

Conference

**ACTION RESEARCH:
EXPLORING ITS
TRANSFORMATIVE
POTENTIAL**

Thursday 19 August – Friday 20 August 2010



**Nelson Mandela
Metropolitan
University**

for tomorrow

Conference hosted by

Action Research Unit

Centre for Educational Research, Technology and Innovation

Faculty of Education: Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University

Unit Head: Professor Lesley Wood

Table of Contents

Programme: DAY 1 Thursday 19 th August 2010.....	1
Programme: DAY 2 Friday 20 th August 2010	4
ABSTRACTS - Theme 1: Taking research to the classroom.....	6
Chris de Beer	6
<i>Using blogs to make sense</i>	
Heather Goode & Pieter du Toit	7
<i>How can I improve strategies of facilitating learning from a whole brain theory perspective?</i>	
Sally Hobden	8
<i>Redressing poor schooling – working diligently on my own patch</i>	
Farida Kadwa.....	9
<i>Improving my teaching practice: providing transformative opportunities for my students</i>	
K. Loji	10
<i>Combined use of cognitive education with other teaching and learning strategies and approaches to improve problem solving skills in the field of engineering studies</i>	
Tobeka E Mapasa	11
<i>Undergraduate student perceptions of the supervisor role and the research process: an unfinished story</i>	
Mikhail Peppas.....	12
<i>Reflections along the way: learning life skills and photojournalism on the streets of Durban</i>	
Ansurie Pillay.....	13
<i>‘Be the change you want to see in the world’: changing teachers, changing worlds</i>	
Lee Scott.....	14
<i>Using a visual voice to entice creative well being: telling tales</i>	
Celeste van der Merwe	15
<i>Exploring the transformative potential of Art Education</i>	
Linda van Laren	16
<i>Integration of HIV&AIDS education in mathematics education at a Faculty of Education</i>	
Linda Vargas	17
<i>“Flamenco dance as education (al)”</i>	
Liz Wolvaardt & Julia Blitz	18
<i>A spoonful of sugar: action research and the bitterness of medicine</i>	

ABSTRACTS - Theme 2: Transforming the academy through self-study action research	19
Nana Adu-Pipim Boaduo	19
<i>Action research and teacher researchers: how do they complement each other in the context of general teaching?</i>	
Alette Delport	20
<i>Exploring the transformative potential of transformational leadership</i>	
Renalde Huysamen & Lourens Geyer	21
<i>Utilizing an organisational change model to implement a performance management system</i>	
Dudu Jankie	22
<i>Linking language education to issues of diversity: reflections of a language teacher educator</i>	
Sibongile Madi.....	23
<i>Addressing the context for success: what we do before we write ... in a writing centre at a University of Technology</i>	
Joseph Matsoga	24
<i>Pre-service teachers' use of a teaching portfolio as a tool for promoting action research: the University of Botswana (UB) case study</i>	
Karin Murriss & Joanna Haynes.....	25
<i>Philosophical practice with children and the provocation of an epistemological shift in teacher education</i>	
Larissa Naicker-Hassim.....	26
<i>Bullying, Rice and Emoto: Exploring the energetic effects of words</i>	
Leah Ndimurwimo.....	27
<i>Risks and resilience of teaching law to under prepared students in South African higher learning institutions</i>	
Veenah Pillay, Gustaaf Wolvaardt & Pieter du Toit.....	28
<i>Introducing action research as process for higher learning in an advanced course for health managers offered by a private higher educational institution</i>	
Naretha Pretorius.....	29
<i>My journey of awareness: reflections on objects and places as memory triggers and identity indicators</i>	
Lesley Wood.....	30
<i>The transformative potential of living theory educational research</i>	

ABSTRACTS - Theme 3: Creating transformational communities of practice	31
Joan Connelly	31
<i>Transforming our educational practice: Some critical reflections on the educational influence of self study</i>	
Hanlie Dippenaar	32
<i>Action research and community engagement</i>	
Omar Esau	33
<i>Exploring the transformative potential of action research in an HIV/AIDS environment</i>	
Herma Foster & Francois Steyn	34
<i>Measuring life skills transfer as intervention in school based violence</i>	
Bonnie Kaplan	35
<i>My living experience of influencing and creating economic independence for others</i>	
Fazel Khan	36
<i>Understanding informal settlements in Durban: gardeners and domestic workers from the slums graduating from the University of Life</i>	
Deirdre Kroone, Busisiwe Alant & Sigrid Gjotterud	37
<i>Taking control of the tuck shop: how can we influence teenage perspectives on sustainable nutrition in school?</i>	
Shubnam Rambharos	38
<i>Action Research: taking me from isolation, exclusion, marginalization and frustration to inclusion, respect, commitment and understanding as the Extended Curriculum Programmes (ECP) Coordinator at DUT</i>	
Sundeep Singh.....	39
<i>The socio-cultural factors in introducing technologies in rural communities: the challenges and opportunities</i>	
Zoliswa Twani.....	40
<i>The musicians behind bars: the Music Participatory Action Research (MPAR) project as a tool for construction of new identities</i>	
Geoff Van Der Voort	41
<i>A model to assist circuit teams in the Eastern Cape Department of Education to support schools towards whole-school development</i>	

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Programme: DAY 1 Thursday 19th August 2010

08.00-08.30	Entrance	Registration	<i>Tea / coffee</i>
08.30-08.45	Theatre	Welcome	Prof D Zinn (Executive Dean: Education)
08.45-09.30	Theatre	Key Note Address	Professor Jean McNiff

**Master of Ceremonies:
Professor Hugh Glover**

SESSION 1:

Time	Venue	Chair	Theme	Presenter(s)	Title
09.30-11.00	Theatre	Naydene de Lange	Taking research to the classroom	Heather Goode Pieter du Toit	<i>How can I improve strategies of facilitating learning from a whole brain perspective</i>
				Liz Wolfvaardt Julia Blitz	<i>A spoonful of sugar: Action research and the bitterness of medicine</i>
				Ansurie Pillay	<i>"Be the change you want to see in the world": changing teachers, changing worlds</i>
				Lee Scott	<i>Using a visual voice to entice creative well-being: telling tales</i>
	Venue 2	Alette Delpont	Transforming the academy	Alette Delpont	<i>Exploring the transformative potential of transformational leadership</i>
				Karin Murriss Joanna Haynes	<i>Philosophical practice with children and the provocation of an epistemological shift in teacher education</i>
				Joseph Matsoga	<i>Examining a teaching portfolio as a tool for promoting Action Research by Botswana private tertiary institutions: How effective?</i>
				Nana Adu-Pipim Boaduo	<i>Action Research and teacher researchers: how do they complement each other in the context of general teaching?</i>

11.00-11.30

Refreshment break

SESSION 2:

Time	Venue	Chair	Theme	Presenter(s)	Title
11.30-13.00	Theatre	Tobeka Mapasa	Taking research to the classroom	K Loji	<i>Combined use of cognitive education with other teaching and learning strategies and approaches to improve problem solving skills in the field of engineering studies</i>
				Linda van Laren	<i>Integration of HIV & AIDS education in mathematics education at a Faculty of Education</i>
				Farida Kadwa	<i>Improving my teaching practice: providing transformative opportunities for my students</i>
				Sally Hobden	<i>Redressing poor schooling – working diligently on my own patch</i>
	Venue 2	Elsa Lombard	Communities of practice	Hanlie Dippenaar	<i>Action research and community engagement</i>
				Diedre Kroon Busisiwe Alant Sigrid Gjotterud	<i>Taking control of the Tuck Shop: How can we influence teenage perspectives on sustainable nutrition in school?</i>
				Fazel Kahn	<i>Understanding informal settlements in Durban: gardeners and domestic workers from the slums graduating from the University of Life</i>
				Shubnam Rambharos	<i>Action Research: taking me from isolation, exclusion, marginalisation and frustration to inclusion, respect, commitment and understanding as the Extended Curriculum Programmes (ECP) coordinator at DUT</i>

13.00-14.00 **Lunch**

SESSION 3:

Time	Venue	Chair	Theme	Presenter(s)	Title
14.00-15.50	Theatre	Pam Austin	Taking research to the classroom	Chris de Beer	<i>Using blogs to make sense</i>
				Linda Vargas	<i>Flamenco dance as education(al)</i>
				Mikhail Peppas	<i>Reflections along the way: learning life skills and photojournalism on the streets of Durban</i>
				Celeste van der Merwe	<i>Exploring the transformative potential of Art Education</i>
				Larissa Naicker-Hassim	<i>Bullying, Rice and Emoto : Exploring the energetic effects of words</i>
	Venue 2	Christo Pienaar	Transforming the academy	Lesley Wood	<i>Generating theory for educational transformation through action research</i>
				Veena Pillay Gustaaf Wolvaardt Pieter du Toit	<i>Introducing Action Research as a process for higher learning in an advanced course for Health Managers offered by a private higher educational institution</i>
				Alexis Ndimurwimo	<i>Risks and resilience of teaching law to underpaid students in South African higher learning institutions</i>
				Renalde Huysamen Lourens Geyer	<i>Utilising an organisational change model to implement a performance management system</i>
15.50-16.30	Theatre	Prof Lesley Wood	Open floor discussion Wrap up		

16.30- Cocktail function

Programme: DAY 2 Friday 20th August 2010

08.00-08.30	Entrance	Registration	<i>Tea / coffee</i>
08.30-08.45	Theatre	Welcome	Prof Cheryl Foxcroft (Senior Director: HEADS)
08.45-09.30	Theatre	Key Note Address	Professor Jack Whitehead

Master of Ceremonies:
Professor Hugh Glover

SESSION 1:

Time	Venue	Chair	Theme	Presenter(s)	Title
09.30-11.00	Theatre	Bill Holderness	Communities of practice	Sundeep Singh	<i>The socio-cultural factors in introducing technologies in rural communities: the challenges and opportunities</i>
				Bonnie Kaplan	<i>My living experience in influencing and creating economic independence from others</i>
				Geoff van der Voort	<i>A model to assist circuit teams in the Eastern Cape Department of Education to support schools towards whole-school development</i>
				Joan Connelly	<i>Transforming our educational practice: some critical reflections on the educational influence of self-study</i>
11.00-11.30		Refreshment break			
11.30-13.30	Theatre	Laetitia Greyling	Communities of practice	Omar Esau	<i>Exploring the transformative potential of Action Research in an HIV / AIDS environment</i>
				Herma Foster Francois Steyn	<i>Measuring life skills transfer as intervention in school based violence</i>
				Zoliswa Twani	<i>The musicians behind bars: the music participatory action research (MPAR) project as a tool for construction of new identities</i>
			Taking research to the classroom	Tobeka Mapasa	<i>Undergraduate student perceptions of the supervisor role and the research process: an unfinished story</i>
13.30-14.00	Theatre	Prof Lesley Wood Prof Paul Webb	Way forward Vote of thanks		
14.00		Light snacks			

A b s t r a c t s

ABSTRACTS - Theme 1: Taking research to the classroom

Chris de Beer

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Using blogs to make sense

In the past I have found that my students were unable to document their creative process sufficiently enough to write a cohesive research report at the end of their studies. Even though they were encouraged to keep journals the diverse nature of the design process, as practised by jewellery design students, did not make for easy journaling and monitoring of these activities was difficult.

The proliferation of social networking media has provided opportunities for educational interventions not previously possible.

This paper will show how I use blogs and information technology to uncover the underlying theories/interests and methodologies of my B.Tech students. I will also demonstrate how the process of publishing affords a further opportunity to make sense of the journal entries according to the designer's interest and within the guidelines of the action research cycle.

Heather Goode & Pieter du Toit

Heather Goode, Midrand Graduate Institute, heather.goode70@gmail.com

Dr Pieter du Toit, University of Pretoria, pieter.dutoit@up.ac.za

How can I improve strategies of facilitating learning from a whole brain theory perspective?

The Herrmann Whole Brain approach (Herrmann 1995) provides evidence that using multiple learning styles promotes developing students' full potential and deeper learning. It is generally believed that an education practitioner's own learning style affects their teaching style. In addition Kolb (1981) points out that many disciplines predispose to a learning style that tends to be relatively effective for that discipline. Unless education practitioners are exposed to multiple learning styles in facilitating learning, they resort to using their personal or traditional discipline learning styles. This means that many lecturers may only use one or two learning styles.

Within the context of a large private higher educational provider, Heather assists with the academic development of academic staff such as lecturers. Many of the lecturers in private Higher Education institutions are subject matter experts, rather than being proficient in the field of higher education. The lack of professional pedagogical development is a particular problem for mathematics' lecturers. The approach chosen to facilitate and challenge the teaching strategies of mathematics lecturers was offering a professional development workshop that assists lecturers to deal with a topic that frustrates them, namely "math anxiety". In this workshop, Heather attempts to show and allow lecturers to experience the use of activities accommodating multiple learning styles as a provocative example to improve strategies of facilitating learning in their own practice.

This paper reviews an iterative process of action research into Heather's practice through multiple offerings and improvement of this workshop. She adopted an asset-based approach to action research (Du Toit 2009) by using her own learning style profile as an asset and point of departure. Evidence of improvement is reported by means of qualitative and quantitative data.

Sally Hobden

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Redressing poor schooling – working diligently on my own patch

The legacy of apartheid and post- apartheid schooling in poor townships and rural areas is very visible in the poor mathematical skills of many students entering tertiary education. A national and institutional requirement for preservice teachers is “sufficient numeracy” which is taken to mean a Grade 12 pass in Mathematics. Without this, they are required to pass foundational mathematics module in order to qualify as teachers. This puts a barrier in the path of those who had been let down by the schooling system and I consider it an issue of redress to help students to pass this module. Working diligently on my own patch seemed a small personal contribution to redress the legacy of poor schooling.

This paper describes six cycles of reflective practice in this foundational mathematics module. My aim was to enable them to start again and to learn the required fundamental mathematics as adults so that they could approach quantitative situations in their future teaching with confidence. To this end, extensive data was collected from the students each year. This included mathematical autobiographies which gave insight into the affective barriers to learning Mathematics, questionnaires to probe for learning styles and individual interviews. The insights were used to implement different teaching and support strategies each cycle in an attempt to create a learning environment suitable for adults struggling to master basic mathematics. Student feedback indicated that many felt empowered through their success in this module, and were more willing and able to engage with quantitative problems.

Farida Kadwa

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Improving my teaching practice: providing transformative opportunities for my students

Fashion Design is frequently and predictably associated with 'designer labels' and the 'high end' of the industry. In South Africa where there is a high incidence of poverty and unemployment, I believe that there are other considerations, such as the 'low end' of the industry, and the challenges and opportunities that this implies. While these are not historically the preoccupations of the Fashion Design course, it was clear to me that transformation was necessary, in order to address the needs of our communities, and increase the employability of our students.

In this paper I report on the educational influences that have impacted on my practice, and how I have improved my teaching practice with the fourth year research methodology students. I will convey how my efforts to improve my practice have impacted on my students' thinking in the form of reflections by the students and myself. I will also demonstrate the capacity of my students to think critically and creatively about the demands of the current South African situation in their writing of the Theory of Clothing report for the B Tech degree.

K. Loji

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Combined use of cognitive education with other teaching and learning strategies and approaches to improve problem solving skills in the field of engineering studies

The field of engineering is characterized by problem solving skills and abilities both during the time of study and the time practice. Statistics show that these skills are particularly lacking in learners accessing universities with the aim of studying engineering. To date many causes have been mentioned and are being investigated. As a remedial solution, number of universities have started implementing the foundation or extended curriculum programmes (ECP) in order to address among others, the issue of under-preparedness of learners accessing tertiary education and to ensure mitigating of the high failure rate that the education system in South Africa is going through. In this paper I discuss and suggest how I have used cognitive education combined with other strategies, approaches and practices to improve problem solving skills and consequently reduce the failure rate. I will provide a successful sample case in which I will give an account of the action research strategy that I have used. I will also provide a comparative analysis of students' performance between ECP students and main stream students for the same subject. I will further reflect critically on my interventions, and add students' comments."

Tobeka E Mapasa

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Undergraduate student perceptions of the supervisor role and the research process: an unfinished story

I am a lecturer in the School for Initial Teacher Education responsible for the training of pre-service and in-service teachers. My responsibility includes, *inter alia*, guiding and supporting undergraduate students to work on research projects as part of their studies. I am expected to support the student throughout the research process and also to be able to assess the research product.

This self-reflective enquiry arose from my feelings of frustration and confusion, resulting from little self belief in my own ability to guide the students under my supervision to full academic status (MacKinnon 2004: 395). This process of self-inquiry into my practice initiated a conscious focus on living out my values in practice (McNiff 2006:85). It is these values that help to inform my practice and that allow me to evaluate it to ensure that it is responsive to the needs of the student researchers under my supervision.

In this paper I report on the first cycle of my journey to improve my practice as a research supervisor in order to add value to the students' development as researchers by improving the quality of their experience of the research process (Lee 2007). I want to invite your critical validation of the process I followed to determine the undergraduate student perceptions of my role as their research supervisor and also how they experienced the research process.

Mikhail Peppas

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Reflections along the way: learning life skills and photojournalism on the streets of Durban

The successful Photojournalist is one who is able to identify social realities, needs and injustices, and to collect telling evidence for publication on the spur of the moment, sometimes in threatening situations. In addition, Photojournalists have to be able to take effective photographs, and be aware of the legal implications of what they are doing. In short, Photojournalism makes its own specific demands on those who undertake this form of news gathering, yet very few of the knowledges, skills and values of Photojournalism can be learned from books. Even so, Journalism students are expected to have acquired these capacities, and developed them to a professional level in a relatively short period so that they can go out on assignment competently when they report for work.

In this paper, I will show how action research in the Photojournalism course at the Durban University of Technology contributes to the living experiences of first year students, so that they are equipped for success in the highly specialised field of Photojournalism. In the paper, I will account for the learning rationale, and describe the programme. A series of photographs taken in successive walks will show how both the quality and relevance of the photographs parallel the stages at which they were taken. The captions also provide insight into the ongoing development of both photographic and life skills. My presentation will include my own observations and reflections as mentor-participant, and also my own development as guide, mentor and fellow-pilgrim in these "walks of life".

Ansurie Pillay

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'Be the change you want to see in the world': changing teachers, changing worlds

South Africa faces an education crisis of immense proportions. Buzz-words such as 'improvements', 'transformation' and 'accountability' abound, but teachers generally feel helpless to make any changes.

I teach English literature to student teachers who will, one day, teach English literature in their own classrooms in schools. What disturbs me is the practice of student teachers who usually present literature to learners in their classrooms in ways that are tedious and laborious, and generally do nothing to make the literature relevant to learners' lives. Further, student teachers tend not to see themselves as potential change agents in their English literature classrooms.

My aim is thus to improve my own practice in the lecture room by using an action research approach to serve as a model for my students. I also wish to explore, using action research, how teachers of literature can become change agents in their classrooms.

Through a review of the literature, this paper argues that it is imperative that lecturers aim constantly to improve the quality of their practices in lecture rooms as well as the practices of their student teachers in their classrooms, and thus transform students so that they are empowered in the contexts in which they will one day work. It is crucial that lecturers at faculties of education utilize action research to become not just agents of change to their students but also to show students how to become agents of change in their own classrooms.

Lee Scott

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Using a visual voice to entice creative well being: telling tales

As an artist and educator I have a philanthropic interest in people and have always imbibed stories. Stories are more than 'just stories'; stories let you in, let you learn about other's insights, let you into different worlds. I acknowledge that I have a 'voice' to tell my stories by putting brush to canvas. However not everyone has a 'voice', is able to express themselves verbally and conceptually with pen to paper or through the act of putting paint on a canvas. I believe that the ability to express ones self is fundamental to well being, and the personal growth I have experienced by being able to voice myself, endeavors my humanist approach to my personal and professional practice.

I have conceptualized a simplistic and playful approach to encourage people to share their stories and promote creative educational experiences. I have devised a set of playing cards with pictographic images on them. These cards encourage interaction and the playful nature of the concept elicits creative and sometimes thought provoking responses.

I will in this presentation, discuss and show examples of my pictographic cards and how these simple visual prompts are transformative tools. I have used them in a variety of situations but because of the brevity of this presentation, will focus on one of the workshops held at the Durban University of Technology. I will be talking about and showing one of the stories 'told' and performed by second year drama students. Their stories are the physical expression of their learning aided by these visual prompts.

Celeste van der Merwe

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Exploring the transformative potential of Art Education

All of our dogs hide under the bed. Our parrot keeps screeching. Why does he treat us like this? Like objects he can treat anyhow. Anonymous school girl.

As a practising art educator I am confronted with children from broken and dysfunctional homes. These students are emotionally distraught resulting in stunted creativity. Often times students who take art lack confidence and reject their own art. I aspire to address these societal issues through my art and action research. I believe that through art education I am able to relate to students on a transformative level and lead them to make art that is therapeutic while simultaneously being technically appropriate. In this paper I will address the case of a specific art student whom I name Little Red Riding Hood. Her theory marks were excellent but her practical work displayed extreme inhibition as a result of insecurity suffered in a dysfunctional family. I will explain the educational influence leading to her practical marks escalating. Firstly, I will deal with the classroom environment. I believe that participatory and discursive teaching and a relaxed ambience produces a creative atmosphere. Secondly, I will explain how affirmation and encouragement can create new lived experience imbuing the student with confidence. Thirdly, I will mention the benefits of practising art while teaching. The paper will demonstrate ways in which art educators can influence and impact students on emotional, social and educational levels.

Linda van Laren

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Integration of HIV&AIDS education in mathematics education at a Faculty of Education

Possibilities for integrating HIV&AIDS in all disciplines need to be explored in Higher Education. This paper explores ideas related to integration of HIV&AIDS education at a Faculty of Education where integration experiences of a mathematics teacher educator will be discussed. The issues relating to integration of HIV&AIDS in a discipline will be presented under three main sections. The role of higher education lecturers in HIV&AIDS education and the relationship between 'mainstreaming' and 'integration' of HIV&AIDS education. Reasons for integration into all subjects/disciplines are provided in the first section. The second section offers some possibilities for integration of HIV&AIDS education offered by a mathematics teacher educator at a faculty of education in KwaZulu-Natal. The researcher made use of a Starting with ourselves approach using self-study methodology. This research draws on the emerging body of work on self-study in teacher education (Loughran, 2004, 2007; Pithouse, Mitchell & Weber, 2009) that emphasizes the need for teacher educators to become self-reflective whilst taking on the challenges of research that is related to social action. The research question explored was: How can the goal of integration of HIV and AIDS education in a discipline be initiated in a primary mathematics education module at a faculty of education? The third section includes some recommendations for integration of HIV&AIDS education in disciplines across faculties at higher education institutions.

Linda Vargas

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“Flamenco dance as education (al)”

I believe that flamenco dance taught from an education (al) perspective can encourage awareness of the interconnectedness of self and others and the expression thereof through movement. To dance is to imply action. E-motion implies motion. Here dance/action/emotions become inextricably linked. I believe that emotions are grounded in personal and social experience and thereby become linked to the values that they embody. Dance as education (al) provides opportunities for the personal and social to resonate or transform.

Flamenco is holistic as it embraces the intellectual, physical, emotional spiritual aspects of self in one activity. It becomes education (al) when these aspects connect to personal and social values: when it acknowledges the value based interaction that takes place in the learning environment between teacher and learners. Children often naturally express their emotions through the active use of the body as expressive medium. If they are given the opportunity to experience dance as education (al) all aspects of being are allowed to become connected and operational. I believe it to be the right of all children to experience dance as education (al) due to the unique opportunities it affords for the integrated learning experience.

In this paper I examine some of the issues related to dance education in a global classroom. I show how I have used action research to teach flamenco dance with a holistic/education (al) approach in primary education. I also suggest ways in which this could be relevant to dance education as well as education in general.

Liz Wolvaardt & Julia Blitz

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Julia Blitz, School of Medicine, Department of Family Medicine, University of Pretoria

A spoonful of sugar: action research and the bitterness of medicine

Public health is the science of preventing disease and promoting health in populations. It is this population focus that makes many a medical student clamp their lips in protest when confronted with the inclusion of this subject in their curriculum. The study of medicine after all chiefly focuses on the ill and the individual - not prevention amongst the population.

The average medical student has good reason to be resistant. Increasing theoretical load adds to the bitter reality of burn-out amongst medical students. Teamed with a long programme that places students' original motivation and sense of agency under constraint, the average fifth-year medical student has every reason to mistrust the inclusion of another – and seemingly non-essential – subject.

Academic staff from the two participating schools (School of Medicine: Family Medicine Department and the SHSPH) used action research to answer the question on how to improve our practice in a fifth-year module entitled “Health and Health Systems”.

Since 2008 data from literature, questionnaires, student reflections (oral and written), module evaluations and a focus group have informed the changes made.

Previous teaching strategies were replaced with an academic service-learning strategy that has reduced the class-based theoretical load with experiential learning in primary healthcare settings. Clinic staff provides supervision and academic staff guide weekly small-group reflection sessions.

This transformation from traditional teaching strategies and service provision to academic service-learning has resulted in a meteoric rise in the module evaluation, academic staff satisfaction, but importantly a deeper understanding of the real needs of the medical student.

ABSTRACTS - Theme 2: Transforming the academy through self-study action research

Nana Adu-Pipim Boaduo

Senior Lecturer: Faculty of Education, Department of Continuing Professional Teacher Development, Walter Sisulu University

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Action research and teacher researchers: how do they complement each other in the context of general teaching?

All tertiary institutions have four major responsibilities – teaching, research, community service and publication. The adage “publish or perish” has become a thorn in the flesh of many university academic staff who rest on their laurels and do nothing about research, publication and community engagement. Practising university academic staff should engage in regular research be it in their daily lecturing and supervision of students’ research thesis or writing for publication. Research has become the buzz-word of all tertiary institutions but not all of them take the pains to school academic staff in the practice of research. In the context of this paper, the author will list a variety of research approaches – participatory, action, participatory rural appraisal, empirical and exploratory and provide detailed discussion with emphasis on the application of Action Research for effective classroom practice.

Alette Delport

Director: School for Continuing Professional Development, Faculty of Education, NMMU

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Exploring the transformative potential of transformational leadership

The South African higher education landscape recently went through a period of dramatic change due to the restructuring of higher education institutions. The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, where I am currently appointed in a leadership position, came into being as a result of such a merger between three institutions, each with its own distinct culture and character.

McNaughton (2003) holds that, in order for an organisation to successfully transform, it requires a specific kind of leader, who has already gone through a process of self-transformation and has a strong tendency of introspection as part of an inner journey of self-mastery. In this paper I aim to give an explorative account of my personal self-study journey towards the development of sustainable transformational leadership practices at a higher education institution in post-apartheid South Africa.

In doing so I aim to show that my focus on compassion in organisational life also enabled me to contribute to the emerging field of positive organisational scholarship (Kanov et al. 2004). I thus believe that the significance of my research is reflected in its contribution to the development of a growing school of critical theories on leadership, which see values as central to transformational leadership.

Renalde Huysamen & Lourens Geyer

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Mr. Lourens Geyer, Director: Human Resources, University of the Free State

Utilizing an organisational change model to implement a performance management system

(How can action research be used to investigate a process like performance management that drives quality?)

Higher Education institutions are facing new challenges requiring high levels of individual performance, quality and accountability. Higher Education institutions are accordingly attempting to develop and implement performance management systems to drive quality and ensure optimum individual performance.

The purpose of the action research was to answer the question, 'How to overcome staff resistance during the development and re-implementation of a performance management system at a higher education institution? The history of performance management in Higher Education has not always been one of acceptance and immediate success. During the action research a series of action cycles were developed as a means to overcome staff resistance and to redesign and re-implement a performance management system. The sample population is 1000 and the sample size is 443 academics and non-academics.

The information gained from these cycles resulted in the re-design of the performance management documentation, a new implementation process based on the principles of change management as well as the need for a diagnostic instrument that employees could use to analyse their work environments and provide feedback to management. The managerial implication of the research provides evidence and guidelines on how to overcome resistance to performance management in the Higher Education context. The research fulfils a gap in the literature on design and implementation of performance management as a change initiative as well as what could be done to overcome staff resistance.

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Linking language education to issues of diversity: reflections of a language teacher educator

Teacher educators at the University of Botswana (UB) are expected to adequately prepare in-service and pre-service teachers for their professional lives in the country's multilingual and multicultural classrooms. This paper reports and examines results of an on-going action research-based study in a B. Ed in-service course on multicultural literacy education. Within this context, I examine the role of this course in a language teacher education programme at UB as well as its relevance to the major educational goals intended for secondary school students. Moreover, I share some of the activities/tasks that I have used to invite pre-service teachers to read, write and dialogue about issues of diversity and social justice and in the process explore the intersections between language instruction in secondary schools, power relations and issues of diversity prevalent in the Botswana society. Likewise, I also share my struggles, breakthroughs, assumptions and vulnerability as a teacher educator who is committed to issues of diversity and social justice. While this paper acknowledges that a single course on multicultural education issues is not sufficient in a language teacher education programme, data drawn from my reflective researcher's journal as well as observations and participation in classroom discourses suggest that activities utilized, encouraged student teachers to problematize their thinking and 'reasoning' about the intersections between language education and issues of diversity and social justice. This in turn can contribute to efforts to transform teacher education curriculum at UB. Implications for on-going professional development for in-service and pre-service teachers as well as for my own professional journey as a multicultural educator are considered.

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Addressing the context for success: what we do before we write ... in a writing centre at a University of Technology

Writing for academic purposes has long been a critical issue for university students. When students are second language speakers and first generation University students the situation is often intensified. These students are often exacerbated by poverty, unemployment and poor health and also taking into account the personal and domestic circumstances. Students are perceived by their lecturers as 'abnormal', 'broken', 'need to be fixed'. The combination of these negative factors can easily induce feelings of low self-esteem. There is a high correlation between such difficulties and success and failure in university studies.

To attempt to address these deviations many universities have created 'Writing Centers'. The Faculty of Arts and Design (FAD) at the Durban University of Technology (DUT) has established such a 'Writing Centre' to promote success in the use of spoken and written expression for academic purposes. In order to transform our process we need to adjust our beliefs and value systems. We believe that every student is entitled to the best possible attention and advice.

In this paper we will identify and describe the interpersonal interventions that attempt to improve the negative factors described above. We will also report on the student responses to these interventions. Through action research we will report the process we go through in addressing the question 'how do I improve what I'm doing' and the values and beliefs which inform these strategies.

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Pre-service teachers' use of a teaching portfolio as a tool for promoting action research: the University of Botswana (UB) case study

Sub-theme: Transforming the academy through self study action research

Through its education system the government of Botswana, embraces the need to transform into a knowledge society with greater belief in that major competitive drivers that may lead towards an attainment of this are knowledge, creativity and innovation. Further, Higher Education (HE) particularly universities should play an important role as sources of fundamental knowledge and, occasionally, industrially relevant technology in modern knowledge-based economies. Botswana HE is relatively young, however, since 2005 to-date Botswana HE landscape has tremendously changed such that from 2006 several new institutions have been registered by the Tertiary Education Council (TEC). It is a given that more HE institutions need to offer good quality programmes. The Faculty of Education is one of the UB's seven faculties. Its core business is teacher preparation across a range of subject disciplines. Since 2007 to-date the wish to turn around the faculty's teacher education programmes has been very central. This ushered in the use of a teaching portfolio by student teachers when they go for their annual internship session in schools. Envisaged outcomes include are with its pertinent features usually found in a portfolio for example student teachers' teaching philosophy statement, novice teacher's reflective journals, the young teacher's preferred teaching strategies several learning-teaching observations would be gathered from the portfolio to inject quality and accountability into teacher education programmes in UB. In this instance, questions to address are how would student teachers' use of teaching portfolio enhance quality in the university teacher education programmes? What changes face the introduction of the innovation?

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Philosophical practice with children and the provocation of an epistemological shift in teacher education

This paper argues that certain theoretical and practical problems in the practice of philosophical enquiry with children offer rich opportunities for critical reflection on epistemological issues in teacher education. The educational approach, known as Philosophy with Children (P4C) wants to be 'transformative', but most practice takes place in the undemocratic space of compulsory schooling, whether in 'Western' or, post-authoritarian educational settings such as South Africa. In order to take account of the contested nature of both 'child' and 'philosophy', we argue that in all formal and informal educational settings reflection on practice with children needs to be situated, critical and philosophical. We illustrate the problematic nature of this work through incidents, anecdotes and recurring moments of disequilibrium identified in fields of practice and drawn from our lived experience of working with a wide range of children, students, teachers and fellow practitioners across continents. The paper proposes a way of developing and refining educational practice through 'phronesis' and offers suggestions of how P4C can provoke the urgent epistemological shift in teacher education for transformation and social justice.

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Bullying, Rice and Emoto: Exploring the energetic effects of words

In my primary school classroom, I observe power operating in groups. There are groups that have power, and groups who do not. I believe that power imbalances of this kind thrive in societal systems that favour the strong over the weak, the popular over the less popular, and the advantaged over the disadvantaged. I observe that bullying in my classroom continues to happen because of this. I observe that pupils who are viewed as 'different' are teased, kicked, punched, pushed, shunned or called names by the more popular types. I believe that when such situations are not addressed and effectively dealt with, the effects are damaging for all concerned.

In this paper, I will show how action research can help teachers in primary schools to teach students conflict resolution skills which can address instances of bullying. In my presentation, I will reflect on instances of bullying in my primary school classroom. I will reflect and report on the effects of non intervention. I will also report on an intervention activity conducted in my classroom involving the use of positive and negative language, and reflect on its impact on students. I will use video documentation as evidence of the impact bullying and the interventions have had on my students. I will show students discussing the effects of bullying and the coping strategies they have developed.

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Risks and resilience of teaching law to under prepared students in South African higher learning institutions

The Right to education is a fundamental right which also forms part of our broader socio-economic rights. This paper focuses on teaching law between 2006 and 2009 at Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) in both traditional and the current extended programmes. The insights, challenges of learning and teaching law to under prepared students will be discussed whereby suggestions to overcome those challenges will be highlighted. Within the context of Higher Education in South Africa, law students, legal and non legal academics at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University for example are continuously challenged to take risks, and find ways of overcoming them, while at the same time remaining resilient.

Due to the problem of under preparedness in South Africa, a study was conducted through an action research methodology in order to reflect on my own teaching. A survey was done with the Extended LLB students who registered from 2007-2009. The findings of the survey revealed that there are problems facing law students ranging from financial, language, learning environment and others which will be discussed later in the full paper. The discussion will be framed within the context of Section 29 the South African Constitution which asserts that everyone has a right to education and the state is obliged to ensure that it is available and accessible to all. The findings of the survey are analysed in relation to the constitution criteria set by Bill of Rights provisions whereby a list of recommendations makes a conclusion.

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Introducing action research as process for higher learning in an advanced course for health managers offered by a private higher educational institution

The Foundation for Professional Development, based in Pretoria, is a private higher education institution. Apart from its involvement in an array of health science community engagement and other projects, the Foundation offers training programmes for health science practitioners. One such a programme is an advanced programme that focuses on the professional development of health managers in the public and private sector, sponsored by the Yale University in the USA.

A scholarly approach to professional learning is taken. The programme has been changed from being a traditional programme to an action research-driven programme. The notion of becoming an independent scholar of one's management practice is promoted by suggesting that all health managers take responsibility for planning, monitoring and assessing their own management practice/professional learning by means of action research and continuous critical reflection. The traditional assessment practice of written tests and examinations has been changed to assignments, such as an action research proposal, oral presentation on one's progress (mid-term) and an action research report in the form of a portfolio or journal or conference paper.

An asset-based approach to action research (Du Toit 2009) is promoted. Instead of asking "What is my concern?" (McNiff) or "What are students' problems?" (Zuber-Skerritt) one focuses on personal assets and strengths or other positive contextual elements. Managers enrolled for the programme are empowered to take responsibility for their management as a measure for quality assurance from within (bottom-up approach), opposed to quality assurance measures enforced externally from officials/management (top-down approach).

A holistic approach to professional development is promoted – keeping in mind that a manager is more than an individual managing processes, systems, people in an authoritarian way; but is part of a bigger management-in-context picture where it is about other people and their preferences (Herrmann 1995) and intelligences (Gardner 1983) and developing their and one's own full potential by facilitating the processes that would make it materialise.

The re-design and development of the programme are monitored by the action research process the authors are executing on a continuous basis. This paper reports on the initial transformational phase that had been followed during the first year of implementation.

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My journey of awareness: reflections on objects and places as memory triggers and identity indicators

I believe that the election in 1994 of the first democratic government in South Africa has presented a challenge to all South Africans in different ways. I believe that one of the principal challenges that the 1994 elections presented to my conservative Calvinistic Afrikaner community is to address its personal, family, community, national and international identity/ies. Arising out of this perspective and perception, I have, and am, exploring my, and my family memory/ies to answer questions about my identity, through an action research living theories approach.

This paper introduces my 'journey of awareness' as an artist; a critical self-reflective inquiry in understanding my identity through the exploration of memory that is expressed and reflected through works of art. The paper unpacks a specific aspect of the reflective and creative process that focused on places and objects of meaning that formed part of my personal history, family or community. This has provided a platform for critical self-reflection as well as discussions between my immediate and extended family. The paper illustrates how the associations attached to these places and objects allowed for critical thinking and contextualisation that facilitated the understanding of my identity construct. The works of art not only allowed for creative expression and social critique, but also acted as tools for critical self- and community reflection. The paper finally demonstrates the transformation of the Self, but also, how this journey lead to the transformation of others, and further, the potential transformation of a larger South African community.

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The transformative potential of living theory educational research

In an effort to explore the theme of the potential of action research for transformation, I pose the question, “How can we use educational theory to transform our practices at higher education?” Action research is an approach which is eminently suited to contribute to the transformation of the university in line with its stated values. In this paper, I will attempt to demonstrate how values-based, self-study action research can help provide answers to the questions of: How does educational theory need to change in a changed society? Who should develop theory? What difference does this theory make? How can we ensure that theory generated is valid and significant? I will demonstrate how myself and other colleagues hold ourselves accountable for our own teaching practices via the generation of living educational theories (Whitehead, 1989) and by so doing, make significant contributions to the growth of educational knowledge. I make a case that self-study practitioner enquiry has a vital role to play in the development of new theories of practice which will contribute to the transformation of the epistemology of educational enquiry at higher education.

ABSTRACTS - Theme 3: Creating transformational communities of practice

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Transforming our educational practice: Some critical reflections on the educational influence of self study

Sixteen years after the democratic elections in South Africa, the higher education sector is still deeply troubled, and characterised by a lack of transformation of the curriculum, learning, teaching and assessment practices, and depressingly low throughput in both the undergraduate and post graduate sectors. Educators in the higher education sector bemoan the 'underpreparedness' of the incoming students, who are themselves deeply dissatisfied. Simultaneously, employers in all sectors are registering concern about the lack of relevant and usable skills and workplace capacities in graduates, and the rate of unemployment is rising. Clearly this is an untenable situation. Following Einstein's injunction that "Insanity consists of doing things in the same way and expecting a different outcome", we at DUT have instituted an action research self study program in the hope that this will break the logjam, and float our students down the river of success.

In this paper, I report the purpose, the aims and the strategies employed in the Self Study for Transformative Higher Education (SeStuTHE) project at DUT. I will share what I see happening in the group, in the institution, and in other institutions. I will report how my own awareness as facilitator and leader of the group has shifted, and how I am reflecting on my own efforts to improve my practice, and my educational influence not only among group members but also in the wider community. I will also share the impact that this project is having, including instances of success and achievement.

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Action research and community engagement

The aim of this paper is to explore the viability of combining a community based learning project with action research, as part of the practical application of the learning outcomes of a specific course. JTK 200 (Language across the curriculum), is a compulsory course for all 2nd year students at the University of Pretoria and aims to enhance effective communication skills of students as required in the classroom. The question is whether the students could apply and practise their communication skills in a real-life, authentic teaching-learning situation and simultaneously address a need in the community.

The project discussed in this paper investigates the possibility of enhancing the learning outcomes of the course and implementing action research as a way for students as well as the lecturer, to determine whether such projects are viable and effective to both the students and the communities.

The immense possibilities and learning opportunities for students in projects such as these will be discussed. The problems and difficulties encountered when attempting to launch such a project will be identified and suggestions made for future projects of this nature.

This example of action research provides both the lecturer as well as the students with ample opportunities to improve their own practices. It furthermore provides the lecturer with data and feedback which will enable her to improve on the course and ensure quality education.

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Exploring the transformative potential of action research in an HIV/AIDS environment

HIV/AIDS is largely a human sexuality issue with attitudes and behavior change being amongst the major challenges. Effecting behavioral change is a complex task and one which requires a good plan and a strategic pathway. The central question that arise in my inquiry is, is it possible for action research projects to contribute to behavioral change?

In this paper I discuss and explore how I used action research with its reflective practice as a research methodology to raise the awareness of the HIV/Aids pandemic amongst Grade 7 learners located in a Muslim school environment. This study was an attempt to enhance behavioral change in the way learners think about sex and sexuality and included a continuous process of self-reflection, self-awareness, planning and appropriate action.

I saw action research as an investigation of my own practice with a view to understanding and improving that practice (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; McNiff, 2007). This resonated with my own research aim as I looked to a deeper understanding of HIV/AIDS and sex and sexuality issues in my classroom practice. Furthermore, the deeper purposes of my research echo the principles of action research, namely the creation of a just and caring society; building coalitions of shared knowledge across domains, institutions and cultures; encouraging practitioners to take responsibility for the development of the profession; and an interest in issues of identity and personal development (Walker & Winter, 1989).

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Measuring life skills transfer as intervention in school based violence

Action research was used to measure the transfer of life skills by the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) at a secondary school in the Free State province. A research partnership between AVP, the Department of Education and the University of the Free State was established. Mixed methods research was employed, where qualitative assessments among principals and educators, as well as photographs of the appearance and upkeep of the school, informed the construction of baseline and follow-up questionnaires completed by learners. Approximately 80% of the targeted grades were introduced to the AVP workshops, which typically spans XX weeks. Overall, learners demonstrated improved perceptions regarding violence. Specifically, more constructive attitudes prevailed toward violence in dealing with confrontational situations. However, the possible impact of the programme is not so visible where respondents were direct victims of school-based violence. A possible explanation for this is that, although the training improved knowledge of coping skills, such new insights did not translate into practical coping behaviour. It is argued that changes in reactions and behaviour can only be achieved through intensive and prolonged exposure to positive coping mechanisms. Logistical pitfalls and methodological challenges in engaging schools in action research are identified and discussed. This form of research, involving an inter-departmental research team, an NGO, a school and a government department, offers real life opportunities to develop both theoretical and practical insight in creating transformational communities of practice in addressing social issues, in this case violence at schools.

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My living experience of influencing and creating economic independence for others

Many South Africans are seeking social and economic independence and security by trying to create their own businesses, often due to financial insecurity, unemployment and/or poverty. Since 2005 I have been engaged in training people who cannot find employment, and who are trying to become self-employed, working through the New Venture Creation (NVC) programme at the Clothing, Textiles, Footwear & Leather (CTFL) Sector Education Training Authority (Seta), Industry Training Unit, Durban University of Technology.

In the process, I have come to realize some shortcomings of my initial training programme due to inadequate, inaccurate and inappropriate assumptions about the people involved, and the training interventions that have been used in the past. As a result of my desire to improve what I am doing, I have been devising interventions intended to address the perceived gaps in my original training plan. In the process, I have gained further insights into a field of business that I thought I knew thoroughly, and have learned much about the people I train, their capacities and needs, and their life circumstances.

In this paper I will describe the interventions that I have devised, and report on their implementation, as well as the evolution of new perceptions and understandings that developed as a result. I will provide evidence of the educational influence of these interventions, reflect critically on what has been done and achieved, and critically assess the way forward

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Understanding informal settlements in Durban: gardeners and domestic workers from the slums graduating from the University of Life

Urbanisation increased globally especially in developing countries. This is particularly the case in South Africa where people move from rural to urban areas in search of employment and a better life. This trend has resulted in the formation of informal settlements in the city. People live in poor conditions in slums or shacks or informal settlements which lack basic services. The aim of this paper is to gain an understanding of the people who live in these poor conditions. This study explores trends and reasons for the existence of informal settlements. It argues that there is a lack of understanding of all the factors. Politicians have promised housing to the poor but there has been slow delivery. This has been exposed by protests to the housing shortage and forced relocations. These protests included the use of visual methodology (photographs and videos) in the build up this protest movement. At the start of this research the community agreed to participate in this action research on condition they benefit from skills training. Computer literacy classes were conducted at the university with 80 members from different areas and their life histories were recorded. The subject of the research was brought into the classroom. The shackdwellers became students who typed up their own lives. Reflecting on their own lives have affirmed their belief in themselves. An analysis of the life histories of the people will reveal a deeper understanding of our society.

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Taking control of the tuck shop: how can we influence teenage perspectives on sustainable nutrition in school?

This study focuses on contemporary teenage food choice in a South African High school. It is viewed from a critical paradigm in the context of global food trends amongst teens, and seeks to understand the many factors influencing teenage food choices. It draws a parallel between food choices of teens in South Africa and in other modern societies, and suggests that in their search for identity and autonomy, teenagers are manipulated and exploited by multinational food industries and the media. It suggests that the industrialised world has created 'the teenager' as a target market for its products, and is based on Culture Industry theories of Horkheimer and Fromm, of the Frankfurt school, and the Identity theories of Ericsson, Gauntlett, Giddens, and Marcia. It argues that teenage food choice cannot be directly influenced by parents or teachers, but can be influenced by teenage peers. Therefore a methodology of Participatory Action Research is used to involve teenage learners in finding ways in which they can influence teenage food choice in the school. Film, Photovoice and a Blog are all used as tools to collect data. The teenage learners assist in the analysis of the data collected.

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Action Research: taking me from isolation, exclusion, marginalization and frustration to inclusion, respect, commitment and understanding as the Extended Curriculum Programmes (ECP) Coordinator at DUT

The introduction of the extended four year programme in Higher Education requires the development of innovative and flexible curricula that enables students to realize their potential and succeed (Scott, et al, 2007). At the Durban University of Technology (DUT), educators on these programmes are to a large extent part time staff that teach limited hours, have limited access to support structures in the departments and are excluded from decision-making processes about the programmes they teach on. As the ECP coordinator at DUT, I am responsible for developing and offering of interventions that assist these educators to enhance effective learning, teaching and assessment strategies by subscribing to the scholarship of innovative, flexible, integrated and authentic learning activities. I believe that the ECPs require educators that embody the values of love, caring, respect, understanding and commitment to making a difference to student's chances of success. At DUT, I have established a critically reflective community of practice of educators that interrogates their learning, teaching and assessment practice, attitudes and values in a safe and supportive environment.

In this paper, I will report on interventions that I have implemented to improve my practice as the ECP coordinator. These interventions resulted from my concerns about educators feeling marginalized, isolated, incapacitated and frustrated in the classroom and their departments. I will share my own and the lived experiences of the extended programme educators in the community of practice to identify our educational influences and the impact of the interventions on the curricula of the extended programmes.

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The socio-cultural factors in introducing technologies in rural communities: the challenges and opportunities

Sixteen years after the first democratic election, many rural communities in South Africa still lack potable water and power. Introducing these technologies to improve the quality of life in rural communities is challenging in many ways. The challenges include a wide variety of cultural, linguistic, and life style factors some of which can be anticipated, and some of which are often specific to each community. When these factors are ignored, overlooked or marginalized, the success of the project is frequently compromised, no matter how excellent the technology. The success rate of such interventions is often depressingly low. The effect of failures in this regard impacts directly on the development of communities and the effective establishment of basic needs such as potable water and power facilities which enable improved levels of nutrition, sanitation, health, literacy levels, community management, education, and connection with further technologies.

At the DUT we are engaged in a number of projects which are introducing new technologies of the life enhancing variety to rural communities. In addition, we are also engaging in the social-cultural factors to maximize the success rate of these projects.

In this paper I will report on two projects taking new technologies to rural communities in which we are taking socio-cultural factors into account. I will report on the technologies involved, the socio-cultural interventions, their rationale, and my critical reflections about what I am learning in the process about meeting the challenges, and exploring the opportunities that present themselves as part of this journey.

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The musicians behind bars: the Music Participatory Action Research (MPAR) project as a tool for construction of new identities

In this paper I posit that participatory action research in music and education generally extend beyond the boundaries of formal education institutions to include and embrace informal education of both the young and old, even offenders. Within this space I present some of the encounters with the participants of the music participatory action research (MPAR) in one of the prisons in the Eastern Cape province of South Africa. I draw from Michel Foucault's philosophical theory of governmentality or governing to gain a better understanding of the potential of Foucauldian ideas in analyzing educational practices and processes and the wider strategies and techniques of governing among offenders in constructing their new identities as lifelong learners, committed to reconstructing their identities as rehabilitated citizens and artists. I further look at the nature of the collaboration between the community groups to argue for the significance of dialogical interactions among participants for effective reconceptualisation and construction of new identities of offenders as rehabilitated people ready for integration into the society.

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A model to assist circuit teams in the Eastern Cape Department of Education to support schools towards whole-school development

The education sector in South Africa faces multiple challenges which cause 80% of schools to be essentially dysfunctional (Taylor 2006: 3). One of the major factors contributing to the underperformance of schools is the fact that they do not get the required support, guidance and advice from the Department of Education (Public Service Commission 2006; Taylor, Fleisch and Shindler 2007, as well as Province of the Eastern Cape, Department of Education 2008, 2009). In addition to this, the role of the Circuit Office in supporting schools has been largely overlooked for many years (Mac Master 2009).

My research study is based on a pilot project initiated by the General Motors Foundation and Port Elizabeth District Office to render whole-school development to nine schools from three different Circuits, using the Circuit Team approach. Through participatory action research (PAR) specialists from various sections of the District Office (who constitute the Circuit Team) will be empowered to plan, implement, review and evaluate interventions aimed at addressing the developmental needs of these schools. The findings and lessons learnt through the PAR will culminate in a model, which will then be used to train all Circuit Teams across the Eastern Cape, being developed and implemented.

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(Professors Jean McNiff and Jack Whitehead)

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