

*Symposium Session Title.*

“Starting With Ourselves”: Perspectives from the Transformative Education/al Studies Project

· *Abstract.*

Higher Education in South Africa is characterised by a range of challenges. The Transformative Education/al Studies (TES) project brings into dialogue a number of practitioner-research studies that respond to these challenges. The overarching research question --“How do I transform my education/al practice as ....?” – is adapted for each participant’s educational context, giving rise to a range of responses and insights. This symposium will provide an opportunity to engage with a variety of participant perspectives from the TES project. The objectives of the session are to make public education/al knowledge engendered by the TES project and to illustrate how participation in the *process* of this self-study of practice research project actually changes its practitioners and their education/al practice and contexts.

(120 words)

· *Session summary.*

This symposium will provide an opportunity to engage with a variety of participant perspectives from the Transformative Education/al Studies (TES) Project. The objectives of the session are to make public education/al knowledge engendered by the TES project and to illustrate how participation in the *process* of this self-study of practice research project “changes its practitioners and their situations” (Pithouse, Mitchell & Weber, 2009, p. 48), thus “[improving] education and actually [serving] the public good” (Ball & Tyson, 2011, p. 198).

The TES project is a three-year (2011-2013) project involving academic staff working and studying in three different university contexts in South Africa: a university of technology, a ‘research intensive’ university, and a rural comprehensive university. The participants are 22 Higher Education practitioners who are pursuing Masters and Doctoral studies at the three universities and their 12 research supervisors. Together these staff-students and supervisors form an inter-institutional, trans-disciplinary inquiry community, underpinned by the methodology of self-study of education/al practice (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009).

Higher Education in South Africa is characterised by a number of disturbing factors: poor undergraduate success and throughputs, particularly among students from previously disadvantaged communities; slow if any transformation of curricula, a poor profile of community engagement and social action; inadequate Higher Education staff

qualifications; an ageing professoriate; and too few new and young researchers (ASSAf, 2010; Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007).

The TES project brings into dialogue a number of practitioner-research studies that respond to these challenges facing Higher Education in South Africa. The overarching research question (drawing on Whitehead, 1999) --“How do I transform my education/al practice as ....?” – is adapted for each participant’s educational context, giving rise to a range of responses and insights that contribute not only to research knowledge, but also to the “[improvement of] education and [that] actually serve the public good” (Ball & Tyson, 2011, p. 198).

This symposium will offer perspectives from four TES project participants from each of the three universities. These Higher Education practitioner-researchers, who work and study in very different academic contexts, will each offer a response to the question: “How is the process of self-study transforming me as a practitioner-researcher in a South African University?”

The symposium will thus “examine innovative scholarship by researchers whose work is currently being used to improve education and serve the public good” (Ball & Tyson, 2011, p. 198). It will also offer a forum for intensive discussion of the potential for collaborative self-study scholarship to contribute to education/al research knowledge and to education/al change for the public good.

The session will begin with an overview of the TES project by one of the project co-investigators. This will be followed by four presentations by project participants. Each presentation will offer a different perspective on the transformative potential of involvement in a self-study inquiry community. Thereafter, the discussant, who is an acknowledged expert in the field of self-study of education/al practice, will respond to the presentations. Time will also be allocated for discussion with the audience.

(495 words)

## References

- Ball, A. F., & Tyson, C. A. (2011). American Educational Research Association 2012 Annual Meeting call for submissions. *Educational Researcher*, 40(4), 198-220.
- Pinnegar, S., & Hamilton, M. L. (2009). *Self-study of practice as a genre of qualitative research: Theory, methodology, and practice*. Dordrecht; Heidelberg; London; New York: Springer.
- Whitehead, J. (1999). *How do I improve my practice?: Creating a discipline of education through educational enquiry*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bath, Bath.

## Presentation 1

· *Title.*

“Starting with Ourselves”: An Overview of the Transformative Education/al Studies (TES) Project

· *Presentation summary.*

Higher Education in South Africa is characterised by a number of disturbing factors: poor undergraduate success and throughputs, particularly among students from previously disadvantaged communities; slow if any transformation of curricula, a poor profile of community engagement and social action; inadequate Higher Education staff qualifications; an ageing professoriate; and too few new and young researchers (ASSAf, 2010; Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007).

Thus, a vital question for the South African Higher Education community is: How can we ensure that our education/al *research processes* as well as the ensuing *research knowledge* “improve education and actually serve the public good” (Ball & Tyson, 2011, p. 198)? The participants in the Transformative Education/al Studies project share a conviction that we can start by studying and making public the development of our own *self-reflexive* pedagogic, research and graduate supervision capacity. We are working from an understanding that “the very process of [such] self-study [can change us as] practitioners and [our] situations” (Pithouse, Mitchell & Weber, 2009, p. 48).

The TES project is therefore simultaneously a research project and an education/al intervention. It is a three-year (2011-2013) project led by researchers from the Durban University of Technology (DUT), Walter Sisulu University (WSU) and the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and funded by a grant from the South African National Research Foundation. Currently, the participants are 22 Higher Education practitioners who are pursuing Masters and Doctoral studies at the three universities and their 12 research supervisors. Together these staff-students and supervisors form an inter-institutional, trans-disciplinary inquiry community, underpinned by the methodology of self-study of education/al practice (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009). A wide range of academic disciplines is represented, including teacher development, communication, fine arts, the performing arts, and accountancy education.

Thus far, TES project participants have come together for two three-day inter-institutional workshops led by international experts in self-study of education/al practice. Participants also attend support meetings at the individual institutions and access an online classroom and list serves. Over the next two years, there are plans for further workshops as well as a public conference, and edited book.

The TES project brings into dialogue a number of practitioner-research studies that respond to the manifold challenges facing Higher Education in South Africa. The overarching research question (drawing on Whitehead, 1999) --, “How do I transform my education/al practice as ....?” -- is adapted for each participant’s educational context, giving rise to a range of responses and insights that contribute not only to research knowledge, but also to the “[improvement of] education and [that] actually serve the public good” (Ball & Tyson, 2011, p. 198). For example:

“How do I transform my educational practice as a teacher of science to first year students from a disadvantaged educational background?”

“How do I transform my educational practice as mentor of first generation Higher Education academics?”

“How do I transform my educational practice as a writing tutor in a writing centre for non-mother tongue speakers of the language of instruction in Higher Education?”

(493 words)

## References

- Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf). (2010). *The PhD Study: An evidence-based study on how to meet the demands for high-level skills in an emerging economy*.
- Ball, A. F., & Tyson, C. A. (2011). American Educational Research Association 2012 Annual Meeting call for submissions. *Educational Researcher*, 40(4), 198-220.
- Pinnegar, S., & Hamilton, M. L. (2009). *Self-study of practice as a genre of qualitative research: Theory, methodology, and practice*. Dordrecht; Heidelberg; London; New York: Springer.
- Pithouse, K., Mitchell, C., & Moletsane, R. (2009). Going public with scholarly collaboration: Reflections on a collaborative self-study book process. In K. Pithouse, C. Mitchell & R. Moletsane (Eds.), *Making connections: Self-study & social action* (pp. 26-39). New York: Peter Lang.
- Pithouse, K., Mitchell, C., & Weber, S. (2009). Self-study in teaching and teacher development: A call to action. *Educational Action Research*, 17(1), 43 - 62.
- Scott, I., Yeld, N., & Hendry, J. (2007). *Higher education monitor: A case for improving teaching and learning in South African higher education*. Pretoria: The Council on Higher Education.
- Whitehead, J. (1999). *How do I improve my practice?: Creating a discipline of education through educational enquiry*. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bath, Bath.

## Presentation 2

*Title.*

How is the Process of Self-Study Transforming me as a Lecturer and Novice Education/al Researcher in a South African University of Technology?

*Presentation summary.*

This presentation illustrates the transformative influence of self-study on a novice education/al researcher in a South African university of technology as I explore my own pedagogy in an undergraduate English Communication course comprising 69% students who do not speak English as their mother tongue, 75% of whom are first-generation university students. Using self-study as a methodology to critique my practice allows for a re-conceptualization of student learning in order to effect a more engaged learner environment, which echoes the claim of Mitchell, Pithouse & Moletsane (2009, p. 21) that “self-study opens up a space for illuminating significant social questions and making the avenues and tools for social action or intervention more visible and more possible.”

The purpose of my self-study is to develop a greater understanding of how I, as an educator, can learn from reflecting on my practice though an examination of my underlying assumptions. My personal values and the ideologies underpinning my professional work become more explicit through the process of self-study as I develop a deeper and more critical understanding of my academic self-identity and of students' experiences of my practice. Using an interpretive theoretical paradigm to underpin my study, I attempt to understand and interpret what learning and teaching takes place whilst adopting a socio-cultural perspective to frame the study in relation to teaching for learning practices (Kelly, 2006).

Although the overarching approach to this research is self-study of practice, elements of narrative inquiry are used as a conceptual framework, for journaling of my personal and professional history, allowing reflection on my practice and on the process. In addition, student stories give voice to their lived experiences (Pithouse, 2007). Video, capturing my teaching and taped recordings of student focus groups and discussions with colleagues provide opportunities to examine how 'others' experience my pedagogy. Course and lecturer evaluations and an analysis of official documents such as course outlines provide further evidence.

As I become more conscious and critical of my values, my embodied knowledge, gleaned through this reflexive process, moves to public knowledge and the exemplar (Mishler, 1990) that I make public can influence how Communication pedagogy is carried out in other Universities of Technology in South Africa. It might also transform academics' views of the current and potential role of the academic discipline of

Communication. It is my intention that my study will stretch educational boundaries by contesting the realities of students' experiences of learning in the academy and, in aligning with the aim of self-study research, will "provoke, challenge and illuminate rather than confirm and settle" (Bullough & Pinnegar, 2001, p. 21).

(427 words)

## References

- Kelly, P. (2006). What is teacher learning? A socio-cultural perspective. *Oxford Review of Education*, 32(4), 505-519.
- Mitchell, C., Pithouse, K., & Moletsane, R. (2009). The social self in self-study: Author conversations. In K. Pithouse, C. Mitchell & R. Moletsane (Eds.), *Making connections: Self-study & social action* (pp. 12-23). New York: Peter Lang.
- Mishler, E. G. (1990). Validation in inquiry-guided research: The role of exemplars in narrative studies. *Harvard Educational Review*, 60, 415-442.

## Presentation 3

· *Title.*

How is the Process of Self-Study Transforming me as a Graduate Research Supervisor in a 'Research Intensive' South African University?

· *Presentation summary.*

In this presentation, I offer an understanding of the complex nature of the supervisory relationship in the context of self-study research and the pedagogy of graduate education. The key research question that frames my response in this presentation is: How am I transforming as a Higher Education researcher-practitioner-supervisor in a "research intensive" South African university through the supervision relationship in self-study? And, following on from this central question, I ask: What kinds of supervisory support are necessary in self-study research in which the very process changes its practitioners and their situations (Pithouse, Mitchell & Weber, 2009)? What is my role in a self-study supervisory relationship, where the significance of the intellectual endeavor is gauged both by its original contribution to knowledge *and* its contribution to education/al change?

Supervision as pedagogy might be understood as the provision usually by an academic to a student of either the expert guidance in subject knowledge or genre knowledge in relation to graduate thesis development. However, supervising a self-study jolts me out of complacency and knowing as the 'expert', and puts pressure on me to engage in exploring my supervisory 'teaching' as an act of re-knowing and researching myself and

my practice so as to make explicit the values informing my knowing, being and acting. I seek to better understand the self-study supervision relationship in graduate pedagogy through asking by what conditions and what means do we (the student and I) as partners come to know *and* act.

Drawing on video recordings of my supervisory meetings and sessions, email correspondence, supervisory records of meetings and photographs of the learning/supervision spaces, I reflect critically on my learning and identity in an inquiry-based supervision relationship. Using trust, respect, moral support and equality as the key markers for the relationship, I explore the nature of the critical dialogue and scholarly conversations as a co-learner/developer of knowledge and identity production (Calma, 2007).

The presentation concludes with the understanding that the capacities and forms of identity that are being produced, and the means by which they are being produced, is held to spring from 'deep within'. The 'deep within' is constituted through the performances I as supervisor enact and which are open to ongoing transformation. The presentation contributes to the understanding that the intellectual development that occurs offers both student and supervisor new perspectives, and the result of their joint labor represents a public gain in both education/al knowledge and education/al change.

(400 words)

## References

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- Pithouse, K., Mitchell, C., & Weber, S. (2009). Self-study in teaching and teacher development: A call to action. *Educational Action Research*, 17(1), 43 - 62.

## Presentation 4

· *Title.*

How is the Process of Self-Study Transforming me as a Professor and University Chaplain in a South African University in a Poor Rural Community?·

*Presentation summary.*

As an experienced academic and newcomer to self-study research, I am fascinated by the concept of self-study and the vast possibilities of this methodology. I see in self-study the potential for improving not only my practice and my being, but more

importantly, empowering and transforming my students and taking their learning experience to a higher level. The possibility of transforming all of us to a higher level of humanity, in addition to the acquisition of the academic knowledge, as a way of contributing to a public good is more than a wondrous attraction to me, in a society with a brutalized past whose scars are evident and which needs more than knowledge to achieve a sense of healing and peace.

As a university lecturer in a poor rural community in South Africa, where it is understood that the students are mostly unprepared for university, the need for a drastically different approach and attitude to reaching them where they are is essential. Yet, universities like mine seem to have little if anything in place to address this unique position and students continue to be 'thrown in at the deep-end'.

This makes the Transformative Education/al Studies project's central question of "How do I transform my education/al practice as ....?" for the public good extremely critical for me. The traditional university teaching and learning 'practice' is supposed to be well established and we all know to just 'fit in' and not to ask questions. The idea that I can improve my practice within this environment by questioning what I do and come up with innovative ideas of my own which encompass getting to know who my students are, who I am in relation to them and what their needs are so that their learning starts from there is incredible. The involvement of my relationship with my students in the learning experience seems unimaginable.

When I look at my personal journey, however, in the same environment for the past ten years, I find that I and my students are perhaps a living testimony of what is possible when the great mask of academia is removed and we are revealed as humans with feelings and that the values of love, hope, compassion and respect are an integral part of transforming lives if we hope to work for the public good.

In this presentation, I take a narrative inquiry stance to explore my story and experience as a woman with multiple roles, some of which may seem contradictory, in my journey as a single mother, a Roman Catholic University Chaplain, 'the Professor' and until recently, head of the English Department, on top of being someone's else's child, sister, friend, and so forth. Using self-study methods of artefact retrieval (Allender & Manke, 2004) and journaling (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2009), I will offer a self-reflexive examination of my dual role as a university lecturer and that of Chaplain, and how the two have transformed my practice and some lives, including my own, without my even knowing it.

(499 words)



## References

- Allender, J. S., & Manke, M. P. (2004). Evoking self in self-study: The analysis of artifacts. In D. L. Tidwell, L. M. Fitzgerald & M. L. Heston (Eds.), *Journeys of hope: Risking self-study in a diverse world. Proceedings of the fifth international conference on self-study of teacher education practices, Herstmonceux Castle, East Sussex, England, June 27 - July 1* (pp. 20-23). Cedar Falls, IA: University of Northern Iowa.
- Pinnegar, S., & Hamilton, M. L. (2009). *Self-study of practice as a genre of qualitative research: Theory, methodology, and practice*. Dordrecht; Heidelberg; London; New York: Springer.

## Presentation 5

### · Title.

How is the Process of Self-Study Transforming me as a Doctoral Researcher and as an Academic at a University of Technology in South Africa?·

### *Presentation summary.*

Higher Education in South Africa has, amongst its many challenges to deal with, the issue of poor undergraduate success and throughput among students from the previously disadvantaged communities as well as the subminimum academic staff qualifications (ASSAf, 2010; Scott, Yeld & Hendry, 2007). I identify with these issues both as a doctoral student from a previously disadvantaged community and as an academic staff member teaching at a University of Technology in South Africa. I have found that the self-study approach to education/al research is appropriate in my Higher Education context since "knowing more about ourselves as teachers and teacher educators changes us, provokes growth, jolts us out of complacency – sometimes radically, in ways that can seem transformative...The very process of self-study itself changes its practitioners and their situations. Seeing things differently, self-study can prod us to take action" (Pithouse, Mitchell & Weber, 2009, p. 48). It is in changing myself and my situation during both my practice and my research that I believe I am contributing to the American Educational Research Association's mission to "promote the use of research to improve education and serve the public good" (Ball & Tyson, 2011, p. 198), particularly in South Africa.

In this presentation, I will explore my lived experience as a Higher Education practitioner and part-time doctoral student, showing how my research as well as my practice have been transformed during my self-study research process. Whilst doing a self-study, I have examined my own values, beliefs, knowledges and hence ways of knowing, being and becoming as a practitioner-researcher in Higher Education to provide an account

for my understanding of learning as a biochemical process. It is in systematically examining my practice through telling my own stories, the stories of those that I interact with as a professional academic developer and the use of multimedia that I have become more aware of the various educational influences on my practice. Through the application of Marcel Jousse's "Laws of the Anthropology of Geste and Rhythm" (Jousse, 2000), I discover how changes in my values and my beliefs are associated with biochemical changes occurring in my whole being as a result of intussusception. My new knowledge of myself, my educational influences as well as the educational influences of those I interact with during my doctoral study have transformed my practice both as a doctoral researcher and as a practitioner. This transformation has resulted in the generation of a living theory (Whitehead, 2008) that offers spiritual resilience gained through a connection with a loving dynamic energy as a standard of judgement.

(423 words)

## References

- Academy of Science of South Africa (ASSAf). (2010). *The PhD Study: An evidence-based study on how to meet the demands for high-level skills in an emerging economy*.
- Ball, A. F., & Tyson, C. A. (2011). American Educational Research Association 2012 Annual Meeting call for submissions. *Educational Researcher*, 40(4), 198-220.
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- Scott, I., Yeld, N., & Hendry, J. (2007). *Higher education monitor: A case for improving teaching and learning in South African higher education*. Pretoria: The Council on Higher Education.
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