatives we got a whole drum of paint from Dulux in P.E. . . . they delivered it here. . .*

And the cement floors of the classroom have been resurfaced.

*We decided that. . . it was really from Imbewu. . . because of one of the programmes we were doing in one of the modules which said. . . we must identify something we must do. . . there must be people who are accountable (these are important ideas from Practice Based Inquiry and the planning guide in School Development Support) so we embarked on this resurfacing. . . we called back all the old students (the whole community was asked to contribute and assist, which they did).*

Finally, the dream of so many schools in the province, their concerted efforts have led to the provision of water in the school and the installation of flush toilets.

What has all of this got to do with education? Anyone who has worked in the average rural or township school in the Eastern Cape would understand the connection. The horribly familiar sight of children learning in classrooms that are unsafe because of broken ceilings or rough floor surfaces, with walls that are unpainted or without any teaching aids has been eradicated by the passion for development at Archie Mbolekwa. Struggling to make a school more attractive, safer and learner centred in this context requires energy and creativity of a special kind.

What has this to do with the Imbewu intervention? Mr Mothlabane is passionate in his conviction that it has everything to do with it. He even attends workshops in the district for Phase 2 schools to act as a mentor, encouraging new schools to experiment with the ideas of the programme because they had worked for him.

*What we got from Imbewu was. . . we got this idea you know. . . that there is no I in a team. . . umm. . . and its in everybody to be wise. . . I might have forgotten some of the things. . . but there was a lot we had to learn (becoming more and more enthusiastic) . . . the idea that transformation begins with me. . . you know. . . I am a change agent. . . all of this we learnt from Imbewu.*

I went round the school and saw all the things mentioned above. I also saw their efforts to build a science laboratory in one classroom. The positive spirit and culture of the school was evident. All the teachers that I greeted were friendly, lively and told me they were transformed. I did not use the word myself; it came from them. Relationships with the principal seemed good.

Each classroom has teaching aids, including learners' work, on the walls. This was almost unheard of in rural and township schools when we started work in the '90s. The Principal looked at me after the class visits and said. . . *"You see we are a Model C school"* (referring to previously white schools) and laughed with pride. I felt he was better than that. The effort of achieving all of this in one of the poorest urban areas in the province, surrounded by high levels of unemployment, is what makes his story so moving and so remarkable.

Other schools in the study echo the new willingness to take initiatives. A principal in rural Libode contacted the Japanese government office (in Tokyo!) to persuade their School Building Programme to add her school to the list. Another school in Rhini has an HIV/AIDS and health support system that educationalists from all over the country came to investigate. A secondary school in Uitenhage uses Practice Based Inquiry to plan matriculation improvement, and networks effectively with HEIs and NGOs nationally to improve their science teaching. They all claim that Imbewu spurred them into this self belief and into an ongoing process of self- and institutional development.



## Reflecting on practice: linking the lessons learnt to a theoretical framework

This paper is written at a time when the study is still very much work in progress. However, following the example of Paolo Freire (1972), it is possible to take the evolving understandings of transformation and of the processes used in the intervention, and to reflect on them in the light of existing theories relevant to the study, thus informing both the theory and the practice. These theories are multi-disciplinary and it is only possible here to refer briefly to what I see as links between this study and Post Colonial African philosophy, social theory and education. Before looking at the underlying epistemology of the study, however, I have also gained insights from the practice of doing narrative inquiry.

### Narrative is a way of knowing (Bruner, 1986)

The study provides strong evidence of the value of narrative as a research methodology providing knowledge that complements positivist studies but is different from them. The principals' narratives in this study are exemplars of how to turn dysfunctional and demotivated schools around, thus offering validity to the principles and processes that they describe (Mishler, 1990). The fact that the schools are five years beyond the intervention strengthens a cautious claim for sustainability. I see this as an essential step towards improving teacher and learner performance in the future.

A strong message from the intervention and from reflections on the practice is that schools are transformed by individuals who are transformed.

Who are these remarkable individuals? What is it that drives Zola Mothlabane and others to seek excellence for themselves and their learners in the midst of deprivation? The search for answers to this question covers numerous sources across disciplines. The participants have all emerged from the apartheid period. The work of Freire (1972) leads to an analysis that is both educational and political, looking at the impact of colonialism on the oppressed. African literature also provides creative illustrations of the pain and damage done to the soul and self esteem of individuals throughout the continent; this is seen particularly vividly in the writing of Achebe, Soyinka and Ngugi. There are important synergies with the work of Post Colonial African studies focusing on developing new identities in the post colonial period (e.g. Eze, 1997) and the research being done into 'identities' by South African academics (e.g.



Soudien in Lewin, Samuel and Sayed, 2003). At Fort Hare, Duku (2006) and Mtose and Durrheim (2005) are researching critical issues of identity among parents and learners. Another principal, like Mr Mothlabane, spoke with a conscious pride of 'black schools and communities moving forward, moving forward' (Unpublished transcript).

In the area of social theory, the study provides interesting data relevant to the debate around the role of structure and agency in the work of Giddens who holds the view that 'structure' i.e. social structures, institutions and systems "do not exist independently of the reasons, motivations and reflexive behaviour of actual people" (Layder, 1994, p.140).

It is possible that this paper illustrates the interdependence rather than the separation of structure and agency. It provides data from practice for the work of Moyo (2005) on the relationship between agency and structure in South Africa. Interestingly, the Imbewu Project team changed the name of workshop participants from 'key teachers' to 'change agents', people who would work as a team to bring about individual and institutional transformation.

There is a new spirit in the school and in the community; this spirit has to be nurtured as it is the base for transformation.

The Vision Crafting module (1998/9/2002/5) speaks openly of 'spirit'. It is left to the participants to define what that spirit is, according to culture and belief. However, from all the narratives in the study so far, there is a strong emphasis on a spiritual base. People talk about being 'born again' in relation to the school and to teaching, and many speak openly of a faith-based life. Mphahlele (2004) and Biko (2004), both critical of institutional religion, agree that spirituality is a powerful force in African culture both traditional and modern.

Transformation seems to depend on the strengthening and/or birth of profound values and attitudes that lead to changes in the way people perceive themselves and relate to others. These motivate people to develop themselves and the school.

This principle needs to be explored more closely in relation to spiritual, psychological and educational theory. However there are interesting synergies with Farrer (2000) describing a project designed by Neil Hawkes leading to a 'quiet revolution' in schools as a result of encouraging positive values in learners, teachers and parents. And Joyce, Calhoun and Hopkins (1999) dedicate their book on developing inquiring schools and achieving students in the following significantly 'subjective' way:

To Love. When you write about school improvement, you come to  
Realise that no matter how good we get technically, it is love that  
Makes the school improvement world go round (Joyce *et al.*, 1999).

In the context of the Eastern Cape, it is significant that the principle of growing closer together has led to a more loving and caring relationship not only in the school, but also between the school and the community in some of the best practice Imbewu schools.

The use of planning skills and processes dominates the narrative. Parents and school staff identify problems, prioritise and implement development plans together.

This is another principle of transformation seen in all of the narratives, and Archie Mbolekwa is a strong illustration of Whole School Development planning. Planning is, of course, a major component in action research; practice based inquiry being the action research model for the intervention. As the study unfolds, it will be important to link the narrative outcomes to the recognised value of action research in teacher professional development. This has long been cited in the work of Kemmis and McTaggart (e.g.1988), Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead (e.g. 1996) and more indirectly in the evolving meanings of educational change presented over the years by Michael Fullan (e.g.1992).

## Searching and researching: the ongoing journey of understanding transformation in schools

This is not a paper for impatient politicians who want the matriculation results to improve with immediate effect. The paper hardly touches on the improvement of learner performance. This is not because I do not consider that important. Indeed it is the ultimate outcome that all educationalists are striving for. However, I believe that this improvement can only happen if we look carefully at what a 'school' actually is in the context of the Eastern Cape, and try to improve it as a centre for learning and teaching. This entails a concrete programme of both practical and physical improvements, as well as a more subtle programme that is strongly value-based leading to profoundly altered attitudes and relationships of the people that run schools and those who send their children to them. This kind of transformation leads to professional development that springs from the hearts of the principals and teachers and builds schools that are an inspiration to visit, even in deprived contexts. Mr Zola Mothlabane of Archie Mbolekwa Primary School has a lot to teach us, as do many other unknown educators in this province.

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# How do we develop inclusional epistemologies for a new scholarship of democratic educational enquiry?

Jean McNiff and Ana Naidoo

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## Abstract

In this article we explain how and why, in our roles as a Dean and a visiting professor, we encourage practitioner-researchers in our faculties and elsewhere to generate and make public their descriptions and explanations of practice as their living educational theories, by addressing the question, ‘How do I/we improve my/our work?’ (Whitehead, 1989), as we also do, and as we are doing here. Grounded in inclusional logics and values, these accounts constitute a reconceptualisation of theory from normative propositional forms to new living forms. A key feature of these living theories is the articulation of the relationally dynamic standards of judgement we use to test the validity of our research claims. Working collaboratively with others, as we research our practices in higher education settings, however, can be problematic, since we are developing new participative discourses within institutional cultures whose aims often include the perpetuation of divisive and exclusionary politically-constituted discourses, using technocratic epistemologies, to control what counts as knowledge and who should be seen as a knower. We experience such tensions keenly, especially in South African higher education contexts, where a commitment to democratic educational enquiry often means wrestling with the ontological insecurities of transforming existing logics of domination into new inclusive epistemologies within a post-apartheid democratic university culture. This is, however, the task we have set ourselves. In this paper, we explain how, by subjecting our accounts to public critique as we research how to encourage the development of new institutional epistemologies, we are aiming to contribute to the education of the social formation of the higher education community. We are doing this by showing how it is possible to develop high quality research programmes that are grounded in inclusional and transformational logics and that focus on demonstrating their methodological rigour through an analysis of the transformation of ontological values into the epistemological standards of judgement against which the validity of research claims can be tested. We explain how the development of such new inclusional institutional epistemologies can act as the grounds for a form of social solidarity that can contribute to forms of sustainable social evolution and, in a South African context, can contribute to South Africa’s renaissance, and how our explanations for these processes can contribute to the education of wider social formations.

## Introduction

One of the greatest challenges facing the new post-apartheid South Africa can be understood as how to ensure that the key services and institutions of the country reflect the egalitarian impulses of the new democracy (Council on Higher Education, 2004). This is especially the case for education, given that education is the main institution for communicating the normative practices of the culture (Bourdieu, 1988), and ensuring the healthy development of the social formations within the culture. Given further that it is the task of higher education to set precedents for the epistemological base of what counts as normative practices within the culture, it is essential that the domain of higher education itself should reflect the commitments of the new democratic social order (Jenkins, Breen and Lindsay, 2003). If democracy implies that all citizens should come together, on an equal footing, to negotiate their own life plans, and find ways of living in the direction of their humanitarian and democratic values, a clear implication is that higher education itself needs to create new practices and new infrastructures to support the independent thinking of the members of its communities and ensure the basic conditions through which such independent thinking and communicative action can be safeguarded.

This is however a sticking point, which provides the context and the impulse for our research. As free and free-thinking professionals in higher education contexts, we wish to exercise our options for negotiating our practices, including our commitments to the development of the new epistemologies of the New Scholarship (Boyer, 1990), grounded as they are in democratic and humanitarian educational values. However, we often find ourselves in the institutional epistemological contexts of traditional forms of scholarship, in which those democratic educational values are frequently contradicted in practice. This happens often because of the entrenched assumptions of traditional institutional epistemologies that are grounded in established forms of propositional theory and a logic of domination (Marcuse, 1964), and that consequently deny both the democratic impulses of the socio-political practices of the new South Africa and the epistemological and methodological impulses of the New Scholarship. We therefore come to experience ourselves as living contradictions (Whitehead, 1989) when our democratic epistemological values of enquiry learning are denied in our practices by the hegemony of the dominant institutional values that focus on the control and maintenance of the existing epistemological order. We therefore exercise our minds as to how to overcome the tension, so that we do realise our values in our practices, and exercise our educational leadership in a manner that ensures the full social and epistemological democratic participation of all members of the institutional community.



At the same time, we appreciate that we cannot promote such new epistemologies without explaining how or why we do so, that is, without justifying our own practices and commitments to those new forms. Doing so would amount to oppression, as explained by Berlin (2002), who critiqued the contradictory practice of the imposition of freedom as a denial of the very freedom it claimed to value. In this paper therefore we offer this justification, and in so doing, show how we try to hold ourselves accountable for our educational leadership practices to ourselves, our colleagues, and to the educational research community.

First we set out the contexts for our research. We then go on to explain why we believe our research demonstrates internal validity and our own moral accountability.

## Contexts for our research

We work together at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU). Ana Naidoo is Dean of Education, with the responsibility for exercising her academic leadership in the development of a strong and coherent research-active Faculty. Jean McNiff is a visiting professor from St Mary's University College in the UK and a research associate at NMMU. Her professional commitments include the encouragement of faculty in her own College, at NMMU, and internationally, to develop their capacity in new scholarship forms of educational enquiry for social transformation. For the last two years we have been working together to strengthen research capacity at NMMU, in relation to developing a distinctive research approach whereby members of faculty investigate their practices by asking questions of the kind, 'How do I improve my practice?' and producing research accounts, comprising their descriptions and explanations of practice, as their living educational theories (Whitehead, 1989). Both of us have deep commitments to developing new institutional epistemologies for a new scholarship of educational enquiry (Whitehead, 1999). The idea of developing new institutional epistemologies for new scholarships of educational enquiry is an important idea that bears some further explanation.

In 1990, Ernest Boyer, then President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, proposed that the higher education professoriate needed to develop new priorities for their scholarship. Traditional forms of scholarship, he said, such as those conducted in the social sciences, had proven to be inadequate for the development of new educational practices that would have deep relevance for new forms of social practice. Boyer called for a new scholarship, through which professionals could study their own practice. In 1995, Donald Schön developed this theme, calling for new epistemologies for

the new scholarship. Traditional epistemologies, he said, were rooted in propositional forms of research and theory. In propositional forms of research, a researcher adopted a spectator attitude towards an object of enquiry in order to offer descriptions and explanations about it. The descriptions and explanations that the spectator researcher offered for the practice under observation came to constitute a theory about that practice. The form of theory was abstract and conceptual. This had long been accepted as the normative practice in educational research (Lagemann, 2000). Since the adoption by the community of educational researchers of the methods of the social sciences, educational researchers had observed their fields of study and produced their theories in the form of statements and propositions. This had considerable implications for practitioners in educational workplaces, whose learning educational theory was intended to serve. Propositional theories could be communicated to practitioners, who could apply the theories to their practices. This, said Boyer and Schön, was the traditional mode of enquiry in higher education settings, whose logical assumptions could inform the kind of pedagogical relationships appropriate for communicating and implementing propositional theories. Working from the spectator-researcher metaphor of traditional forms of enquiry, the same pattern of epistemological relationships between knower and what was known could easily transfer to pedagogical settings, where the teacher knew the theory and passed it on to their students. Therefore pedagogical relationships in education became power-constituted hierarchical relationships in which the teacher's knowledge was superior to the student's, and, by implication, the teacher was positioned as superior to the student. The metaphors of educational research easily manifested as a hierarchical structure for the communication and exercise of pedagogical power (see also Bernstein 2000).

Boyer, Schön and others said that this situation was inappropriate for education, especially higher education, whose philosophical commitments to growth and nurturing needed to manifest themselves as caring and supportive relationships. New epistemologies were therefore required that celebrated the capacity of all to exercise their originality and critical engagement, in order to find new forms of working through the development of communicative action. Schön believed that a new epistemology for a new scholarship would emerge from action research, in which practitioners focused on investigating and improving their own practice. The location of educational theory could be seen as within the practice, and educational theories of practice would emerge from the systematic study of the practice. Consequently, the focus of research would shift from a spectator perspective, with the aim of producing a theory about the practice, into a study of an educational practice from the perspective of the researcher themselves, with the aim of producing a theory that could account for the practice and show how the practitioner was prepared to hold themselves accountable for their work and the values that inspired the work.

This new form of theorising has been developed extensively, especially by Jack Whitehead and others at the University of Bath, and by Jean McNiff and others at St Mary's University College, and is now receiving considerable attention in the educational research community, especially in terms of how it can provide insights into what has become a critical issue in deciding the future of educational research, namely, how to assess quality in educational research and what kinds of criteria and standards of judgement are appropriate for the task (Whitehead 2004a, 2005; McNiff and Whitehead 2006; Whitehead and McNiff, 2006). We authors, Ana and Jean, address these issues now, especially in terms of their relevance to our context of introducing new epistemologies into our institutions. The question for us becomes, how do we demonstrate our accountability by producing our own living educational theories that contain the explicitly articulated standards we use to make judgements about the educational quality of our work? Further, if our aim is to develop new institutional epistemologies that reflect the same democratic impulses of the new South African social order, how do we show our capacity to transform our nominated criteria of social validity (Habermas, 1987) into new criteria of ethical validity, and then transform the abstract criteria into critical living standards of judgement, in order to show the commensurability of our ontological and epistemological values and their transformation into egalitarian practices that are life-affirming for all?

We address these issues in turn. First, we outline our understanding of Jack Whitehead's idea of living educational theories. Second, we explain how we understand the idea of critical living standards of judgement. Third, we explain the importance of showing the nature of the relationship between criteria of social validity and the realisation of educational values as the manifestation of the ethical validity of our social and methodologically rigorous scholarly practices.

## The idea of living educational theories

This idea was developed by Jack Whitehead in the 1970s, in response to the then dominant disciplines approach in education, which stated that education could be studied via its constitutive disciplines of sociology, psychology, philosophy and history (Peters, 1966; Hirst, 1983). The form of theory thus generated would be grounded in the study of the conceptual issues developed within the different disciplines. While immensely valuable in offering insights into such concepts, however, this approach did not contribute to, or acknowledge the need for, a personal understanding of practice in which the enquirer asked questions of the kind, 'How do I understand what I am doing? How do I evaluate my work? How do I improve it?' (see Whitehead, 1989). Indeed, it did not even allow for the expression of such questions. The idea of

asking questions about the nature of one's own practice and how it may be possible to improve the practice was grounded in the personal knowledge of the enquirer, a form of knowledge that was radically different from the conceptual knowledge of the disciplines approach, and that took as its guiding principle a deep commitment to ontological values. However, adherents to propositional forms of knowledge dismissed as invalid any personal forms that embraced living contradictions within the personal theory. Popper (1963), for example, said of dialectical theory that "it was a loose and woolly way of thinking", and so a "theory which involves a contradiction is therefore entirely useless *as a theory*" (page 317, emphasis in original). Consequently, the development of the idea of practitioners creating and generating their own personal theories of education, and the struggle to legitimate this idea, became one of the core debates of the 1990s UK educational research community (see for example Newby, 1994). The idea has however now been well established and legitimated, and a large and significant knowledge base exists to attest to this fact (see below) through the production of masters and doctoral dissertations and theses, which have been validated by universities in the UK, such as the University of the West of England and the University of Bath, in North American universities, such as Brock and McGill Universities, and now in South African universities, such as the University of Johannesburg.

A distinctive feature in the creation of living educational theories is that the descriptions and explanations that a researcher offers for their practice constitute their own living theory of practice. The descriptions show the processes of the improvement of practice through learning, and the explanations show how the researcher's own ontological values can manifest in practice as the guiding explanatory principles for their life. For example, the value of freedom comes to manifest as a living out of freedom, that is, living in a way that is free. The value of democracy manifests as a form of living in which people respectfully listen to one another, valuing the capacity of the other to think and act independently and from the grounds of their own ontological authority. The concept of a value, say Raz (2001), is an abstraction, a linguistic term that denotes how we hold a particular thing or practice as valuable or worthwhile. For the value to take on meaning in a person's life, the value itself needs to be transformed into a living practice, to show how it acts as an explanatory principle. In other words, when a person says that they try to live according to their values, they are saying that they can explain why they act as they do. They offer explanations, in the form of their living educational theories, for their practices. In Whitehead's (2004) terms, our embodied values come to act as the explanatory principles of our lives.

As noted, a major and significant knowledge base now exists to show that this approach has been widely accepted and validated by the practitioner research community and the academic research community alike. Following the call of

Catherine Snow (2001), then President of the American Educational Research Association, for the development of a knowledge base that would systematise the contributions of teachers to assist other teachers' learning, a coherent knowledge base has been put together, that contains the books and papers of scholars working in the field, as well as the validated masters and doctoral dissertations and theses of large numbers of practitioners world wide. You can access this knowledge base via the printed papers and books of ourselves and colleagues, and also via our and their websites ([www.actionresearch.net](http://www.actionresearch.net) and [www.jeanmcniff.com](http://www.jeanmcniff.com)).

We now turn to the idea of establishing critical living standards of judgement for assessing the quality of practitioners' accounts of practice.

## Critical living standards of judgement

A recent event served to foreground the need for addressing issues of assessing quality in educational research. This was a conference in May 2005, hosted by the British Educational Research Association, about the future of educational research in the UK. The conference addressed, among other themes, the idea of assessing quality in educational research, on the grounds that only research that was demonstrated to be of top quality could qualify as contributing to public debates to inform the future of educational policy and practice. The main recommendation of the conference was that the social sciences should continue as the main form of educational research. While newer forms of practitioner research were widely respected as contributing significantly to new practices, they did not yet demonstrate the necessary internal validity to qualify for serious consideration as a form of credible educational research (Furlong, Barton, Miles, Whiting and Whitty, 2000; Furlong and Oancea, 2005). This internal validity had to be demonstrated by the development and establishment of appropriate standards of judgement.

We, Ana and Jean, take this point very seriously, so now we show how we draw on some of the most recent work in this area to develop the kinds of standards of judgement we use to make judgements on our own practices and theories.

We draw especially on the work of Jack Whitehead (2003, 2004a and 2004b, 2005), who speaks about the need to show how a practitioner's embodied ontological values can transform into their critical living epistemological standards of judgement. He is communicating the idea that the ontological values, held at a deep tacit level, and that take an abstract form when communicated as linguistic items, can be externalized in human practices that manifest as the value in question. The value of freedom, say, exists on the

printed page as an abstract linguistic item. When people begin practising in a way that embodies the value of freedom, they begin by showing how they respect others' capacity to be free by not seeking to impose or dominate in any form. Democracy is a procedural value that we seek to live by. We agree with Bernstein when he says:

First of all, there are the conditions for an effective democracy. I am not going to derive these from high-order principles. I am just going to announce them. The first condition is that people must feel that they have a stake in society. Stake may be a bad metaphor, because by stake I mean that not only are people concerned to receive something but that they are also concerned to give something. This notion of stake has two aspects to it, the receiving and the giving. People must feel that they have a stake in both senses of the term.

Second, people must have confidence that the political arrangements they create will realise this stake, or give grounds if they do not. In a sense it does not matter too much if this stake is not realised, or only partly realised, providing there are good grounds for it not being realised or only partly realised.

(Bernstein, 2000, p.xx)

The value of democracy can be demonstrated ostensibly when people agree to work together, in ways that respect the other as of equal status and worth. It is however straightforward enough to speak the language of values, but difficult to enact them as living practices, because values enactment involves more than intellectual or scholarly engagement and demands emotional and ontological commitment, not only to the value in question but to the other people who are participants in the practices that the value informs. Consequently, in a post-apartheid South Africa, saying that one lives by the values of democracy needs to be demonstrated by both a verbal commitment to upholding the value and also an ontological and practical commitment to living by the value. For many, this can mean wrestling with the ontological insecurities of transforming existing logics of domination into new inclusive practices within the new post-apartheid culture.

The situation becomes doubly entrenched however when it is a question of transforming existing logics of domination into new inclusive epistemologies within a post-apartheid democratic university culture. Given, as Schön (1995) explained (see above), that the western intellectual tradition is underpinned by a centuries-long tradition of propositional thought, and given that the academy is the most intensive articulation of established modes of thinking, to introduce new inclusive epistemologies into a context whose normative propositional epistemological values and logics are those of divisiveness and objectification implies transforming the very logics, values and understandings of its participants. This can seriously threaten the ontological security of many who



wish to remain at the level of intellectual engagement but do not wish to take the next step, necessary in our opinion, to probe the very mental structures by which they define their own positioning in the world. Doing this means that there is no going back. Polanyi (1958, p.143) says of such processes, “I shall never see the world again as before. My eyes have become different; I have made myself into a person seeing and thinking differently”. Once we willfully make the self-conscious decisions to change our minds, those minds are changed forever. We change ourselves into new persons, thinking and seeing things differently, and there is no right of return.

So if we say we wish to live in the direction of our values of freedom and democracy, in terms of our social values in our personal and social practices, and in terms of our epistemological values in our scholarly and organizational practices, we need to show how we live in the direction of those values. In terms of the claim of us authors that we are developing new inclusive epistemologies within our universities, we therefore need to show how we are transforming our personal and social relationships, and our organizational practices that reflect the nature of those relationships, by producing evidence-based claims that we are having some influence. Further, if we take these claims as our unit of appraisal, our serious scholarly claims in this paper, we need to show how we live by the values of freedom and democracy by honouring the critical engagement of our scholarly audience, and show the internal validity of our claim by producing the evidence of demonstrating, through focusing on articulating our own critical standards of judgement, our awareness of the need to judge our scholarship as well as our practices. We show how we are meeting already articulated and agreed standards of rigour (Winter, 1989) in attending to the need to articulate our values and show their living transformation in our lives in order to prevent the kind of potential contradictions that Berlin (2002) spoke about (see above) of imposing freedom or engaging with the rhetoric of transformation while living in a way, informed by a traditional logic of domination (Marcuse, 1964), that remains committed to outmoded and unjust epistemological practices.

Here is an account of how we are beginning to do this.

## Developing new action research-based practices at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

Over the last two years we have encouraged and supported members of the Faculty of Education to engage with the ideas of the new scholarship, and produce their scholarly accounts to show how they are doing so. Our activities have taken the form of the practical provision of a staff development programme, through which staff can engage deeply with ideas about the

underpinning epistemological and methodological assumptions of action research, including its values and logics. We have encouraged and supported them as they undertake their action enquiries to show how they hold themselves accountable for their practices. A dedicated action research group has been set up in our Faculty, consisting of a floating population of about fourteen people. These people meet regularly to share their research, and time and practical resources are allocated for them to do this. Colleagues from other faculties join the group from time to time. Our hope is to encourage the production of scholarly papers to show how as a group we are focusing on our own explanations of our learning as a unit of appraisal, and how we are engaging in the practice of transforming our ontological values into the epistemological standards of judgement we use to test the validity of our explanations. Our initiative is still new. Consequently, and also given that this is labour intensive and emotionally demanding work, not many accounts are yet available to provide an empirical evidence base for our claims, but these are beginning to emerge (for example Olivier and Wood, 2006; Wood, Morar and Mostert, 2005).

At a practical level, we have evidence to show how faculty members are benefiting professionally from the support we offer for the research group. Here are the edited minutes of a meeting held on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2006 at NMMU, supplied by Lesley Wood, the action research group convener.

***Report on Action Research Meeting – some bullets for interest***

● ***Action Research Projects***

*Some interesting projects were presented, using the action plan format circulated earlier. Some of the questions being researched are (still working titles)*

- *How can I improve my supervision of students?*
- *How can I better support teachers to implement their learning in schools?*
- *How can I help my clients to unleash the healing potential of their spirituality?*
- *How can I improve my management practices so as to create a caring climate in the Faculty?*

*Some very stimulating discussion arose out of this which helped the researchers to refine their action plans. Others are still grappling with ideas and these were discussed and fleshed out.*

● ***Additional points raised in discussion***

*We had an interesting discussion on Foucault and his metaphor of the panopticon and how it applies to our educational system. For those interested I am attaching some web links to useful information on this.*



*It was agreed that action research is invaluable for teaching practice and that our students need to be exposed to it from first year. Teaching it in a one semester module in fourth year will not allow students sufficient time really to become reflective practitioners and to internalise the importance of living out values in everyday practice.*

*If the faculty engages in action research, then it may encourage people to become more responsible for their actions and more proactive. It could also help to improve relationships between us all.*

*What we are doing as a faculty is a first and we intend to publish our collective accounts. **Everyone** is invited to submit their own narratives of their self-enquiry and we will collate these as a publication to show how our faculty is contributing to the transformation of education.*

*The **next meeting is on 19 September** in the Music Room and Jean will be with us. Those who wish to can 'flesh out' the first three questions of the action plan to present to colleagues for discussion:*

- *What is my context and my concern?*
- *Why am I concerned?*
- *What kind of experiences can I describe to show why I am concerned?*

*This group is a support for all, so if anyone wants to send their ideas electronically to me between meetings, please feel free to do so or come and chat about your ideas for action research.*

Most importantly, we authors are aware, in our positions as academic leaders, that we also need to show how we are doing this. We accept the fundamental Kantian moral principle that no one should expect another to do something they are not prepared first to do themselves. This is especially important for academic leaders, who themselves claim that they are engaging in new scholarships, and is a core aspect of organizational practice if they wish to claim that they are demonstrating democratic leadership (Grace, 1995). It is also core to any claim that they are claiming ethical validity for their scholarship, since claims need to show their internal validity through the production of empirical evidence in relation to identified standards of judgement that test the validity of the claim. In saying this we are clearly not supporting the view that statements of fact and statements of value form independent realms of discourse. This paper is our first published articulation of our claim, and our first attempt to generate empirical evidence for our claim. Evidence of the growth of our understanding is however already in the public domain. In Whitehead and McNiff (2006), Jean explains the processes of the growth of her own understanding of the need to interrogate her

whiteness, how she takes steps to do so in company with academic colleagues, and the kind of ontological and intellectual transformations incurred. This kind of account is radically different from the traditional propositional accounts of the need to interrogate whiteness (for example Jacobson, 1998), by showing the processes in action, including the deep ontological insecurities involved, and their transformation into a more enlightened intellectual engagement and improved personal and social action through the struggle. A second paper (Naidoo and McNiff, 2005) further develops these themes. We hope to develop our evidence base through the intensification of our research efforts and the production of our scholarly books and papers.

We now raise critical questions about the claims we are making in this paper. Do we show that we engage with the social criteria of comprehensibility, truth, sincerity and appropriateness, which Habermas (1976) says are the basis of communicative action? Do we show that we are conducting our social and scholarly practices in terms of our ontological values commitments? Do we show the rigour of our own research in demonstrating our capacity to engage with the issues of articulating our critical standards of judgement, and showing explicitly how we are attempting to fulfil them in our personal and social practices? We claim that we are doing this by focusing explicitly on the articulation of our ontological values as our critical standards of judgement and an explication of how we are transforming those values into the critical epistemological standards of judgement whereby we assess the validity of our social and scholarly practices. In our current institutional practice, we are aiming to develop inclusional epistemologies for a new scholarship of democratic educational enquiry. We explain here how we consistently try to realize our abstract values of freedom and democracy through the kinds of social and institutional practices that encourage freedom and democratic ways of working. We engage with the idea of 'theory of mind' (Hayes, 1994), the idea that we recognize others as having the capacity to exercise their originality and critical judgement. We try to realize those same values in our scholarship through the very practice of showing how we transform into action our awareness of the need to show how we are assessing our work, through the articulation of our critical standards of judgement and their realization in our living organizational and scholarly practices, such as the production and presentation of this paper. We do this because we recognize our scholarly audience also as exercising their capacity to mediate our influence through their originality and critical judgement, as Said (1994) says is how Valéry communicated the idea of influence to his friend Mallarmé, and make judgements on the validity and integrity of our claims to knowledge.

## Demonstrating ethical validity

We are claiming that we are evaluating our work in the most stringent terms and thereby demonstrating our awareness of and capacity for showing the rigorous nature of our organizational and scholarly practices. We are also claiming that by doing so we can claim that ours is an ethical practice, in the sense that we act towards others as we would have them act towards us. This is however quick-sands territory, because, while it is possible, as we are doing here, to speak about these things, and even to produce authenticated evidence that we are doing these things in relation to our social practices, it is virtually impossible to show that we are also doing them in relation to our ontological practices, that is, producing evidence for the fact that we have literally changed our minds. The only evidence we can honestly produce is our statement that this is so. The rest has to go on trust, and in the idea that truth will emerge honestly and over time through a commitment to authenticity (Habermas, 1976).

To try to strengthen the validity of our research, therefore, we intend in future specifically to focus on developing its evidence base, with a special focus on how we can extend our engagement with the literatures of post-colonialism, with their current emphasis on dismantling the logics of domination in socio-political and cultural practices (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, 1998), into a new transformative emphasis on dismantling the epistemological hegemonies of forms of scholarship. We intend to focus on the production of our own scholarly work, which will incorporate our explanations for how and why we encourage others also to focus on the production of their scholarly work. Our immediate administrative tasks include the development of the basic services in our Faculty to encourage the practice of democracy as freedom (Sen, 1999). These services include intensifying the current provision of a high-quality academic staff development initiative that will provide the necessary intellectual, practical and emotional supports necessary for raising the research capacity of the staff within the wider context of the realization of the development of new democratic epistemologies. We aim also to develop institutional research links between our two universities and faculties of education. We hope that our efforts will provide the basis for the development of an important new knowledge base that will have implications for the future of educational research in South Africa, and that will show its potentials both as a form of social solidarity that will contribute to South Africa's renaissance, and also for the education of social formations (Whitehead, 2004) in relation to new forms of democratic practices and scholarship on a global scale. This kind of effort and its practical realization will, we trust, show that we are true to our words when we say that we are committed to social and epistemological freedom and the equal active participation of all participants in the discourses.

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# Towards a critical understanding of the teaching of discipline-specific academic literacies: making the tacit explicit

Cecilia Jacobs

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## Abstract

This paper explores the process that occurred among a group of academics at a tertiary institution, as they worked collaboratively over a three-year period in an attempt to situate the teaching of academic literacies within the mainstream curricula of various disciplines of study. The study draws on interview and focus group data, which were produced, using narrative methods such as stimulated recall, free writing and visual representations. Framed by New Literacy Studies and Rhetorical Studies theory, and drawing on the data from participating academics, the paper explicates a model for the process of integrating academic literacies into disciplines. The unfolding model presents factors to be considered when designing integrated approaches to the teaching of academic literacies, and the findings suggest that higher education needs to create discursive spaces for the collaboration of language lecturers and disciplinary specialists. The paper concludes that it is through sustained interaction with language lecturers that disciplinary specialists are able to make their tacit knowledge of the literacy practices and discourse patterns of their disciplines, explicit. Such collaboration enables both language lecturers and disciplinary specialists to shift towards a critical understanding of the teaching of discipline-specific academic literacies.

## Introduction

The study reported on in this paper explores the process that occurred between a group of academic literacy practitioners and disciplinary specialists at a tertiary institution, as they worked collaboratively over a three-year period in an attempt to situate the teaching of academic literacies within the mainstream curricula of various disciplines of study.

## Background

The research site is located at a University of Technology (previously a Technikon) where until fairly recently academic literacy (AL) was taught by a central language department, servicing the curriculum needs of the various faculties and academic departments. The only AL instruction in most



academic programmes was taught as a mandatory offering, namely Communication Skills, which was a largely generic, stand-alone subject. With institutional research beginning to show the inherent problems associated with this approach to AL instruction, and a growing realisation that AL played an important role in the conceptual development of students, the institution began moving towards a more integrated approach to the teaching of AL.

Institutional restructuring, resulting in the decentralisation of the language department and the shifting of the language lecturers into the academic departments of the various faculties at the institution, provided some impetus for language lecturers to embed their AL teaching in the mainstream curricula of the academic departments where they were placed. These shifts, along with an institutionally co-ordinated project to advance the integration of AL and disciplines of study, precipitated collaboration between the language lecturers and disciplinary specialists. This institutional project provided the research site for the study.

The institutional project involved collaboration between lecturers from different disciplines (disciplinary specialists) and AL practitioners (hereafter language lecturers) who formed partnerships. These partnerships in turn formed a transdisciplinary project team of tertiary educators, which was the institutional platform that networked the discipline-based collaborative partnerships between language lecturers and disciplinary specialists. This paper examines the processes that occurred between and among the partnerships as they attempted to negotiate common understandings of academic literacy (AL) practices within the mainstream tertiary curriculum, and theorises these processes through an unfolding model.

## Theoretical framing

The study is framed by two theoretical traditions, New Literacy Studies and Rhetorical Studies. Gee (1990, 1998, 2003; Gee, Hull and Lankshear, 1996), a linguist who is also regarded as one of the founders of the New Literacy Studies group has contributed to a theory of literacy-as-social-practice through his theorising the notion of Discourse. He sees Discourses as encompassing more than language or literacies, to include not only ways of speaking, reading and writing within particular contexts, but also ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking and believing, that are acceptable within specific groups of people in particular contexts. This study draws on three core theoretical constructs emanating from Gee's more recent work (2003), namely, 'semiotic domains', 'affinity groups' and 'design grammars'.



Gee sees semiotic domains as embodied contexts along with their distinctive social practices through which content is constantly changed and negotiated, and cites academic disciplines as examples of semiotic domains. This view understands academic disciplines as dynamic spaces inhabited by people and their meaning-making interactions through words, sounds, gestures and images, rather than static objects defined as a body of content knowledge. Closely associated with the notion of semiotic domains is the notion of affinity groups, which refers to groups of people who share semiotic domains and amongst whom knowledge, skills, tools and resources are distributed in complex systems. These affinity groups share sets of practices, goals, values and norms associated with the semiotic domain, and can be regarded as 'insiders'. According to Gee, mastering a semiotic domain involves joining an affinity group as an apprentice.

This understanding of academic disciplines as semiotic domains, leads to understandings of students as apprentices to affinity groups of which their lecturers are members or 'insiders'. Learning is therefore seen as a process of becoming fluent in the social practices through which meaning is made in a semiotic domain. Learning is thus linked to the third theoretical construct, that of design grammars. According to Gee every semiotic domain has a design grammar, which is a set of principles or patterns through which materials in the domain are combined to communicate complex meanings. He distinguishes between the 'internal design grammar', which he refers to as the ways in which the content of the semiotic domain is presented, and the 'external design grammar', which he refers to as the on-going social practices that determine the principles and patterns through which the semiotic domain communicates meanings. In order to learn authentically and participate in an affinity group, a student must master the design grammars of the semiotic domain. Critical learning, according to Gee, is achieved through an understanding of both the internal and the external design grammar of a semiotic domain, and is crucial for a meta-understanding of the semiotic domain.

Rhetorical Studies propose a theory of literacy that sees literacy as socially constructed and argues that the linguistic resources individuals draw on to produce text (whether spoken or written) are shaped by a lifetime of interaction with others. This proposition is closely aligned to the way that the New Literacy Studies understands literacies. However, researchers in the Rhetorical Studies tradition (Geisler, 1994b; Bazerman, 1989, 1991 and 1994) have gone further into theorising the nature of expertise. Geisler asserts that expertise is achieved through the interaction of two dimensions of knowledge, the 'domain content' and the 'rhetorical process'. According to Geisler, gaining expertise in the 'domain content' involves working with abstract representations of disciplines and applying those abstractions within different

contexts and adapting them to case-specific data. Her studies show that while ‘domain content’ expertise is generally developed during the undergraduate years in higher education, the knowledge of undergraduate students continues to lack a ‘rhetorical dimension’, which refers to an understanding of the complex relationships between the author of a text and the intended audience, as well as the broader social context within which such a text operates. The ‘rhetorical dimension’ of a field or discipline would entail knowing when, where, to whom and how to communicate the ‘domain content’ knowledge. Geisler claims that the ‘rhetorical process’ underpinning knowledge in disciplines, remains hidden for most students because they are taught to view texts as “repositories of knowledge, completely explicit in their content but utterly opaque in their rhetorical construction” (1994b, p. 39). Both Geisler and Gee agree that knowledge of the ‘rhetorical process’ has a tacit dimension, which makes it difficult for experts to articulate, and therefore difficult for students to learn – an understanding on which this study builds by exploring empirically how this tacit dimension can be made explicit through a process of interaction between language lecturers and disciplinary specialists.

## Methodology

As the focus of the study was on the process underpinning an integrated approach to the teaching of academic literacies, as well as on how the participants understood this process and constructed themselves within it, it was appropriate to use ‘ex post facto’ (Freeman, 1996) data rather than real time data. This type of data required a data production plan that enabled participants to recall and reflect on past experiences. The data production plan included the following:

- Stimulated recall: A session with participants, using data from the institutional project to stimulate reflection on their project experiences.
- Free-writes: A stimulated free-writing exercise, on project participants’ lived experience of the project.
- Individual project portfolios: The researcher compiled, printed and bound individualised project portfolios for each consenting participant, including their free-write and various pieces of project documentation representing their participation in the project. This was then used as a stimulus for their creation of a visual representation in preparation for the individual narrative interviews.
- Visual representations: All consenting participants were requested to create a visual representation reflecting their lived experiences of the project.

- Individual narrative interviews: All consenting participants were interviewed individually using their free-write and visual representation to generate a narrative of their project experiences. All interviews were audio-taped (and where permission was granted, video-taped) and transcribed for analysis.
- Focus groups: Three focus group sessions were held, one with language lecturers only, one with disciplinary specialists only and one with a mix of both groups. All focus groups were audio-taped (and where permission was granted, video-taped) and transcribed for analysis.

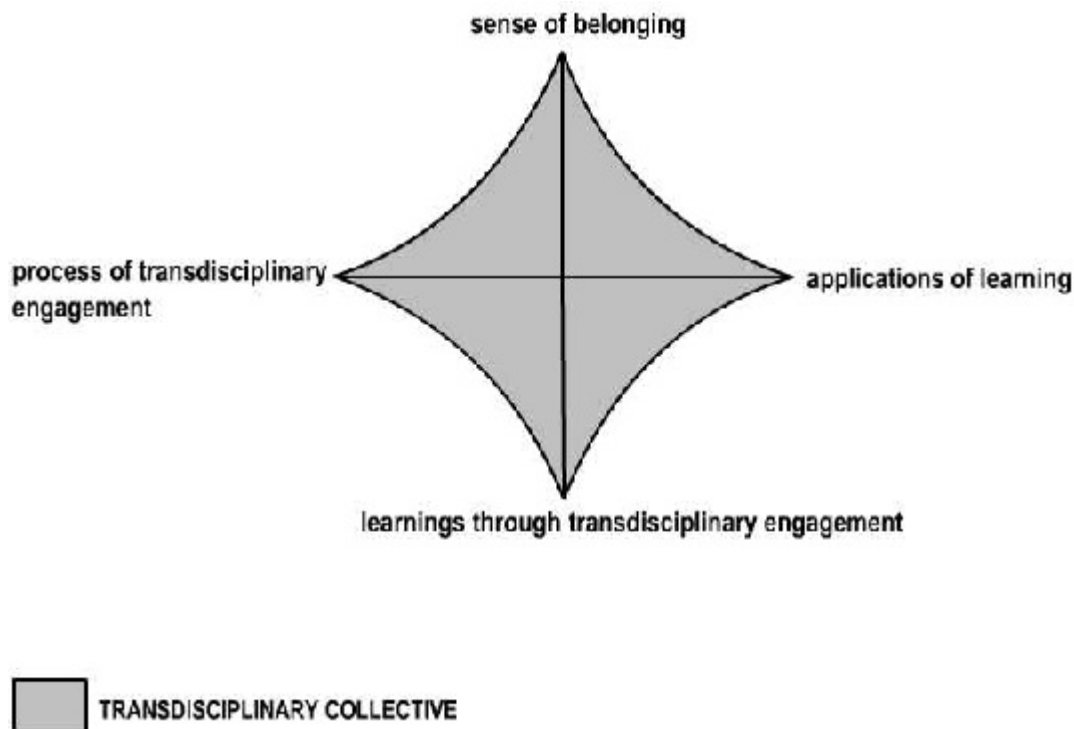
## Analysis of findings

Transcripts from interviews and focus groups were open-coded (Geisler, 2004; Strauss and Corbin, 1998) according to the themes emerging. These themes informed an unfolding model (see figures 1–4) for the process of integrating academic literacies into disciplines. As previously mentioned, the participants in the study were a group of language lecturers and disciplinary specialists who worked collaboratively. This group I refer to (in figures 1–4) as the ‘transdisciplinary collective’ of tertiary educators, which was made up of lecturers from different disciplines as well as language lecturers. This transdisciplinary collective comprised partnerships consisting of collaborating language lecturers and disciplinary specialists, whom I refer to (in figures 2–4) as the ‘collaborative partnerships’.

### Transdisciplinary collective

The discursive process that took place in the transdisciplinary collective was seen as crucial to the development of individual and collective understandings of what the integration of academic literacies into disciplines of study entailed. This process of transdisciplinary engagement seemed to be an important factor in clarifying lecturers’ thinking about the relationship between language and disciplinary content, but also in developing new understandings about teaching and learning generally, and focussing the lecturers on their role as tertiary educators. The findings revealed four factors (see figure 1) that influenced the development of a collective identity among these tertiary educators:

**Figure 1: Factors influencing the development of a transdisciplinary collective**



- The first factor was *a sense of belonging* – to a community that was bound by a new integrated approach to the teaching of academic literacy.
- The second factor was the *process of transdisciplinary engagement* – through which lecturers shared practices from a range of disciplinary perspectives.
- The third factor was the *learnings* that crystallised *through* the processes of engagement in the transdisciplinary community, and
- The fourth factor was the *application of the learnings* arising from the processes of engagement in the transdisciplinary community.

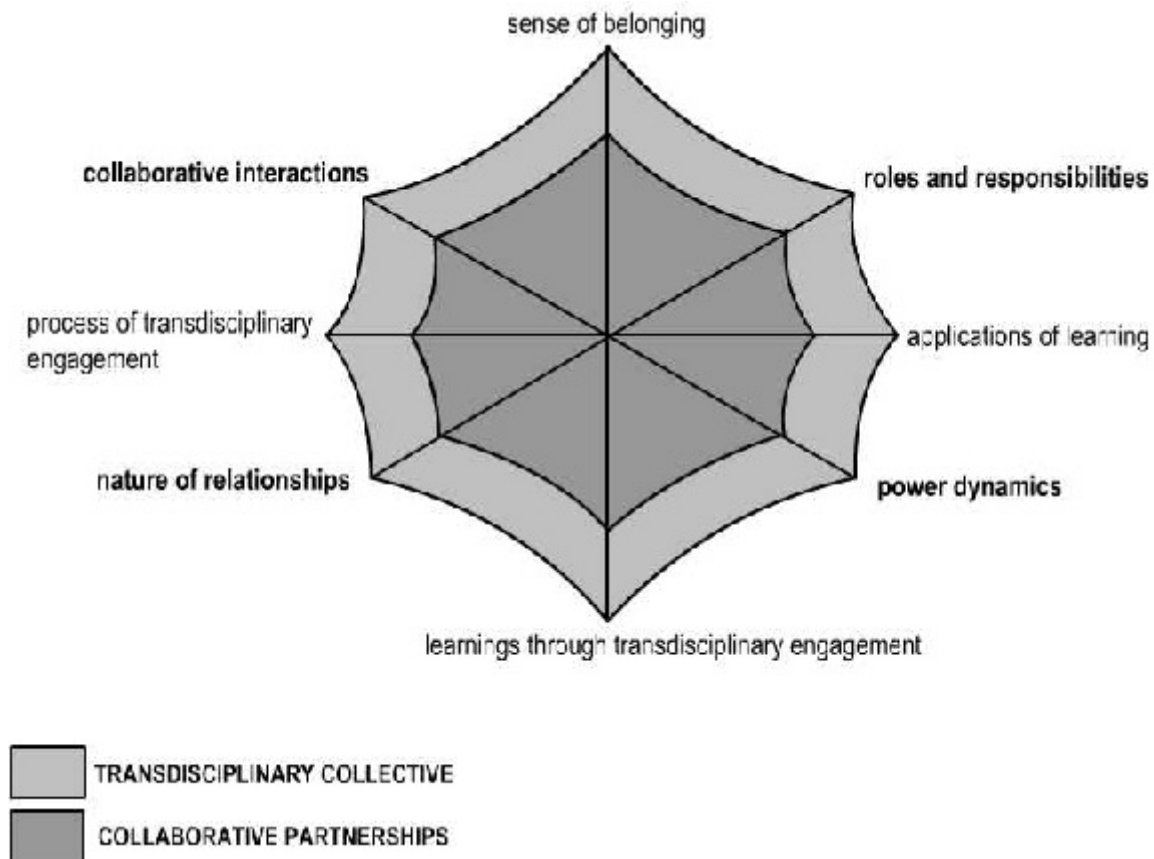
The discursive process of transdisciplinary engagement is a key factor when tertiary educators engage with their existing practices and explore unfamiliar approaches to teaching. The transdisciplinary character of the group seemed to raise the debates around teaching and learning to a level seldom reached within disciplinary groupings, one where ideas could be tested against practices from a range of disciplines, as illustrated in the following transcript from one of the participants:

*You have people who were coming from different disciplines, but incredibly supportive of what you were trying to think through. To me that was what I found really extraordinary. . . I think because there's a sort of critical evaluation that you often get from your own discipline peers, it is in fact much less useful sometimes because they always weigh it against their own practices in the same thing. . . So therefore when someone from Radiography talks about it, maybe I'm seeing it in an Architectural way but I'm coming from my side of it, I can talk about it. . . They (transdisciplinary collective) could see what you were trying to do. Because they were outside of your discipline they were open to the ideas of how you were doing it. We were all kind of doing it to each other. It was opening windows into our content, into the disciplines that we were dealing with. You were opening a window and you got a glimpse into Law, into all sorts of different fields that people were doing. . . it's like a little window into an aspect of somebody else and you're looking into it, and then when you could comment and you felt quite happy talking about something like that, a different sort of feel because of what it was and the way it worked. . . it really worked incredibly well in that process.*

## Collaborative partnerships

The study investigated two levels of interaction among participants, one level within the collaborative partnerships and another level within the transdisciplinary collective. The data show that participants distinguished between their participation in the collaborative partnerships and their participation in the broader transdisciplinary project team, which was made up of the collaborative partnerships. The findings reveal that these two levels of interaction contributed to participants' development in different ways. The interaction within the transdisciplinary collective appeared to lift the participants outside of their disciplines and focus them on issues of teaching and learning, which cut across disciplines. This process was instrumental in developing a collective identity as tertiary educators or teachers. This collective engagement also provided a discursive space for them to negotiate an integrated approach to the teaching of ALs and to develop shared understandings of what it meant to integrate AL and disciplinary content.

However, the interaction that took place between the collaborating language lecturers and disciplinary specialists, in their partnerships, was instrumental in shaping both language lecturers' and disciplinary specialists' understandings of their respective roles and identities beyond that of tertiary educator/teacher, to include that of Discourse teacher. The discursive process of a language partner questioning and asking for clarification regarding disciplinary discourses, led to discussions and the developing of new understandings and insights for both language lecturers and disciplinary specialists. The findings revealed the following factors (see figure 2) that influenced the development of reciprocal identities, as Discourse teachers, between language lecturers and disciplinary specialists:

**Figure 2: Factors influencing collaborative partnerships**

- The first factor was the *collaborative interactions* through which the disciplinary specialist partners made explicit, to the language partners, their tacit knowledge of the workings of Discourse within their disciplines. For disciplinary specialists, the process of interacting with someone who was not from the discipline helped clarify how the discourse of the discipline might be ambiguous and impeding students' access to the disciplinary content.
- The next factor was the *nature of the relationships* between the language lecturers and disciplinary specialists, which was influenced by personality, educational vision, commitment and so on. Efforts at integrating AL and disciplinary content were negatively affected by personality differences between collaborating partners. It seems that the passage of time played an important role in allowing for personalities to gel. Time was also found to be an important factor in developing a shared identity across the transdisciplinary collective.
- Another factor was the *power dynamics* emerging within the language lecturer/disciplinary specialist partnerships. This was influenced by notions of expertise. Language lecturers constructed themselves as educational experts, often



conflating academic literacies with teaching and learning issues, while disciplinary specialists saw themselves as lacking expertise in educational matters. This had a significant effect on the dynamics of power operating in the collaborative partnerships, and set the scene for how the power relations played themselves out in the partnerships.

- The final factor was the *roles and responsibilities* negotiated within the collaborative partnerships, which influenced division of labour and how participants understood the nature of their integrated approach. Notions of expertise also influenced how partnership roles were defined. Where division of labour was more equal and where the language lecturer was not regarded as ‘the expert’ in the partnership, role reversal occurred, and disciplinary specialists emerged as initiators. When disciplinary specialists, rather than language lecturers, initiated and produced integrated teaching materials, there were deep levels of integration. However, in partnerships where this level of integration did not happen, and where language lecturers assumed the role of primary writer, the integration was more superficial and the texts lacked authenticity. It seems that the depth of integration achieved, when language lecturers take on a primary role, is compromised.

When language lecturers were unable to access the more technical disciplinary content, which is the deeper level of discourse where students really need linguistic access, they attempted to induct themselves into the discourses of the discipline. However, language lecturers attempting to become ‘experts’ in the disciplinary discourses, crossed into the disciplinary domain of the collaborating partner, and often further undermined the disciplinary expertise that the disciplinary specialist brought to the partnership. This disempowered the disciplinary specialists, most of whom already felt that they lacked expertise in the collaborating partnerships.

In partnerships where deep levels of integration were achieved, language lecturers, rather than inducting themselves into the discourses of the disciplines, ‘lifted’ the disciplinary specialists out of their discourses by asking questions that a novice to the discipline would. Through this process they shifted the disciplinary specialists to making explicit the rules governing their disciplinary discourses, and in this way unlocked their tacit knowledge of the workings of these disciplinary discourses. This process is articulated in the following piece of the transcript where a participant outlines the challenge he faces as a disciplinary specialist, in bringing his tacit knowledge into the realm of overt and explicit teaching, and how his interaction with a language partner helped to do that:

*When one’s in a particular discipline with a knowledge base that you have, you don’t tend to realise that the language of describing it is often very dense, it’s packed with jargon and sometimes ones way of saying things, often makes assumptions about a whole kind of knowledge base that you have. . . you can so easily disempower students by doing that, to me was something which I’d never thought of. . . and working as (collaborative) partnerships, where you’re dealing with someone who*

*isn't from your discipline, who's saying "but I don't understand, just explain that for me". Just working with a language person, you suddenly realise that you're veering way into the discipline, like talking out from the discipline rather than bringing people in with you into it, that's always sort of hard when you're in something because it's like sitting in some kind of cocoon in a way, and then talking to someone outside, describing what's around you and you're very familiar with all these things and this other person can hear you but they really aren't sure what you're actually meaning and it's only when you move outside it, that is where I found the language person helped a lot. . . the notion of the discourse is that when you're inside one and you've been inside one for a long time, you forget what it's like to be outside of it. You don't actually know, it's like so much part of you that it's hard to step outside of it. As soon as you move into the field of one's own discipline, the rules of the discourse take over, it's not a sort of conscious thing. It's actually quite unconscious. You're simply doing it. . .*

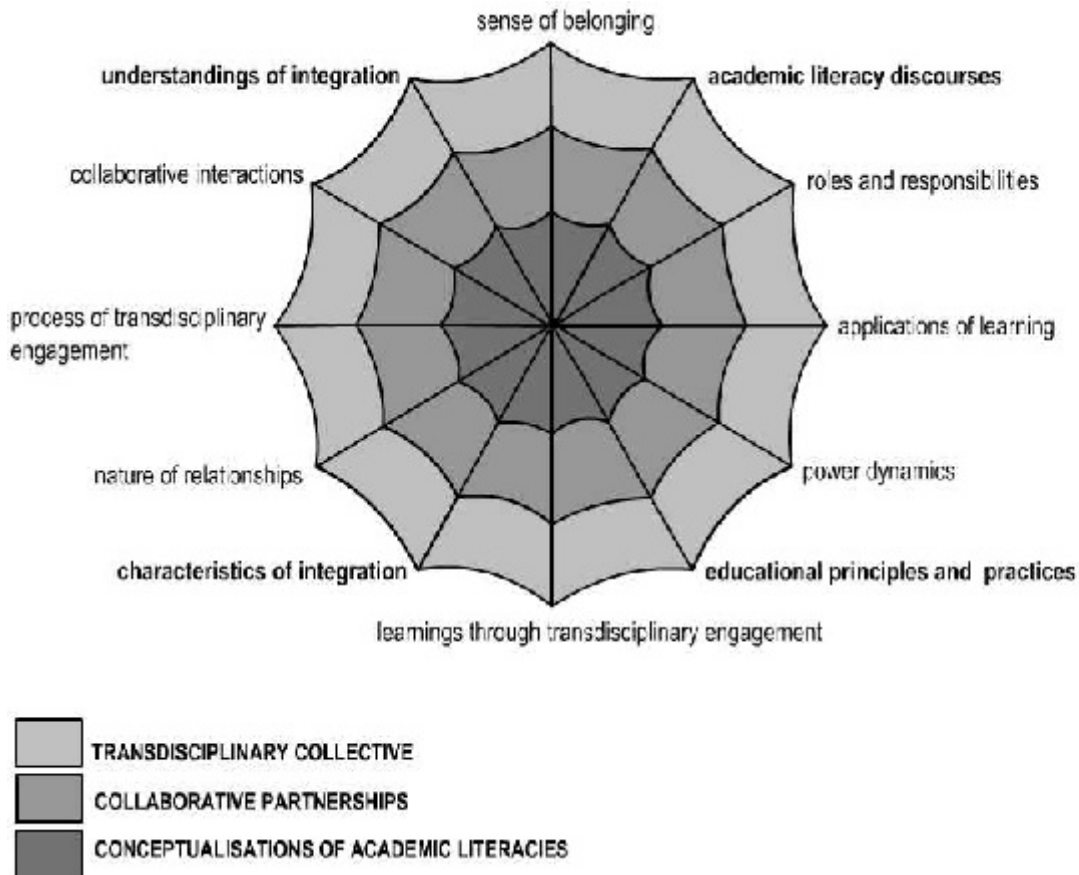
This process of collaborative interaction focused the collaborating partnerships on disciplinary discourses, and was instrumental in expanding the emerging collective identity as tertiary educator/teacher, to include a reciprocal identity as Discourse educator/teacher, between the language lecturers and disciplinary specialists.

### Conceptualisations of academic literacies (ALs)

The social process of discursive engagement that occurred in both the transdisciplinary collective and the collaborative partnerships seemed to influence a conceptual process for individual participants. Through this process the individuals making up the transdisciplinary collective developed and attributed meanings to the concept of ALs. A number of factors (see figure 3) appeared to shape how individual lecturers made meaning of the concept of ALs, and its implications for teaching.



Figure 3: Factors influencing conceptualisations of academic literacies



One such factor related to the *characteristics of integration* that shaped how individual lecturers made meaning of the concept of ALs. The nature of the practitioner seemed to be an important characteristic for successful integration of AL and disciplinary content. Lecturers who were relatively new to academia seemed to be more receptive to new approaches and not in a comfort zone in the way that more experienced lecturers might be. Timing also seemed to be an important factor for the lecturers involved in this initiative. When this initiative coincided with lecturers' reflection on own practice, such as at the end of the first year of teaching, and when the lecturers themselves were open-minded and receptive to other perspectives, then integration appeared to be more successful. Another important characteristic for successful integration of language and disciplinary content seemed to be a criticality in lecturers regarding the nature of knowledge production in both their own discipline and in other disciplines. Insight into how knowledge was produced within their own disciplines, and the implications of this for teaching and learning, were important characteristics for successful integration.

- The next factor shaping how individual lecturers made meaning of the concept of ALs, was the implicit theories informing their *educational principles and practices*. Those lecturers who understood knowledge as something to be imparted, and the curriculum as a body of content, were inclined to understand ALs as an autonomous list of generic skills which could be taught alongside a disciplinary curriculum. Where partnerships understood ALs as an autonomous list of transferable generic skills, they tended to integrate these ‘skills’ alongside a disciplinary curriculum, in a rather superficial model of integration. On the other hand, those lecturers who understood knowledge as discursively constructed, and the curriculum as how the discipline intersected with the world, were inclined to understand ALs as being deeply embedded within the ways in which the various disciplines constructed themselves through language.
- Another factor that appeared to shape how individual lecturers made meaning of the concept of ALs, was the *academic literacy discourses* prevailing within the broader institutional context. The data revealed three dominant institutional discourses. One that understood language as an instrument of communication rather than as a means for making meaning, one that conflated academic literacy and English proficiency, and another that framed students in a deficit mode. All of these discourses shaped both lecturers’ conceptualisations of ALs, as well as how they implemented academic literacy interventions at the institution. These discourses tended to reinforce notions of ALs as autonomous generic skills, which in turn led to calls for interventions such as separate remedial classes in English and add-on, generic academic literacy skills-based courses. Such discourses also tended to construct AL practitioners as being responsible for the development of students’ disciplinary literacies, and exonerated disciplinary specialists from the need to reflect on how they were or were not making explicit for their students the rhetorical nature of their disciplines. These dominant institutional discourses often limited lecturers’ understandings and practices, structuring their discursive engagement and the ways they conceived of integrated materials and collaborative teaching.
- The final factor was the *understandings of integration* that individuals brought to their partnerships and to the collective. Through their collaborative engagements in the partnerships and the collective, the participants not only developed shared understandings of what it meant to integrate AL and disciplinary content, but also shifted from their initial understandings of what it meant.

Participants had varying notions of what it meant to integrate AL and disciplinary content. Some understood it as integrating their own subject area with the subject area of their collaborating partner, as illustrated in this excerpt from the data:

*There's almost a mutual coming together, in other words she's got to go somewhat into the discipline of language, and the language person has to come some part into the discipline of (Business).*

This type of understanding is reinforced by tertiary curricula with mandatory subjects like Communication Skills, or separate courses in AL. Where Communication Skills did not form part of the disciplinary curriculum, and where ALs were not taught through a formal subject, it seemed to lead to understandings that saw ALs as embedded within disciplines. Few of the lecturers understood integration as being about making explicit and giving students access to the workings of disciplinary discourses. The following excerpt from the data illustrates this understanding:

*Initially one could have said you only need to know the words and the meanings to understand (the discipline) better. But you need to do more than that, you need to be able to place the term where it comes from, what it means, what the implications are, how just one word changes the whole meaning, how language sets up relationships of power, how it sets up relationships of equality or inequality. So it's getting deeper into conceptual understanding of these things. And I think it's not only a matter of having certain language proficiency, it's more than that. . . It's because words ultimately operate in a context, but it doesn't only operate in the context of a passage or in the context of a book. It operates in the context of a reality, of a life; it operates in the context of your experience.*

For many of these lecturers, their understandings of integration developed over the three-year period of their participation in the institutional project, from understandings of AL as a body of knowledge comprising an autonomous set of generic skills transferable to any discipline of study, to understandings of ALs as embedded within the discourses of academic disciplines.

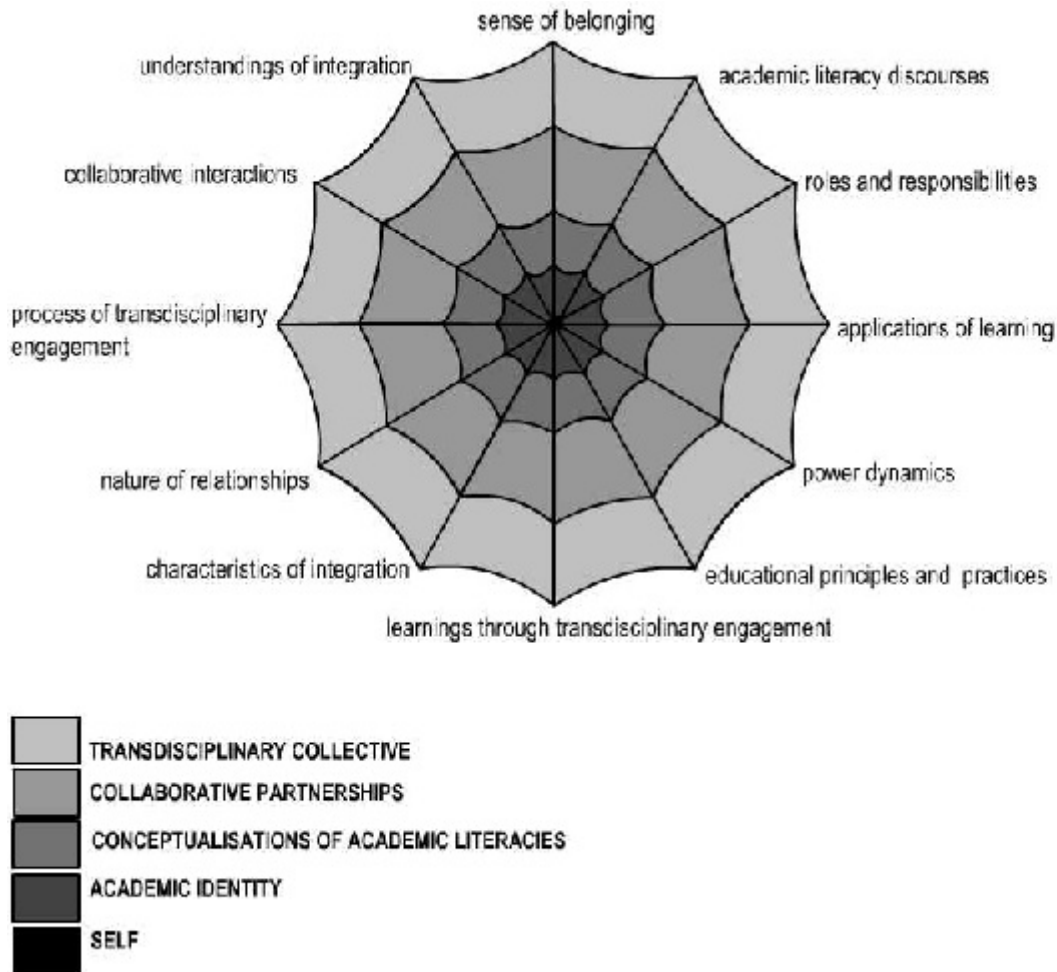
These shifts in understandings of what it meant to integrate language and disciplinary content were also instrumental in shaping participants' changing conceptualisations of ALs. Those participants who began to understand language and content integration as being about making explicit the workings of disciplinary Discourses, started reconceptualising their notions of ALs. They articulated conceptual understandings of ALs as being multiple, embedded within particular disciplinary contexts, and therefore not easily transferable to other contexts. This understanding emerged as a result of the

social processes of collective and collaborative discursive engagement, and also as a result of the expanding collective identity as Discourse educator/teacher. These new understandings and expanding identity gained significance and were cemented in the social context provided by the collaborative partnerships and the transdisciplinary collective, while the process of reconceptualisation appeared to further influence a process of identity construction among individual participants.

### Academic identity

While the transdisciplinary collective provided a discursive space for the development of a collective identity as tertiary educators, it appears that the collaborative partnerships provided the spaces where language lecturers and disciplinary specialists could explore their respective roles and identities as Discourse teachers. For disciplinary specialists this meant expanding their disciplinary identities to include that of discourse teacher, and this process seemed to hinge on both language lecturers' and disciplinary specialists' understandings of language as deeply embedded within disciplines. This understanding, of the embeddedness of ALs within disciplines, seems to be at the core of expanding the narrow disciplinary identity of lecturers, to incorporate a broader academic identity, as illustrated by the innermost layer of figure 4.

**Figure 4: A model for the process of integrating academic literacies into disciplines**



The findings revealed that the participants were involved in three processes, which should be considered when designing integrated approaches to the teaching of academic literacies. These three processes were dynamically interlinked, each precipitating and contributing towards a deeper level of change in participants.

The first process occurred in both the transdisciplinary collective and the collaborative partnerships in turn. This was a ‘doing’ process of discursive engagement between language lecturers and disciplinary specialists, and is depicted by the two outer layers of the model, the *transdisciplinary collective* and the *collaborative partnerships*. The factors that impacted most directly on this experiential process in the transdisciplinary collective were a *sense of belonging*, as well as the *processes of transdisciplinary engagement*, the *learnings* that crystallised through the processes of engagement, and the

*application of the learnings* arising from the processes of engagement in the transdisciplinary community (as illustrated in figure 1 of the model). While the factors that impacted most directly on this experiential process in the collaborative partnerships were the *collaborative interactions*, the *nature of the relationships*, the *power dynamics*, and the *roles and responsibilities* negotiated within the collaborative partnerships (as illustrated in figure 2 of the model).

The second process was a cognitive one that flowed directly from the process of discursive engagement with colleagues from different disciplines. This was a ‘meaning-making’ process of individual reconceptualisation, and is depicted by the third layer of the model, *conceptualisations of academic literacies*. The factors that impacted most directly on this process of understanding were the *academic literacy discourses* prevailing within the higher education context, the implicit theories informing individual lecturers’ *educational principles and practices*, the *characteristics of integration* that shaped how individual lecturers made meaning of the concept of academic literacies, and the *understandings of integration* that individuals brought to their partnerships and to the collective (as illustrated in figure 3 of the model).

The third process flowed directly from the individual process of reconceptualisation of academic literacies. This was a ‘becoming’ process of academic identity construction, and is depicted by the innermost layer of the model, *academic identity*. These three processes were layered, fed into each other, and were linked to each other through the web of factors surrounding the model in figure 4. These factors and the processes linking them represent important considerations when designing integrated approaches to the teaching of academic literacies.

The findings seem to suggest that sustained interaction between the language lecturers and disciplinary specialists has value for both parties and facilitates the process of reshaping how both language lecturers and disciplinary specialists construct their roles and identities within higher education, a necessary element in shifting mindsets regarding the practice of AL teaching in higher education. All of the interrelated factors presented in the unfolding webbed model in figures 1–4, linked by a process of discursive engagement, feeding into a process of individual reconceptualisation, feeding into a process of academic identity construction, are instrumental in bringing about this shift in mindset.

However, the continuity and sustainability of interaction between language lecturers and disciplinary specialists appears to be compromised in the absence of a context which takes account of the factors outlined in the model. It appears that academic departments, with their strong disciplinary structures,



do not provide the kinds of spaces where such transdisciplinary engagement can occur. While the basis for academic communities of practice remains particular academic disciplines, the separation of academic literacy teaching from mainstream teaching will continue. It appears that the institutional project provided the kind of ‘protected’ discursive spaces, where the participants could engage with alternative discourses in an environment that was non-threatening and free from the hierarchical lines of power operating within academic departments and faculties.

## Conclusions

Both New Literacy Studies and Rhetorical Studies allude to the tacit nature of knowing a Discourse. Gee (2001) refers to this tacit knowledge as something that is stored in people’s minds, ‘cultural models’, that inform the social practices in which people in a Discourse community engage. While there are different interpretations in the literature as to the nature and forms of tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1983; Nonaka, 1991; Eraut, 2000), theorists agree that this kind of knowledge is internalised, operates at an unconscious level and is difficult to articulate and make explicit. This has implications for what it means to develop students’ disciplinary discourses.

Social theories of learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2002) suggest that such tacit knowledge is acquired through being socialised into communities of practice through interaction with the existing members. New literacy studies theory adds that the literacy practices and Discourses of academic disciplines are best acquired by students when embedded within the contexts of such disciplines, where reading and writing are developed within the ways that particular disciplines use language. Gee (1990, 2003) argues that students are best inducted into the Discourse communities or affinity groups of the various disciplines of study by modelling themselves on others who have mastered the Discourses, the ‘insiders’ who are part of the affinity group themselves. The implications are therefore that disciplinary specialists are best placed to induct students into the Discourses of their disciplines, and that discipline-specific academic literacies are best taught within the contexts of particular academic disciplines or semiotic domains by ‘insiders’ who have mastered the Discourses of those particular academic communities.

I have problematised elsewhere (Jacobs, 2005) the notion that academic literacies are best taught by ‘insiders’ who have mastered the Discourses of disciplinary affinity groups. The findings from this study have shown that such ‘insiders’ or disciplinary specialists have a tacit knowledge and understanding of the workings of Discourse within their disciplines. While the tacit nature of such knowledge and understanding is unproblematic when

operating within an affinity group or disciplinary Discourse community, it does pose a problem for teaching and learning, where lecturers need to make explicit what is tacit for their students, who are not yet part of the affinity group to which their lecturers belong. This tacit knowledge remains unarticulated as they model appropriate disciplinary practices and Discourse patterns for their apprentice students in the classroom.

Theorists in the Rhetorical Studies tradition argue that while disciplinary specialists much better ‘know’ the rhetorical processes through which their disciplines communicate meaning, albeit tacitly, language lecturers can much better ‘see’ this largely invisible process because they treat language as opaque, something to look at (Segal, Pare, Brent and Vipond, 1998). However, this ability to ‘see’ the rhetorical processes through which disciplines communicate meaning, has led language lecturers (also referred to in the literature as rhetoricians, Discourse teachers and academic literacy practitioners) to take on the ‘burden of rhetorical persuasion’ (Geisler, 1994a) and increasing responsibility for making the rhetorical dimension of disciplinary knowledge explicit for students. This approach assumes that language lecturers have ‘knowledge’ of the rhetorical processes through which disciplines communicate meaning, rather than just an ability to ‘see’ these rhetorical processes more clearly (because they treat language as opaque) than disciplinary specialists. The findings from this study show that this assumption is flawed and often leads to a pedagogical position that suggests language lecturers know the rhetoric of disciplinary specialists better than they know it themselves (Segal *et al.*, 1998). It appears then that both language lecturers and disciplinary specialists need to own the ‘burden of rhetorical persuasion’ and redefine their respective roles within the process of making this ‘invisible’ process explicit for students at tertiary level.

The findings from this study have shown that the depth of integration achieved when language lecturers take on a primary role (as in many rhetorical studies reported) is compromised. In the studies reported by Myers (1990) and Bazerman (1989), rhetoricians use the tools of their language backgrounds to closely analyse the textual features of disciplinary texts. This study has shown that when such processes of textual analysis are not guided by the disciplinary knowledge of disciplinary specialists, it leads to language lecturers attempting to become ‘experts’ in the disciplinary discourses, which in turn tends to undermine the disciplinary expertise of disciplinary specialists. Deep levels of integration are achieved when language lecturers, rather than inducting themselves into the discourses of the disciplines, ‘lift’ the disciplinary specialists outside of their discourses by asking questions that a novice to the discipline would. In this way they are able to shift disciplinary specialists to making explicit the rules governing their disciplinary discourses.



This deep level of integration and the understandings underpinning it are closely related to the identities that language lecturers/academic literacy practitioners and disciplinary specialists bring to their work in higher education. Strong ‘tertiary educator’ identities in language lecturers tend to dominate partnerships with disciplinary specialists and disable the emergence of ‘tertiary educator’ and ‘Discourse teacher’ identities in disciplinary specialists. In the case of disciplinary specialists, making language lecturers feel part of the discipline into which they are integrating is an important factor. This is achieved when disciplinary specialists frame language/communication as central to how their discipline structures and communicates its knowledge base. This in turn locates the language lecturer as being an integral part of the process of making explicit this tacit dimension, and influences how their roles and identities as academic literacy practitioners are defined within a discipline which is not their own.

These reciprocal processes of language lecturers ‘lifting’ disciplinary specialists outside of their discourses, and disciplinary specialists making language lecturers feel part of their disciplines, seem to enable the shifting of understandings of integration for both parties. Language lecturers/academic literacy practitioners, as well as disciplinary specialists, need to change their conceptualisations of academic literacies as an autonomous body of knowledge and the understandings of integration that arise from such conceptualisations. In this way language lecturers and disciplinary specialists can change the way they view each other, as ‘outsiders’, and find new collaborative ways for embedding the teaching of discipline-specific academic literacies within disciplines. Such collaboration is equally important for both language lecturers and disciplinary specialists.

Language lecturers are better able to ‘see’ the Discourses that shape the disciplinary genres, because they view language as opaque and also because the disciplinary content is foreign, so they don’t get caught up in the meaning. This makes the generic structures and Discourse patterns clearer than when they are obscured by meaning, as is the case with disciplinary specialists who tend to view language as transparent and read ‘through’ the genres and Discourses to get to the meaning. Disciplinary specialists however, bring a tacit knowledge of their disciplinary genres and Discourses, and the purposes they serve in meaning-making, something they have gained over years of study and participation in disciplinary ‘affinity groups’, which is a knowledge base that language lecturers don’t have. For both language lecturers and disciplinary specialists, integrated academic literacy teaching involves engaging with the nature of Discourse, and this study shows that making Discourse explicit involves more than being a member of a Discourse community.

While Rhetorical Studies and New Literacy Studies both speak to the need for interaction between language lecturers and disciplinary specialists in an effort to shift academic literacy teaching into disciplines, there is a gap in the literature as to how such interaction might happen and what the nature of it should be. While the 'burden of rhetorical persuasion' remains with language lecturers, academic literacy teaching will never become critical pedagogy. Language lecturers might have the rhetorical tools to make explicit what is hidden in Discourse, and ensure that students understand the rhetorical patterns underpinning their disciplinary knowledge bases. However, to push academic literacy teaching towards a critical pedagogy, language lecturers need to bring this tacit awareness, of the workings of disciplinary Discourses and the inequalities that Discourse practices often set up within classrooms, to a level of consciousness for disciplinary specialists. This will provide disciplinary specialists with a new critical perspective on the Discourses of their disciplines and in this way create opportunities for them to change or modify their classroom Discourse practices that continue to set up inequalities between students with academic 'cultural capital' and those who are not well 'precurSED' for academia.

Disciplinary specialists are best placed to bring academic literacy teaching towards a critical pedagogy, since students need to understand and produce meanings in the disciplinary semiotic domain that are recognisable to members of that disciplinary affinity group. In addition to this, Gee (2003) states that critical learning requires students to think about the disciplinary domain at a meta level, and produce meanings that are not only recognisable but also novel and unpredictable. For disciplinary specialists to achieve a critical pedagogy in their classrooms they need to have reached this level of meta awareness themselves, before they are able to produce critical learners with a similar meta awareness. This is where language lecturers are able to play a vital role and in fact stand "at the very heart of the most crucial educational, cultural and political issues of our time" (Gee, 1990, p.68).

While Rhetorical Studies argue that language lecturers are best placed to deliver the rhetorical dimension of knowledge, and New Literacy Studies argues that disciplinary specialists are in the best position to deconstruct the rhetorical dimension of knowledge, this paper argues that it is through the interaction of disciplinary specialists and language lecturers that the rhetorical dimension of knowledge can be critically deconstructed for students. This paper proposes that disciplinary specialists need to be actively involved in this process rather than 'talked to' by language lecturers. Disciplinary specialists need to be working both within their role as a disciplinary affinity group member, while simultaneously having a critical overview of this 'insider' role, from outside of it. It is in engaging with language/academic literacy specialists who are 'outsiders' to their disciplinary Discourses that disciplinary specialists

find themselves at the margins of their own fields, and are able to view themselves as insiders from the outside, as it were. This shifting location from a purely insider perspective, to an insider perspective from the outside, shifts lecturers towards a critical understanding of the teaching of discipline-specific academic literacies. The model explicated in this paper theorises the process by which this dual critical identity can be crafted in practice.

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# An analysis of 'needs talk' in relation to sustainable development and education

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## Abstract

The year 2005 marked the beginning of the United Nations Decade of Education for sustainable development. Commonly, sustainable development (SD) means development that does not compromise the needs of future generations. Therefore the term implies two broad categories of needs: needs of present generations and needs of future generations. In this paper, I theorise about these two categories of needs. More importantly, however, I theorise about needs discourses associated with sustainable development. In other words, I focus not only on needs as the distribution of satisfactions but also on the contested character of needs or the politics of needs. Nancy Fraser writes that 'needs talk' functions as a medium for making and contesting of political claims: 'it is an idiom in which political conflict is played out and through which inequalities are symbolically elaborated and challenged'. Furthermore, she proposes a scheme for classifying the varieties of needs talk in late capitalist societies, suggesting that there are three major needs discourses: 'oppositional' discourses, 'reprivatisation' discourses and 'expert' needs discourses. All of these relate to sustainable development, but sustainable development produces another discourse which might be described as a 'futures' needs discourse. In this paper I explore some of the current rival needs discourses and reflect on 'futures' needs discourses vis-à-vis sustainable development. I also suggest some implications of my discussion for education.

## Introduction

The year 2005 marked the beginning of the 'United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development', providing an opportune time to (re)consider key concerns related to education for sustainable development (ESD). I should point out at the outset that although the UN resolution 75/254 implies a new line of interest, a considerable body of literature has been produced on ESD and it has been the subject of a great deal of controversy and contestation over the past twenty years. The debate centres on the term sustainable development and the proposal that it should be a key focus of (environmental) education. I shall (re)visit this later in the paper. However, of greater concern is an aspect of the conventional definition of sustainable development which appeared in the Brundtland Commission report:



“development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987). Needs is an aspect that appears to be neglected in much that has been written on sustainable development and ESD. My interest though, is not only on needs as the distribution of satisfactions, but on the emergence of needs discourses and needs interpretations, that is, with the politics of needs. In my exploration I divide my paper into four main sections. First, I discuss some of the difficulties with the terms sustainable development and ESD. Second, I discuss the emergence of needs discourses in late capitalist societies. Third, I examine how these might relate to sustainable development. Fourth, I look at some of the implications that needs discourses or ‘needs talk’ (in relation to sustainable development) may have for education.

## The term sustainable development

Sustainable development, a term first used in eighteenth-century German forestry management practices,<sup>1</sup> was popularised in the 1980s. The term has great political appeal ostensibly because it integrates two highly attractive notions. One of which promotes the conservation or preservation of non-human nature and the other allows opportunities for human aspirations to ‘develop’. However, as Bonnett (2002) argues, sustainable development is a problematic term. It is heavily contested, subject to internal contradictions (the notions of conservation and development are conflicting) and raises epistemological difficulties (for detail see Rist, 1997; Bonnett, 1999).

Although sustainable development may be viewed as a continuum ranging from weaker (based on conventional understandings of economic growth) to stronger sustainability (challenges unbridled technological advance), many authors contend that the term essentially reinforces a problematic anthropocentric stance. Mitchum (cited in Bonnett, 1999) presents two arguments. First, he argues that proponents of sustainable development were attempting to move away from the notion of scarcity which the Western (modern) world defines as the economy of subsistence, even though the latter is possibly the only route to sustainability. Second, he argues that the notion of sustainable development involves a subtle addiction to management, since it

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<sup>1</sup> According to Van Zon (2006), the term sustainability was first used in the year 1713 in a German publication on forestry by Hans Carl von Carlowitz. The reason for its use at the time was because people in many German states were fearful that there would be a shortage of wood. Van Zon points out that the word sustainability is not found in the 1933 edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, indicating that the word did not exist in the English language at the time. This is confirmed by the 1986 supplement of the dictionary which states that the word ‘sustainability’ was used for the first time in 1972.

views the world as “a spaceship in need of an operating manual” (quoted in Bonnett, 1999, p.317). Drawing on the work of the critical discourse analyst Fairclough, Stables and Scott (2002) make the case that in democratic societies, politicians resort to the creation of compound terms such as sustainable development which embrace what could appear to be opposite aspirations. They note that compound terms such as sustainable development have a strong appeal as policy slogans but are difficult to implement – a huge gulf therefore develops between policy sloganising and policy implementation.

## Education for sustainable development

Sauvè (1996) points out that the relationship between environmental education and sustainable development (sustainability) is perceived in different ways. For some, sustainable development is the ultimate goal of environmental education, thus the term *environmental education 'for' sustainable development* (EEFSD). For others, sustainable development encompasses specific objectives that should be added to those of environmental education, thus the expression *education for environment 'and' sustainable development* (EFE and SD). For others still, environmental education inherently includes *education for sustainable development*, thus the use of both terms is tautological.

Education for sustainable development has in the main been shaped by the emergence of *sustainability* as a concern within the environmental movements of the 1980s and 1990s and by the orientation to environmental education, *education for the environment*. *Education for sustainability*, however, has been at the centre of controversy. For some, *education for sustainability* is associated with critical discourses on education (see Fien, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c; Gough, 1997; Huckle and Sterling, 1996; Plant, 1998; Huckle, 1999). Critical approaches to education maintain that education is openly ideological (not value-neutral) and so given people to nature relationships and people to people relationships that have gone wrong on planet Earth (i.e. human activity that is eroding the planet's biophysical base leading to an increasing gap between haves and have-nots), we have little choice but to educate for sustainable development. However, even if such an approach were to be adopted, the problem of what is meant by sustainable development would remain unresolved. For example, narrow stipulative definitions of sustainable development hold the danger of indoctrination. Recognising this danger Huckle (1999, p.38) argues that critical *education for sustainability* should not be based on a single preferred construction of sustainability. In his view it should rather be seen as “a process of critical reflection and action on those forms of technology and social organisation that might allow us to live

sustainably with one another and the rest of nature”. Huckle’s (1999) view represents a shift from a narrow instrumentalist approach to environmental education and provides greater space for debate, contestation, speculation and nuances of thought within discourses on critical *education for sustainability*. However, those arguing from a more liberal stance have pointed out that education for sustainable development might be anti-educational. For example, Jickling and Spork (1998) challenge the idea of educating ‘for’ anything that is external to education itself. As Jickling (1997, p.95) writes:

When we talk about ‘education for’ anything we imply that education must strive to be ‘for’ something external to education itself. We may argue, in an open sense, in favour of education for citizenship or character development. However, as prescriptions become more specific interpretations of education become more loaded and more problematic. . .

Debates on sustainable development are likely to continue and become more pronounced in view of the UN declaration. Along with Sauvè (1996), I would argue that the issue of sustainable development and how it is reflected in discourses on environmental education will remain: it is important for different conceptions of environment, education and sustainability to coexist. As, Huckle (1999), Sauvè (1996), Jickling (1995), Robottom (1990) have argued, diversity in environmental education needs to be acknowledged as a stimulus for “critical reflection, discussion, contestation, and evolution” (Sauvè, 1996, p.28). In a recent publication Wals and Jickling (2002, p.123) support the view that sustainable development should not have a single meaning or fixed definition but rather be the focus of ongoing, critical (re)examination. Although they are wary of sustainability being used as the pre-eminent organizing concept of education, they do see its potential for what they term, “sustainability talk”. Wals and Jickling (2002, p.123) elaborate on the idea as follows:

Sustainability talk potentially brings together different groups in society searching for a common language to discuss environmental issues. . . Where different ways of looking at the world meet, dissonance is created and learning is likely to take place – so-called: “learning at the edge”. This dialogue also allows the socio-scientific dispute character of emerging knowledge and values to surface. Participation in such a dispute is an excellent opportunity to learn about a highly relevant, controversial, emotionally charged and debatable topic at the crossroads of science, technology and society.

It is evident that sustainable development and ESD are contested terrains. Before discussing the terms further, I shall explore the key focus of the paper, ‘needs talk’ in relation to sustainability and education.

## The emergence of needs talk as a major vocabulary in political discourse

In my view, the angle of vision of much of the critique of sustainable development and education evident in the literature should shift to a focus on needs. 'Needs talk' has been given scant attention in the proliferation of literatures on education and sustainable development of the past 25 years despite the fact that the word 'needs' features strongly in the most widely quoted definition of sustainable development. With a few exceptions (for example, Miller, 1999; Hamilton, 2003), even in political philosophy there is little theorisation of needs, and this is so despite the fact that need has become "institutionalised as a major vocabulary of political discourse" (Fraser, 1993, p.162).

In the Brundtland Commission Report (WCED, 1987) two sets of needs are mentioned: the 'needs of present generations' and the 'needs of future generations'. Before referring to these, I shall first focus on what is meant by needs by generating questions on it. For example, are needs the distribution of satisfactions; a principle of social justice; or a variant of desires and wants? What is meant by 'needs'? Answers to the mentioned questions (and many other related questions) are complex. For one thing, the term 'distribution of satisfactions' would have to be interrogated. For example, what is meant by 'satisfactions', are they individual or group satisfactions, and how can competing satisfactions be met if there are not sufficient resources available? Many needs may qualify as a principle of humanitarianism but not necessarily as a principle of social justice. Distinguishing when needs claims are claims of justice or claims of humanity/benevolence becomes crucial – the boundaries between these, however, often are blurred (see Miller, 1999 for a detailed discussion). Needs could be distinguished from desires and wants in that if the former are not met, the individual or group suffer: that is, they are harmed. But this begs the question of what constitutes harm. There are many more questions concerning what is meant by need(s). However, suffice it to say that questions such as these belie the apparent simplicity of the definition "development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). I shall return to particular difficulties with respect to meeting the "needs of future generations".

Fraser (1993), however, introduces another dimension to the analysis of needs which focuses on the politics of needs. Talk about needs has not always been central to Western political culture. In the past it has often been relegated to the margins and considered antithetical to politics. So, why has talk about needs become so prominent in the political culture of welfare state societies?

Fraser (1993) raises several other questions of which I shall mention two. Firstly, does the emergence of the needs idiom presage an extension of the political sphere or, rather, a colonisation of that sphere by newer modes of power and social control? Secondly, what are the varieties of needs talk and how do they interact polemically with one another? In responding to these questions, Fraser does not offer definitive answers but rather outlines an approach to thinking about such questions. I shall elaborate on this, arguing that her approach could provide a more nuanced understanding of needs (talk) in relation to sustainable development.

Fraser's central focus of her inquiry is not on needs but rather on discourses about needs and in so doing she shifts the angle of vision to the politics of needs. Put another way, she shifts the focus from the usual understanding of needs, which pertains to the distribution of satisfactions, to the politics of needs interpretation. She sharpens the focus on the contextual and contested character of needs claims so that the interpretation of people's needs are not seen as simply given and unproblematic; the politics of needs concerns a struggle over needs. Fraser (1993) goes on to suggest that the politics of needs comprises three moments that are analytically distinct but interrelated in practice. I summarise them as follows:

1. The struggle to validate a given need as a matter of legitimate political concern or to enclave it as a nonpolitical matter
2. The struggle to interpret the need – the struggle for the power to define it and to determine what would satisfy it.
3. The struggle to satisfy the need – the struggle to secure or withhold provision.

Fraser's inquiry into the politics of needs led to a social discourse model which maps three major kinds of needs discourses in late capitalist societies: 'oppositional' discourses, 'reprivatisation' discourses and 'expert' needs discourses. Oppositional discourses arise when needs are politicised from the bottom which lead to the establishment of new social identities on the part of subordinated groups. These discourses arise when needs become politicised such as when women, people of colour or workers contest the subordinate identities and roles they have been assigned or that they have embraced themselves. Among other things oppositional discourses create new discourse publics and new vocabularies and forms of address. Fraser (1993) points out that the wave of feminist ferment established terms such as 'sexism', 'sexual harassment', 'date rape' and 'wife battering'. In her view, reprivatisation discourses have emerged in response to the oppositional discourses. They articulate entrenched needs that would previously have gone without saying. Institutionally, 'reprivatisation'

initiatives are aimed at dismantling or cutting back social welfare services, selling off nationalised assets, and deregulating private 'enterprise'; discursively it means depoliticisation. They may insist that 'wife battering' is domestic rather than political.

For Fraser (1993), expert needs discourses link popular movements to the state. They are best understood in the context of 'social problem solving', institutional building, and professional class formation. They are closely connected with institutions of knowledge production and utilisation, and they include social science discourses generated in universities and 'think tanks' legal discourses generated in judicial institutions, journals, and professional associations, and so on. Expert discourses tend to be restricted to specialised public discourses associated with professional class formation, institution building and 'social problem solving'. However, sometimes expert rhetorics are disseminated to a wider spectrum of educated laypersons – expert public discourses sometimes acquire a certain porousness – and become the bridge discourses linking loosely organised social movement with social state. It is the polemical interaction of these three kinds of needs talk that structures the politics of needs in late capitalist societies. The interaction between these three kinds of needs talk could provide a basis for reflecting on the idea of sustainable development, particularly in view of the definition of sustainable development which appeared in the Brundtland Commission Report.

## Needs talk and sustainable development

Fien's (1993b) typology provides a useful starting point for critical reflection on sustainable development in terms of *people to nature* values/principles and *people to people* values (see table 1), as does his placement of needs as a value/principle of social justice. His two broad categories: ecological sustainability and social justice are in tension with one another – or, it could be perceived to be. A primary focus on ecological sustainability may be described as biocentric/ecocentric whereas viewing social justice as central of sustainable development could be described as anthropocentric. People who argue from liberal and Gaianist (influenced by deep ecological perspectives) positions favour values related to ecological sustainability but view values associated with social justice as being anthropocentric (human-centred). Those who take up critical and/or ecosocialist positions emphasise issues related to social justice in preference to those associated with ecological sustainability. The first group, which favours values related to ecological sustainability, extend the notion of needs to non-human nature and refer to the needs of nature. Some of them would restrict needs to sentient beings only, arguing that animals, which have rights, also have needs. As a whole, Gaianists and deep ecologists contest the idea that 'needs' are endemic to human beings.



**Table 1: Core values central to sustainable development**

<b>People and nature: Ecological sustainability</b>	<b>People and people: Social justice principle</b>
<i>Interdependence:</i> people are part of nature and are dependent on it.	<i>Basic human needs:</i> the needs of all individuals and societies should be met, within the constraints of the planet's resources.
<i>Biodiversity:</i> every life form warrant respect independent of its perceived worth to humans	<i>Inter-generational equity:</i> future generations should be left with a planet that at least has similar benefits to those enjoyed by present generations.
<i>Living lightly on the earth:</i> all persons should use biophysical resources carefully and restore degraded ecosystems	<i>Human rights:</i> all persons should enjoy the fundamental freedoms of conscience, religion, expression etc.
<i>Interspecies equity:</i> people should treat all life forms decently and protect them from harm	<i>Participation:</i> all persons in communities should be empowered to exercise responsibility for their own lives.

Adapted from Fien (1993b)

But, the value/idea, 'basic human needs' is contested and controversial. In her cogent argument, Fraser (1993) presents the view that thin needs are uncontroversial but when one descends to a lesser level of generality the needs claims become controversial. For example, let us assume that shelter is a basic human need in non-tropical climates – at this level of generality such a claim would be uncontroversial. However, as soon as we become more specific and ask what homeless people need in order to be sheltered from the cold, the needs claim becomes more controversial. As Fraser (1993, p.163) illustrates when she asks: “. . . [should they] sleep undisturbed next to a hot-air vent on a street corner, in a sub-way tunnel or bus terminal. . . a bed in a temporary shelter. . . a permanent home? And, we can go on to proliferate such questions – in doing so, we will proliferate controversy”. Furthermore, “needs” is not necessarily a value/principal of social justice. Miller (1999) argues that an individual's satisfaction or relief is based on the moral imperative of benevolence or humanity rather than justice. Justice, he argues is concerned with the fair allocation of resources to meet satisfactions. Also, much of the discussion here focuses on the needs of present generations. Thinking about needs of future generations further complicates matters. Can and should present generations determine the needs of future generations? How would they determine what the needs are? Yet, at the same time the decisions that



present generations make, could place future generations in very vulnerable/needy positions. In brief, I reiterate the complex nature of needs. But, the discussion should be taken further and so I turn to the politics of needs, that is, to discuss some needs discourses and how they might relate to sustainable development.

Oppositional discourses in relation to sustainable development are evident in a contemporary era. For example, the NGO forum that met at the Rio De Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992 formulated alternative principles on sustainable development to those of governments. Concerning new vocabularies, environmental justice is an example of a new term constructed within oppositional discourses – the environmental justice movement is led mainly by women of colour in the USA. More recently, we have also witnessed oppositional voices from what is referred to as the new social movements. As Irwin (2003, p.329) writes:

Contemporary anti-globalisation protest is a remarkable 'rhizome' of radical groups, upstanding citizens, charities, long standing emancipatory organisations, environmental groups, right wing organisations, anarchists, communists and so forth, who have all found a common thread which weaves together their disgust at the solidified locus of financial, discursive and policy flows which have coagulated in supra-national organisation such as the [World Trade Organisation] WTO, World Bank, [International Monetary Fund] IMF, and various events such as the recent United Nations Earth Summit at Johannesburg.

Referring to reprivatisation discourses, Irwin (2003) argues that most of the nations of the world currently adhere to neoliberal policies of privatisation and devolvement promoted by the World Bank, IMF and WTO. As far as expert discourses are concerned, over the past two decades we have witnessed several conferences held on sustainable development as well as education for sustainable development, journals on sustainable development (for example, *Journal of Sustainable Development in Higher Education*) have been established and several special issues of journals have been published on education and sustainable development (for example, *The Trumpeter*, *Philosophy and Theory of Education*, *Environmental Education Research*) as well as inter-governmental conventions such as the World Summit in Johannesburg (2002) have been held. Fraser's social discourse model is pertinent to sustainable development. The struggle over needs is evident in oppositional discourses of anti-globalisation movements, which struggle against reprivatisation discourses produced by organisations such as the WTO, IMF and the World Bank as well as national governments. Expert discourses influence both oppositional and reprivatisation discourses and are also influenced by these. However, the issue here is what implications these may have for education.

## Some implications for education

As I said earlier, need is a complex construct, easily invoked in political speeches and social policies. However, it is a controversial and contested idea. In this paper I briefly discussed why need is such a complex issue and the importance of understanding the politics of needs, that is, how needs are constructed or produced within different political discourses. As Foucault (1977, p.26) writes: “need is also a political instrument, meticulously prepared, calculated, and used”.

At a time of increasing concern about the planet’s biophysical base that is rapidly being eroded, the perennial existential question of *how should we live* emerges strongly. Related to this are questions of how and what should be learned and taught in educational institutions. In response to these questions notions such as sustainable development and *education for sustainable development* have great appeal presumably because they purport to serve multiple and often disparate aspirations. However, as pointed out sustainable development generally and ‘needs’ more specifically, are complex and contested ideas. It is very difficult to determine what is meant by needs for needs form part of and are constituted by much of the political struggles that prevail in contemporary societies. Viewing sustainable development through the needs lens powerfully emphasises the complex, contested and controversial nature of the term. Such a perspective could provide students with the opportunity to learn about what Wals and Jickling (2002, p.123) describe as “a highly relevant, controversial, emotionally charged and debatable topic at the crossroads of science, technology and society”.

In South Africa’s new National Curriculum Statement (NCS), sustainable development forms part of the knowledge foci/content prescriptions of subjects such as Geography and Life Orientation. *Environmental and social justice* is also one of principles which underpin the NCS for Further Education and Training. Sustainable development will therefore form part of school learning programmes. However, because of its popular appeal there is a danger that it will be reduced to simplistic definition and formulation in terms of narrowly defined outcomes. It is vital that sustainable development forms part of classroom conversations. However, these conversations must recognise and critically debate the complex, controversial and contested nature of the term. For this to happen, teachers will have to understand the complexity of sustainable development and engage critically with the construct. They will also have to understand learning outcomes as being dynamic and not static. South Africa is the fifty-second wealthiest country in the world but is one hundred and twentieth on the United Nations human development index, indicating the extent of the gap between the haves and the have-nots. South Africans need to be careful that sustainable development does not become a

subtext for unbridled economic growth thus widening the gap between the wealthy and the poor. We should be careful about what we will educate for in the decade 2005 to 2014. Looking through the 'needs' lens makes possible an appreciation of the complex nature of the term sustainable development and further, reference to needs in classrooms may enable better understanding of sustainable development because 'needs' is a term learners might be able to relate to more easily.

The introduction of aspects of sustainable development into South African education coincides, and in a sense is integral to curriculum and school reform currently taking place. Popkewitz (1991, p.244) cautions against accepting reform as truth producing and progressive, referring to what he terms, the "dangers of an epistemology of progress". Dominant discourses on sustainable development (produced through supranational bodies) and curriculum reforms (influenced by globalisation) such as outcome-based education, are underpinned by an "epistemology of progress". Progress stories embedded in both global discourses on sustainability and curriculum reforms threaten to narrow democracy by thwarting efforts to achieve social justice and to develop a critical citizenry that is reflexive in a rapidly growing consumerist society. Shifting the angle of vision on sustainability to a focus on needs could shift the understanding of reform (social, political and educational) as "truth producing and progressive" to understanding it as an "object of social relations" (p.244). Such a move might provide pedagogical space for critiquing/deconstructing education programmes embedded in Western (enlightenment) progress stories.

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# Reflecting on difference: an intervention at a public high school in post-apartheid South Africa

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## Abstract

This paper describes an intervention conducted with a core group of teachers at an ex-model C high school in the Eastern Cape. The six teachers from various disciplines met weekly over a period of eighteen months with the researcher to discuss various aspects of diversity. One of the outcomes of these focus group meetings was that teachers began to reflect critically on how fixed, totalising forms of representation offer restricted understandings of people which may lead to discrimination and unfair practices.

## Introduction

Recent research into school desegregation in previously single race public schools in South Africa describes the prevalence of assimilationist approaches (Naidoo, 1996; Carrim, 1998; Carrim and Soudien, 1999; Sekete, Shilubane and Moila, 2001; Chisholm, 2004). However there appears to be very little research on practical ways of changing dominant hegemonic views and of encouraging critical reflection on practices relating to diversity within schools.

This paper describes the construction, over a period of eighteen months, of a regular dialogic space in the form of focus group meetings for teachers of 'Melrose High School' to reflect on issues of difference in their school. Through discourse analysis of extracts of the eighth focus group, I provide evidence of these teachers reflecting critically on previous incidents in their school, which discursively fixed learners and teachers in gendered and/or racialised ways and replacing these with dominant constructions with more nuanced and textured versions.

## Research into desegregation in South African schools

The effects of legislated deracialisation of schooling in South Africa since the demise of apartheid has been the topic of considerable research over the past decade. National studies conducted by the Human Rights Commission, Valley and Dalamba (1999), Sekete *et al.* (2001) and Chisholm (2004), as well as



private studies by Naidoo, (1996), Carrim and Soudien (1999) and Dolby (2000) highlight, among others, two major areas of concern. One is the predominance of assimilationist beliefs and practices in the majority of desegregated schools and the second is the evidence that learners most negatively affected by assimilationist practices, are often the 'migrated learners' (Sekete *et al.*, 2001) who may experience financial, social, emotional and linguistic displacement. This suggests a need for educators within these schools to initiate and maintain changes to promote equity and justice. However, change is difficult and without time and space, as well as the conviction of why it needs to happen, teachers are unlikely to place this kind of change as a priority.

## Assimilationist approach

The assimilationist approach to multiculturalism reflects the view that those 'minority' groups joining the 'mainstream' or host school are the ones who need to assimilate and change. The host school usually implements strategies to encourage and assist 'minority' groups to fit into the existing culture and norms of the school. A deficit discourse is often used to describe the newcomers or 'foreign' students. This approach is often accompanied with a notion of 'colour-blindness'; all learners or students are assumed to be the same and an attempt is made to treat them so or to encourage them to all take on the norms of the dominant culture. Naidoo, speaking of schooling in South Africa (1996, p.13), argues that often, the 'foreign students' are given "powerful incentives to assimilate into the dominant culture as quickly as possible to have a chance of receiving meritocratic rewards". This suggests that in order to 'succeed', minority groups are required to conform to and adopt the dominant ways of being, of learning, of behaving and of becoming. The establishment (including staff, learners and parents) often have fixed views of who and what is valued in the school and those who fail to assimilate, (either by choice or circumstance) are often discursively constructed as deviant. These constructions can become naturalised and unquestioned and prevent more nuanced, layered ways of understanding.

## Assimilationism, stereotypes and fixity

Stereotypical and fixed categories become lenses through which we experience people and practices and these limited ways of seeing the world then shape our language, our perception and our encounters between people. Existing categories and perceptions allow one to "see new things, things seen for the first time, as versions of a previously known thing" (Bhabha, 1994, p.73). Stereotypical constructions enable fixity for they act as structures to

control what we perceive and how we react to them. The stereotype is “a simplification because it is an arrested, fixated form of representation that, in denying the play of difference (which the negation through the Other permits), constitutes a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations” (Bhabha, 1994, p.75). If ‘new’ elements do not fit our existing views, we then tend to think of them as disruptive and needing to be moulded to fit existing categories. Therefore I am arguing that fixed, stereotypical constructions of gender, race and masculinity facilitate the tendencies towards assimilationist practices and disrupting these constructions might lead to new ways of thinking and doing.

## My research focus

In light of the above, I designed an intervention to create a space for teachers in a previously ‘white’ ex-model C high school to begin to talk about differences in their school and to reflect more critically on dominant practices. Empirical evidence of case studies by Gillborn (1995) and Epstein (1993) suggest the important role critical reflection plays in promoting equitable practices in educational settings. Drawing on the importance of schools as social organisations and the need to “engage with forces that shape routine interactions inside schools” (Gillborn, 1995, p.99) as well as the important role that dialogue plays in reflective action, (Edwards and Brunton, 1993), I constructed a dialogic space in the school in which a group of teachers could examine and explore contentious issues of difference in their school and their own classrooms.

## Methodology

In August 2003, I gained the necessary permission from the Department of Education and from the principal of my chosen school to begin my research. I addressed the whole staff and explained my interest in examining difference in their school and requested volunteers to join me in regular focus group meetings over a period of approximately eighteen months. I also requested that the teachers bring an issue relating to diversity (I explained it could be gender, race, class, abilities, ethnicity or language) that they would like to explore at the focus groups. Eight teachers from various disciplines and age groups volunteered. The table below provides more details:

**Table 1**

Pseudonym	Gender	Race
Sally	F	White
Jenny	F	White
Suzie	F	White
Zander	F	White
Alison	F	White
Emily	F	White
Brolox	M	White
Mr M	M	Black

## The school site

Melrose High is an ex-model C school. It was established in January in 1940 as a school for 'white' pupils in a Dutch Reformed church hall. It relocated to its current building in 1945 in a previously 'white' suburb. The vast suburb, which I will call Melrose Acres, is home to some of the wealthiest residents of the city. Along one side of the suburb exists the 'Melrose Township'. It is a sprawling mass of squatter homes and temporary settlements and a few small brick homes. Over 25 000 people live in this township which is racked by unemployment, poverty and illness. People living in this township are in walking distance from Melrose High but few can afford the school fees and of those who can, very few are accepted into the school.

Currently Melrose High has about 1 000 pupils and a teaching staff of approximately 50. Of those 50, 45 are white. The racial demographics of the learners are approximately 40% black (includes so-called coloured and Indian) and 60% white (Afrikaans and English speaking).

## Research methods

### Teacher interviews

Firstly I conducted a semi-structured interview with each of the eight teachers to ascertain what issue they wanted to discuss, what changes they had and were making in their classrooms to accommodate the changing profile of their

learners and how often they reflected on their teaching and their practices. Next I set up regular meeting times for our focus groups where all eight teachers and myself would meet. Since teachers were committed in the afternoons with extra mural activities, it was nearly impossible to have a shared open space. Fortunately the principal came to the rescue by allowing those teachers to miss every Thursday assembly period in order to meet with me. This generous gesture facilitated regular and good attendance from the teachers.

### Focus group meetings

In total the teachers and I held 14 focus group meetings between 4 September 2003 and 26 October 2004. During this period, three teachers left the group. The remaining five teachers and I continued to meet approximately twice a month until October 2004.

Below is a table that briefly summarises the seven focus group meetings held before focus group eight, which forms the focus of this entire paper.

**Table 2**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Focus group One:</i> getting to know one another and setting up ground rules for participation. An introduction to a ‘diversity grid’ which I compiled to assist teachers in identifying the top and bottom achievers according to race, gender and class.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Focus group Two:</i> A discussion and feedback of the diversity grid (first conflict in group due to the difficulty in discussing issues of class).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Focus group Three:</i> Discussion of a reading by Fullan(1999). The identification of the school detention system as unfairly discriminating against black learners and as a possible focus for the group.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Focus group Four:</i> Feedback on participation in research thus far. Discussions on discomfort and difficulty of engaging in sensitive issues like race and class and culture. Criticism of Xhosa cultural evening.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Focus group Five:</i> Feedback on Gillborn (1995) reading. An examination of detention records-indication from some teachers that detention was not an issue and that latecomers were skewing the results.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>Focus group Six:</i> Discussion of detention list without the latecomers.</li> </ul>

- *Focus group Seven:* Feedback from me on paper I had presented about the group. Decision to interview learners who frequent detention and also with management to better understand DT system and to suggest possible methods to improve situation.
- A meeting with three representatives from management of the school (headmasters, deputy and teacher in charge of detention). This was an intense meeting and the teachers who had been very vocal on the matter of detention in the focus group were particularly silent in this meeting. The day after the meeting the deputy announced to the staff that they were not to be told what to do in their schools by outsiders and that they were to be ‘arrogant’ about their own ability to manage school affairs.
- *Focus group Eight:* Feedback about the meeting with management. The focus of this paper.

### Journal writing, learner interviews and classroom observation

Teachers kept journals documenting readings, comments and reflections from the focus groups. I also conducted classroom observations of four teachers who requested it and observed various school functions such as the Valedictory service, the Oracy day and the Xhosa evening. Several learners were interviewed about their frequent attendance in detention.

### Disrupting stereotypes: focus group 8 (12 December 2004)

In the discussion that follows, I describe three extracts from the eighth focus group session in which the participants interrogate and contest the constructed nature of categories affecting their learners and their own professional identities. This discussion leads them to articulating the ways in which essentialised differences are located in unequal power relations and to discussing the means by which they could contest this inequality. Sally, Emily, Suzie, Alison and Mr M were present at this meeting.

#### ‘He’s no angel’: gender and race stereotypes

The first extract deals with a discussion about a black learner, ‘Zola’ who has been identified by the management of the school as a troublemaker and about whom a ‘form’ is being sent around. This form gets sent to each of his teachers who are asked to comment on his academic and social behaviour. If

the response is unanimously negative, the learner will be asked to leave the school. Sally, however, has found Zola to be a good student in her class and the white male teacher (called Butch in this extract) in charge of student behaviour, has questioned her several times on this. The reference to ‘giving dates’ is the discipline system which allows a teacher to give the learner three dates (three recorded violations). Once the learner has accumulated three dates the learner has to sit for the detention period on a Friday afternoon. This period lasts two to three hours and the learner has to repeatedly write out the school code of conduct.

**Sally:** *I taught Zola last year. A form was sent around by Butch and his thing was to get rid of this child because he’s such a problem and I couldn’t write a negative thing about him, because in my class he was fine. I’d given him two dates but that was way in the beginning of the year. He sat right under my nose, he got merits and Butch actually questioned me. He actually said, ‘Are you sure? Have you got the right person? Why does he behave like that in your class?’*

**Suzie:** *But Sally he is one who takes chances when he can. I can, believe, I mean he’s got some dates with me too and I’ve also given him merits.*

**Sally:** *Look he’s not an angel.*

**Suzie:** *No, but he can, he can. He’s not an aggressive sort of a person or anything but he can sometimes, so with the wrong people, with the people who have a different attitude towards him, he can. . .*

**Sally:** *But I actually objected to being questioned on it. This was how I’d found him in my class and they didn’t believe me.*

In this extract Sally is contesting the essentialised description of Zola as a problem. She insists, despite Butch’s frequent interrogation, that she “couldn’t write a negative thing about him”. Her repeated use of the word ‘actually’ signals her disbelief and annoyance at being questioned and, despite Butch’s insistent questioning of her judgement, she refuses to accept the essentialised identity of Zola. Sally is describing the fluid nature of difference; she indicates that the learner, Zola, is ‘fine’ and ‘has got merits’ in her class, despite being labeled as ‘such a problem’ with other teachers. Learners, as well as teachers, behave differently with different people and in different contexts and it is therefore simplistic to categorise anybody as being a problem without considering the influence of the ‘other person’ and of the specific conditions of the context. Sally’s refusal to go along with the popular notion of Zola’s problem status, has contested the institutionally accepted notion of this learner as being in need of further discipline. Sally’s contested categorising of Zola

highlights the role of the context in identity construction and of the fluid notion of differences and of identity. While agreeing that Zola is ‘no angel’ she rejects the essentialised version of him as being completely bad and in need of expulsion. Refusing to categorise Zola in binaries of good or bad, Sally is illustrating the concept of *differences within* (Burbules, 1997). Burbules explains that acknowledging differences within “provides latitude for understanding the ways in which difference is *enacted*; how people express differences, play with them, transgress them, cross borders between” (1997, p.107).

### ‘He’s a complete monster’: gender, race and masculinity

The second extract focuses on Suzie who starts to question influences, other than race, that locate and position staff members in terms of status, power and popularity. She highlights the constructed and gendered categorising of certain sports and questions why sports such as rugby and boys’ cricket have more status than karate and tennis. Her questioning raises the notion of both masculinities and of what Dolby (2001) refers to as constructed ‘spaces of whiteness’. Dolby argues that “sport occupies a central discursive place in [a] school’s identity” and often serves to “promote and solidify [a] school’s whiteness at both local and global levels” (2001, p.51).

**Suzie:** *I’m starting to wonder whether it’s about just racial things that we should actually pick this up. I think from the top it’s going through all over every hmm, from sport to, it’s a dominance of who sits there and what is important and teachers whoever. What is important? Is it to be there and be a star on stage and the kids love it? Or is it Important what I’m doing in my job. So, I think it’s a whole imbalance from, I don’t know. . .*

**Emily:** *It’s inconsistency!*

**Suzie:** *From the staff, I mean even the sports fields, like yesterday. . . tennis is, you’ve got five people in a team. What must I do, I can’t make them up into a big mass of games. I mean nobody will ever watch a tennis match, because I mean it’s not everyone’s. . . Guys can play hockey can play all those sports but you can’t just take a guy and say come play a tennis match. Something was made about the girls’ cricket, which I don’t know whose is going to play girls’ cricket when they are 30 but when the first team won with the girls, nothing was mentioned. He said nothing, I mean that’s just by the way you play tennis. And the kids see it; they’re not stupid. So, I think it’s a whole. . .*

**Emily:** *Culture.*



**Suzie:** *Ja. How things are just decided or the, the people that are making these decisions and all about the things, they, they like or just what's important and other people, other things just aren't important.*

In the following extract, Emily picks up on this focus on sport and of the gendered and racialised discourse surrounding this topic. She illustrates her discussion with a particular white male learner ('John X'), who despite his abhorrent behaviour at the school, is treated as a 'big hero' due to his sporting prowess. She explains further that this particular learner recently had called her a 'bitch' during class and yet nothing had been done about it (from management's side).

**Emily:** *It's very, I think it's a very big inconsistency and it's coming back to behaviour. I'm on a mission about behaviour at the moment because I'm really, it's a long time since I've seen such badly behaved kids and Ms X actually said something which was, I think was really true. For our school sport is important. The kids okay (pause). We focus on sport. Now we've got a first team player like John X who plays First team rugby who is a complete monster. He is absolutely, he looks terrible, he can't behave himself, he wanders around the school, I mean we're all pander to him because he plays in the first team. And we should say, if someone is on the first team level, their behaviour and their academics need to somehow reflect that they are worthy of being on the First team. You know, so it's so inconsistent because it's okay John is a big hero there but when he's at school. . . And you know nobody is sending around the sheet about him. Nothing is going to be done. I can tell you now. That child won't be expelled. We have to put up with him. Hmm, you know hmm really, I think that's where we have a big inconsistency.*

**Sally:** *We can voice our concerns but it's whether anything happens. But there are two incidents that Zander is concerned about one is, hmm, one was hmm, John called Emily a bitch as he walked out of the class. Nothing is going to be done about him but and John, Mrs Smith said, the other day in class what did she, what did "Oh, come now, John" and he said "uh uh, I can't at the moment". And nothings been said or done about that. And that's unacceptable that boys can talk to teachers like that.*

The irony and injustice that everyone panders to 'John X' because he plays first team rugby and that no form is being sent around about him as opposed to the previously mentioned Zola, who works well in some classes and yet is being targeted for expulsion, does not escape Emily. Despite John's obvious disrespect for female staff, he will continue to be treated as a hero and go unpunished. His whiteness, his gender and his masculinity construct him as 'untouchable'. Not only will he remain in the school, but also he will continue to be given hero status. Emily, Suzie and Sally, well-established female

teachers in the school, have to accept that they can voice their concerns but that nothing is likely to be done about it. Despite their whiteness, the gendered norms in the school position them, in certain contexts, as having less status and power than sporty white male learners have. Suzie's comment that it is 'more than just racial' and Emily's focus on gender and masculinities suggests their awareness, despite their inclination to essentialise John as a 'jock', that categories of race, gender and masculinity are mutually informing and should not be viewed as singular determinants. It is also clear to them that some categories are granted preference in particular circumstances and not in others, which highlights the shifting, contested nature of categories.

In the extract that follows, Mr M, the only male teacher present during focus group 8, sympathized with Suzie, Sally and Emily. He agreed with the obvious inconsistencies in the school and commented on the injustice of allowing John X to go unpunished while punishing latecomers (who were usually black and coloured learners). He told the group how he used his position as soccer coach to challenge what he perceived to be inconsistencies. This he felt he was able to do in certain spaces such as on the soccer field and in his classroom. While unable to challenge the whole system, he is able to exercise some agency in some places, under certain conditions and he uses these opportunities to contest and reconstruct inequitable practices.

**Mr M:** *You know, we don't have the channels with management where we can say, "listen", but I try to implement that where as far as my influence can stretch and that's my team, or my classroom or whatever. Now I've had First team players that've come and they thought they can just do what they want to and they ended up not playing. But I can see also where that attitude is coming from because if you're a First team here at Melrose High – you have certain privileges.*

**Emily:** *The untouchables.*

**Mr M:** *I look at 'Jason', I hear his name called out, detention, DT, DT, DT – he never came to trials at the beginning of this year. I said fine, you not gonna make my first team player. He was a First team Soccer player. He went to rugby. He was at the reserve there in the B-team rugby. I told the coach that he won't play in my team. And, I think you know our influences stretch so far so and let's use it there. And if ever or whenever the channel opens where we can voice our dissatisfaction with other things. John X is every week up in detention but he still plays and he's still at the school. When a child comes late three or four times and then we're asked to send a letter around for this child to leave the school or we tell these children "you are not welcome in this school. We don't want you in the school".*

Mr M gives an example of where he is able to exercise his power by refusing to allow Jason into the first soccer team of which he is coach. Jason, whose name is called out regularly for detention and who does not bother to attend 'trials' (team try-out) is refused an opportunity to play in the first team. He therefore goes to rugby and Mr M knows that he cannot influence the decision to exclude him from the rugby team as well. Mr M, as a 'black' man, despite being racially disempowered at times, is able to position himself powerfully on the sports field due to his location as coach of a recognised masculine sport. Even though soccer does not carry the prestige of rugby in this school, Mr M's maleness and position of coach of a 'masculine' sport allow him certain privileges denied to the female staff who coach more 'feminine' sports like tennis and karate. This illustrates the fluctuating character of difference and of the constantly shifting terrain of power in relation to difference. Certain categories are significant in certain contexts and less significant in others. When examining differences, Mr M is commenting on the influence of changing contexts and changing circumstances as well as questioning the constructed nature of these categories. Instead of passively accepting categories, he challenges the teachers to use their power where they can and to be alert to opportunities to challenge other discriminatory practices at the school in whatever capacities they can.

### Coffee, cake and flowers: gender stereotypes

The third and final extract to be discussed in this paper describes the teachers engaging further with differences and actively challenging and 'playing' with gendered practices. Suzie tells the group about her experience when she went to see the principal the previous year about a problem with management. Instead of listening to her problem and dealing with it, he dismisses it and suggests that she go for coffee and cake in order to calm down.

**Suzie:** *I went into the office, it was about a year and a half ago. Obviously I said the wrong thing but it concerned somebody in management and somewhere something didn't work out. I was sent straight to the coffee shop and got a big piece of cake hmm, and told, "Now, listen, relax have coffee at Melrose Shopping Mall, I'm paying the bill". I came back I was very upset. It had to be stopped just right there and I went there, I came back because I actually just thought just go and think you haven't got, I mean just. . . When I came back I had a big thing of flowers. Simon, my husband laughed himself sick, he said, "this man doesn't know me because that's the last thing anybody would do to me". I want this thing sorted out or just tell or just listen to me or just chat to me. It's never been done.*

**Alison:** *It's called D \_ E \_ N \_ I \_ A \_ L.*

**Suzie:** *Ja. I don't think I, because I think he's actually married to a woman that would accept, that's the way to treat her to do it and I think he thinks every woman.*

**Mr M:** *What did you get? Surely you got something there.*

**Suzie:** *I didn't. I didn't.*

**Mr M:** *It's the school budget. We cannot be spending on people outside the school.*

**Suzie:** *And I tell you, about I actually didn't have coffee or any cake, I bought myself a pair of shoes.*

Suzie's problem with some issue of management, which she hoped would be taken seriously by her principal and sorted out, was instead dismissed and diminished. Instead, she was told to go and relax and have some coffee and cake for which he would pay. When she returned she received a bunch of flowers. Instead of taking the time to listen to Suzie's problem and of dealing with it professionally, the principal draws on the stereotype of an hysterical woman and grants her permission to take 'time out' in order to 'calm down' and hopefully see things 'more reasonably'. When she returns he still does not engage with her and since she does not follow up on the issue, he probably believes that she has now come to reason and that the problem has gone away. This is a demeaningly patronising and gendered manner of dealing with a professional teacher.

Suzie indicates that she went to the shops and instead of having coffee, she bought herself a pair of shoes (which she paid for). When she returned, the principal had bought her a bunch of flowers. To this day she says that her problem has never been discussed and "has never been done". The male principal, having never mentioned the issue again, probably believes he has dealt with this in an appropriate manner. He probably believes that having had an opportunity to rethink the issue, Suzie would have come to the realisation herself, that she had possibly overreacted and that her issue was not all that serious. His gendered handling of Suzie's issue suggests that he views Suzie, not as multifaceted and complex, but predominantly as a woman who fits into his static, essentialised category of someone who can easily be appeased and bought with some coffee and flowers. Suzie's comment that her husband "laughed himself sick" and commented that buying flowers was the last thing anyone who knew her, should do, highlights Burbule's (1997) notion of recognising *differences within* set categories. While women share certain issues, it is foolish and reductionist to ignore differences within the category of women and apply set ideas of 'every woman', every white, every male. . . While the actual categorising of Suzie firstly as a woman rather than as a professional, is not criticised, it is encouraging that the teachers can see the

foolishness of stereotypical categorising. Furthermore, the teachers in this group are able to move beyond a moralistic discourse and ‘play’ with the stereotype. Suzie, while acknowledging that she was upset by the event, was able to exploit the time allocated to her to buy herself a pair of shoes. While rejecting the stereotype of a hysterical woman, she deliberately and defiantly takes up the stereotypical view of the ‘woman shopper’.

## Conclusion

Given the tendency of educators to apply assimilationist thinking to issues of learner integration, I have suggested, as a possible strategy, the construction of a space where teachers can explore and engage in the effects of categorical and rigid thinking. If staff and management of a school continue to “affix the unfamiliar to something established” (Bhabha, 1994, p.73), they are likely to maintain existing views and practices and perpetuate the notion that ‘migrated’ learners are the ones who need to change. However, if educators are encouraged to see difference as dynamic and fluid rather than fixed, they might be more inclined to acknowledge the multiple influences of context and power on representations of difference and of the limits of reducing difference to single determinants such as race, gender or class. An example of this is given in the extract where Sally’s disrupts Butch’s fixed notion of Zola as a problem and provides a more nuanced and fluid representation of him. A second example of a fixed representation is provided with the description of John’s abhorrent behaviour to female staff, which is overlooked by some white male staff due to his prowess on the field. While John is represented as a ‘hero’ in the school, the group of teachers position him, in a rather essentialised way as a ‘jock’ who is a ‘complete monster’, ‘looks terrible’ and ‘can’t behave himself’. Even though the teachers in the group draw on not only on John’s masculinity but also on his race and gender, they too construct him in an essentialised way. Therefore despite including various aspects of one’s identity, it is still possible to essentialise and position people in binary constructions.

The final extract illustrates the principal’s stereotypical positioning of Suzie as an hysterical woman who needs to be given coffee and cake in order for her to calm down and reason properly. This essentialised notion of how to deal with women prevents the principal from providing sound leadership.

In this paper I have provided evidence of teachers discussing, challenging, contesting and playing with essentialised categories and described teachers identifying the effects of the articulation between categories of race, gender and masculinity on the learners, as well as on themselves. The discussion of the extracts also indicates that both learners and teachers can be subjected to

stereotypical constructions especially within contexts where there are unequal power relations. However, the construction of a dialogic space where teachers can interrogate existing representations creates opportunities for teachers to critically reflect on how viewing certain groups in fixed, static ways can impede a full understanding and create narrow, essentialised thinking. Thinking ‘out the box’ and understanding the fluid nature of difference might facilitate more equitable practices at ex-model C schools.

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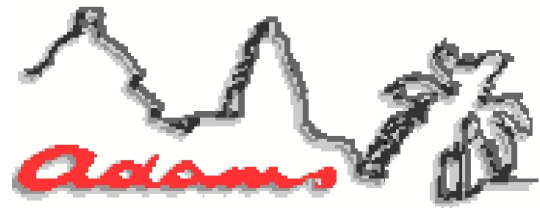
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# Notes for Contributors

*Journal of Education* will appear at least twice per year.

## Submissions

Unsolicited papers are welcome for consideration and should be addressed to the Editor of the *Journal of Education*. Submitting authors should note that a per page fee of R75 will be levied on published submissions. Institutional Research Offices of higher education institutions usually pay this type of fee. Authors whose affiliated organisation may not have instituted this practice are asked to contact the Editor, as the levy is a means of sustaining the journal, and is not intended as a deterrent to aspiring authors!

Articles and review essays are reviewed by anonymous external referees. Appropriate papers will be refereed for significance and soundness. Papers are accepted on the understanding that they have not been published or accepted for publication elsewhere.

Articles and essay reviews (maximum 6 000 words); debate, discussion and research notes (2 500 words); book reviews (2 000 words); and book notes (200 words) will be considered.

Contributors should submit three clear, page numbered copies of the manuscript, and bearing the title of the paper. Manuscripts will not be returned. The name(s) and full address(es) of the author should appear on a separate sheet. Each paper should be accompanied by a 100 – 150 word abstract. Hard copies should either be accompanied by a 3½ inch diskette bearing the article, or followed by the file sent as an email attachment to the Editor at [JoE@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:JoE@ukzn.ac.za). Articles sent by e-mail only are not accepted except in cases where this might be the only reasonable means of communication.

The electronic version of the article should not be formatted, and should preferably not use a variety of fonts and font sizes or use paragraph styles. Where necessary, however authors may wish to indicate levels of subheadings (i.e. first level, second level). Footnotes should be kept to a minimum, and authors are asked to keep tables and diagrams to the most feasible level of size and simplicity. Tables and diagrams should also be sent in separate files.

Each author will receive a copy of the journal in which the paper appears.

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Readers are free to make a limited number of copies of articles for non-profit research and educational purposes. In cases where multiple copies are required for teaching purposes, we trust that South African institutions affiliated to the Dramatic, Artistic and Literary Rights Organisation (Pty) Limited (DALRO) will follow normal procedures with respect to the reproduction of publications. Educators or publishers outside South Africa wishing to reproduce articles in publications or compilations of readings should contact the Editor.

## Referencing style

*Journal of Education* style of referencing is a requirement. References in the text should appear as follows:

No country in the world can afford the schooling its people want (Reimer, 1971) and it has been argued that “of all ‘false utilities’, school is the most insidious” (Illich, 1971, p.60).

The references should be listed in full at the end of the paper in an acceptable standard format, preferably the following:

### Books

Surname(s), Initial(s). Year of publication. *Title: additional title information*. Edition (if other than the first). Place of publication: Publisher.

### Chapters in edited or compiled books

Surname(s), Initial(s). Year of publication. Title of chapter or article. In Surname(s), Initial(s) of editor(s) or compiler(s). (Eds). or (Comps). *Title of book*. Edition (if other than first). Place of publication: Publisher. Inclusive page numbers of the chapter.

### Journal articles

Surname(s), Initial(s). Year of publication. Title of article. *Name of journal* volume number (part number (if there is not continuous pagination)): inclusive page numbers.

### **Articles and reports in magazines and newspapers**

Surname(s), Initial(s). Year of publication. Title of article. *Name of magazine or newspaper* day and month: inclusive (and additional) page numbers.

### **Book reviews**

Surname of reviewer, Initial(s). Year of publication. Title of review (if there is one). [Review of] *Title of book reviewed* by Name of author in its most familiar form. *Name of periodical* volume number (part number) or date (if applicable): inclusive page numbers.

### **Theses and dissertations**

Surname, Initial(s). Year. Title: additional title information. Description of work. Location of university: name of university.

### **Seminar papers**

Surname, Initial(s). Year. Title: additional title information. Unpublished seminar paper. Location of university: name of university, name of department, programme or unit.

### **Conference papers (unpublished)**

Surname(s), Initial(s). Year. Title: additional title information. Description of occasion (including the nature and subject of the conference or meeting, name of the society or group, the place at which it was held and the date(s) on which it was held).

### **Duplicated materials**

Surname(s), Initial(s). Year. Title: additional title information. Description of material. Location of issuing body: name of issuing body.

### **Interviews**

Surname of person interviewed, Initial(s). Year. Interviewed by initial(s) and surname of interviewer. Place where interview occurred, further details of date (day and month). Details of location of transcript, if available.



**Personal communications**

Surname of person with whom communicated, Initial(s). Year.  
Description of communication, further details of date (day, month).

**Microforms, audio-visual material, CD-ROMs etc.**

As for works above but with the addition of the format in square brackets at the end of the reference, e.g. [Microfilm] or [Videotape] or [CD-ROM], etc.

**Online sources of information (published or unpublished)**

Surname(s), Initial(s). Year of publication. *Title*. Version (if any). Place of publication: Publisher.  
<Address of web page between> Day, month (and year if different to publication year) of visit to site.

## Frequently asked questions

*Is the Journal of Education SAPSE accredited?*

Yes

*How many issues per year?*

In terms of a recent policy decision, we aim to produce at least two 'normal' editions of the journal each year in addition to at least two special issues (one of which will be the Kenton Special Edition).

*Most journals now have a per page fee which contributors are required to meet should their articles be accepted. Does the Journal of Education levy such charges?*

Yes. This step was necessary to cover the costs of the increased number of issues each year. A levy of R75 per page will be applied to successful articles submitted to our office. The central research offices in most institutions of higher education routinely arrange for such payments to be made. We encourage individual authors who do not have such cover to contact us.

*Are articles peer reviewed?*

Yes. Our goal is for articles to be refereed by three experts in the field.

*What is the waiting period after submission?*

Referees provide their crucially important service for no reward, and are sometimes unable to oblige on time but we endeavour to respond within three months.

*Can I send my submission by e-mail?*

Only if you live in a place where submission of three hard copies is inordinately difficult or expensive, please. The norm is three hard copies sent to our office. The electronic version of the article may be sent as an email attachment, or on a disk included with the hard copies.

*To what extent should an article being submitted be presented in 'the style' of the journal?*

Citation and referencing should be in the style of the journal (see the previous section 'Notes for Contributors'). Authors are not expected to reproduce the particular fonts and font sizes used in the journal, but the levels of headings and subheading should be clear on the hard copies submitted. With regard to the electronic version of the article, we prefer as little formatting as possible.

*Does the journal have a policy to encourage and support budding novice researchers?*

Unfortunately not – this is simply beyond our capacity. While we welcome extended comment that referees may be able to offer, we cannot impose on their good services beyond the expectation of an overall judgement on the article, together with brief justification of that judgement.

*What is the rate of acceptance/ rejection?*

The following statistics for 2002 and 2003 provide an indication of the pattern of acceptance/ non acceptance:

Year	Accepted with no or minor revisions	Accepted after revisions	Not accepted
2002	9	7	41
2003	15	9	47

Even an increase in the number of issues each year will not keep pace with the ever-increasing number of submissions. We can do little to mitigate the competition engendered by state funding policy and the kinds of incentive schemes that have become a feature of the higher education landscape.

*Is there an appeal mechanism should my article not be accepted?*

Beyond summarizing reasons for rejection – where applicable - we regret that we are unable to enter into detailed discussion on decisions reached by the Editorial Committee on the basis of referee reports.

*The journal describes itself as providing “a forum for scholarly understanding of the field of education”. What does this really mean?*

We understand this as implying that articles should represent a rigorous enquiry (conducted through argumentation or empirically) into the understanding of educational issues. Such inquiry originates in a problem rather than a solution, and it is rare for such enquiry to have no reference to, or engagement with, a broader literature and theory. Advocacy in the form of prescriptions or ‘how to do it’ recipe knowledge for practitioners seldom finds favour with referees. The question of audience is key. The assumed audience is the collective body of researchers rather than those more narrowly concerned with the effective implementation of specific policies.

Recent non-acceptances include a high proportion of undeveloped research reports, summaries of dissertations, and even sound but small-scale case studies that are purely context specific and unconnected with broader issues, literature or theory. Similarly, even a successful conference paper is usually in need of further development before it merits publication.