

# Critical self-reflection as a tool for transformative teaching and learning

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# Critical self-reflection

“I believe we could use this moment as an opportunity for **critical self-reflection**, for exercising humility, for unlearning what we thought we knew” (Lockett 2019: 38).

“a white female academic working in an Education Development Programme (EDP) in a Humanities Faculty at the University of Cape Town, where the #RhodesMustFall protests began 2015” (Lockett 2019: 38).

# The rising popularity in critical self-reflection in HE

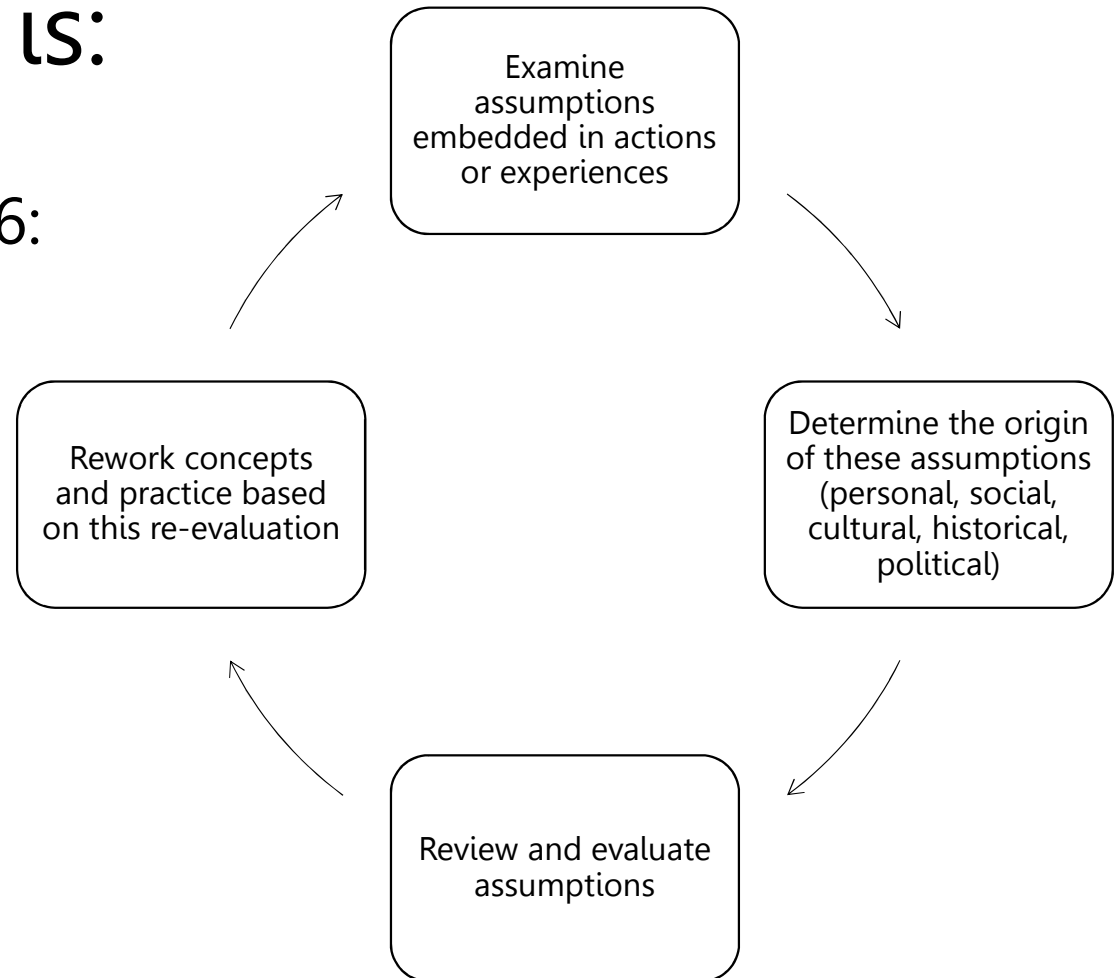
- A search for “critical self-reflection” in Google Scholar returns 3 590 000 hits, and links to research from a variety of disciplines included education, management studies, psychiatry and nursing.
- Applicants for the SU Teaching Award are required to write a “reflective narrative” which describes “**how** the applicant teaches and **why** they do it in that way. The focus of the narrative is therefore on a **critical reflection** on all aspects of the applicant’s teaching practice. The core of this reflection is the applicant’s teaching philosophy statement. If the applicant is not familiar with the concept or practice of *critical reflection* and/or has not drafted a teaching philosophy statement before, assistance could be sought from the CTL” (Addendum 1 c SU Teaching Excellence Awards 2019).
- Creating “the critically reflexive practitioner” (Light and Cox 2000; Schön 1983) (Vorster & Quinn 2017: 42).

# The rising popularity in critical self-reflection in HE

- “The recent resurgence in interest may then be seen as a *return* to reflection after centuries of searching for stable truths and foundational knowledge” (Fook, White & Gardner 2006: 8).

# Critical reflection is:

- a process (Fook et al. 2006: 12).



# Historical overview and influences (Fook et al. 2006)

- Socrates “stressed the centrality of critical self-examination, or living the ‘examined life’, for ethical, compassionate, humane engagement with the world and its moral dilemmas” (page 8)
- John Dewey American philosopher, psychologist and educational reformer. Dewey is thought to be first person to consider the role that reflection plays in personal learning.
- Donald Schön American philosopher and professor in urban planning. Influential for the idea of reflective practice, particularly for its application in professional practice learning.

# Historical overview and influences (Fook et al. 2006)

- Critical theory

A form of social analysis often associated with the Frankfurt School of critical sociology.

“In Hegelian philosophy... criticism was more than a negative judgment and was given the positive role of detecting and unmasking existing forms of belief in order to enhance the emancipation of human beings in society” (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner 2006: 89)

For Marx, critique was a practical and revolutionary activity.

Horkheimer (1982: 244), a member of the Frankfurt School, described a theory as critical if it were one that seeks “to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them.”

“By its very nature, criticism has to be *self-critical*” (Abercrombie et al. 2006: 89).

# The role of language in critical reflection

- “It is posited by some writers (e.g. Taylor and White 2000) that central to the notion of the critical reflection is an understanding of **the capacity of language to construct the world and way we experience it**” (Fook et al. 2006: 9).



# Discourse analysis

- Language produces dominant ideas, or 'forms of thought', or 'regimes of truth' (e.g. Foucault 1980) which are taken for granted.
- Critical reflection is about understanding the technologies of power, language and practice that produce and legitimate forms of moral and political regulation.
- To reflect critically at this level, practitioners need to understand the historically contingent nature of their ideas. The familiar theories and practices need somehow to be 'made strange', so that they can be properly interrogated and so that people can build their own ethics out of this analytic process. That is, they can develop the capacity to resist and transgress.

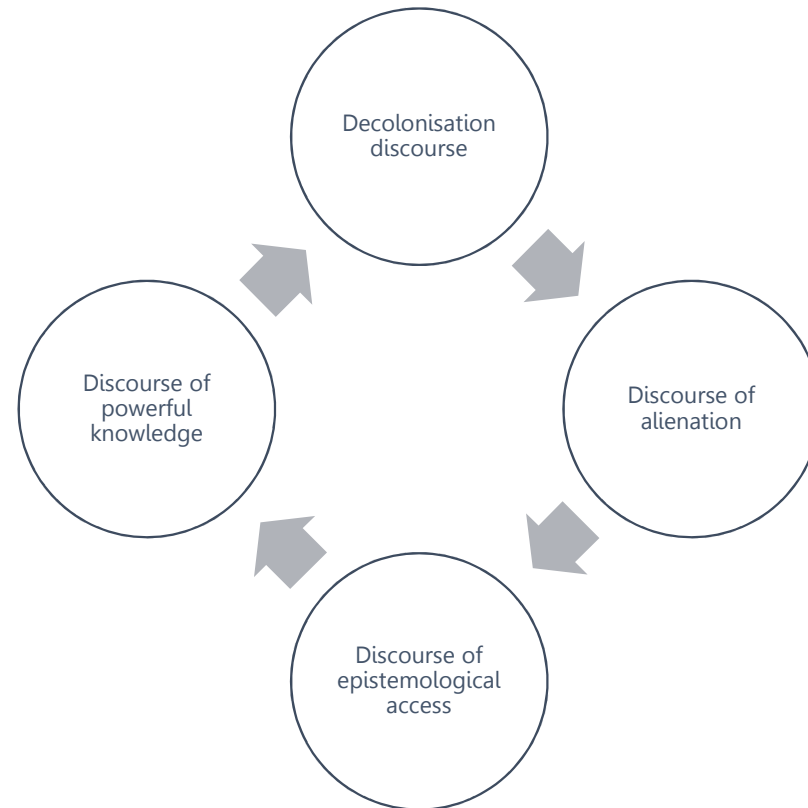
Vorster, J.-A. & L. Quinn. 2017. The 'Decolonial Turn': What does it Mean for Academic Staff Development? *Education as Change* 21 (1): 31 - 49.

- “We critique the discourses that have underpinned our own practices as academic developers over the past two decades” (p 31).

# Historical discourses of transformation in the SA HE context

- Post 1994: “the discourse of transformation” – focusing on the need for greater access for black students and staff.
- Discourses lead to practices/practices create or maintain discourses:
  - The development of extended degree programmes, which cater almost exclusively for black students.

“Emerging discourses” in the SA HE context  
(Vorster & Quinn 2017: 37).



# Decolonisation discourse

## Turning ivory towers into ebony towers

**CECILIA LWINI NEDZWE**  
SINCE the dawn of South Africa's democracy in 1994, calls to dismantle and transform the exclusive colonial and apartheid past are increasingly becoming louder in conversations and debates. The buzzword "decolonise" has repeatedly been echoed at various platforms within and outside institutions of higher learning in order to transform South Africa's present, which is characterised by deep divisions, social marginalisation and racial differences.  
The decolonisation project also represents a more tangible effort to begin to translate the multiple expectations and promises of a new democracy into reality for the majority of the country's 57 million people.

announced by former president Jacob Zuma at Nasrec in December, transformation has generally been slow. This week's conference is further exceptional in that some students who were key drivers of the #RhodesMustFall movement, as well as other key transformation debates across their universities, are among 23 scholars and scholar activists from around the world who will present papers. They will focus on the lessons from South Africa's student movement.

They will speak on topics around four broad themes: the challenges of transformation in order to enrich the debate and discussion about transformational issues in South Africa's humanities curricula. What is further distinctive about the conference is that it seeks to draw on transformation lessons from post-colonial Africa and post-civil rights African American studies in an effort to contribute to transforming South Africa's humanities curriculum.  
Prominent scholars from across Africa, some of whom are involved in similar curriculum transformation projects, such as Tavis Foliola (the Boston School of History) and Ibbo Obasogie (the Dakar School of Culture), will speak at the conference. Providing lessons from African-American studies will be distinguished academics such as Zine

The Star, 16 August 2018

## No more ivory towers!

*It's time to re-imagine South Africa's universities as true African universities*

LAST week Universities South Africa (USAf), a membership organisation representing South Africa's universities, held its annual conference. The conference addressed itself to the theme "Re-imagining South Africa's Universities for the Future".  
The conversation is in keeping with the organisation's mandate of facilitating dialogue among universities, government, business and Parliament on issues affecting universities.  
It could be argued that this is an inept topic in light of the myriad challenges facing the higher education sector. The sector has been bedeviled by storms of violent discontent: from Fees Must Fall campaigns clashing with the



NDLOVU MTSHO

as a form of silent resistance to issues raised around transformation.  
It would not be difficult for black scholars, especially those steeped in the transformation struggle, to expose

culture of privilege in which they were steeped, they ended defending an ingrained prejudice with a studied conviction. The irony is that the white intelligentsia came to be greater, more willing, possessors of apertured thought than their black counterparts."

Casally, Universities South Africa could have chosen a less cowardly approach that confronts the current realities in the sector. It could draw lessons from the discourse of liberation theology, which did not postpone anything to the hereafter.

It starts with a brutal/v

the university sector could positively engage with its public.  
This should be followed by the development of an enabling framework through which the university as a knowledge-producing institution can grow trust and ownership among its publics.  
It's expected that such an engagement could usher in new conversation forms and issues between the university sector and its various publics of industry, government at all levels, the neo-governmental sector, communities in which the universities are located, students and their families.  
To engage meaningfully with its publics, the African-centred university

The Star, 10 October 2019

"The cultural milieu and structures of universities, including the buildings, symbols, ceremonies and rituals continue to privilege the traditions of the colonial Western universities from which the South African higher education system emerged (Lebakeng, Phalane and Dalindjibo 2006, 70)" (Vorster & Quinn 2017: 38).

# The discourse of alienation

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1 of 2

## No tidy truths in the post-colony

Recent debate exposes both student activists' and academics' blind spots on decolonisation

Mark Paterson

**T**he nationwide decolonisation campaign started by students in 2015 risks undermining the country's higher education system and its capacity to support national development, a recent public discussion in Cape Town organised by the Centre for Conflict Resolution concluded.

Students should avoid playing into the hands of political elites who may seek to exploit their protests

part talked about how "part of our being" was excluded in higher education institutions.

The theme was highlighted by panellist Karabo Khakhau, president of the student representative council at the University of Cape Town, who talked about walking around her alma mater in an African blanket, hoping that "I won't be looked at and thought of as someone who is primitive".

She said knowledge acquired outside the context of socioeconomic

erly decolonised.

Chetty, who is now a professor at the University of the Western Cape, spoke of the danger of universities being turned into "graduate factories" to satisfy the demands of business and the state.

Cloete identified contestation among national political elites in Africa as a crucial obstacle to the establishment of developmental states and comprehensive developmental programmes. He reflected on the fears of Martinican political philosopher Frantz Fanon, a popular author among student protesters, who foresaw a post-liberation political culture in which the new ruling classes assimilated the most corrupt forms of colonialism.

Cloete argued Fanon's dystopian vision of the post-colony had been realised in South Africa under the leadership of former president Jacob Zuma, which raised the question: Why are the country's students focusing their discontent on colonialist academics rather than the prime movers of the Fanonian nightmare, the government itself?

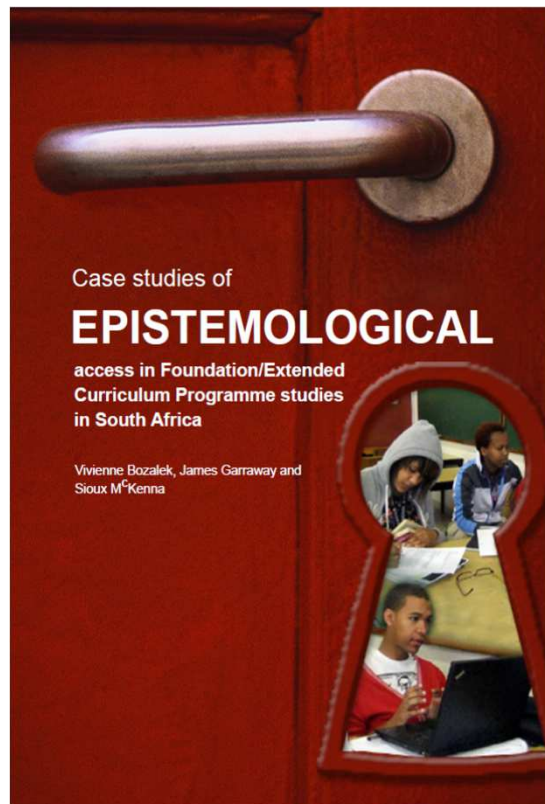
Given this, Cloete accused the

- "refers to students' sense of separation from the socio-cultural life of the university and in particular from the academic project" (Vorster & Quinn 2017: 38).

"A university is not meant to be a home; it is supposed to challenge your mind and confront you. If you are comfortable at university, you are already part of the bourgeoisie, living the good life. The university must confront you with your values and your ideas — and it is in that process that you decolonise and empower yourself," Cloete said.

Mail and Guardian, 26 April 2018

# Discourse of epistemological access



“Wally Morrow’s concept of “epistemological access” has been part of the transformation discourse for a number of decades” (Vorster & Quinn 2017: 38).

Morrow distinguished between formal access (access to the institution) and epistemological access, which involves “learning how to become a successful participant in an academic practice” (Morrow 2000: 77).

## Vorster & Quinn 2017: 38

When used uncritically, it can contribute to what Fricker (2007) and others call “epistemic othering” and “epistemic injustice”.

“There has been insufficient critique of what “epistemologies” students should have access to” (Vorster & Quinn 2017: 38).



# A critique of extended programmes

- Lockett (2019: 39) undertakes “a selective reconstruction of the ED project in the light of current criticisms against it launched from a decolonial platform. Instead of framing it as a liberal anti-apartheid project motivated by a concern for equity and social justice, [she reframes] it as a modernising project within a developmentalist paradigm.”

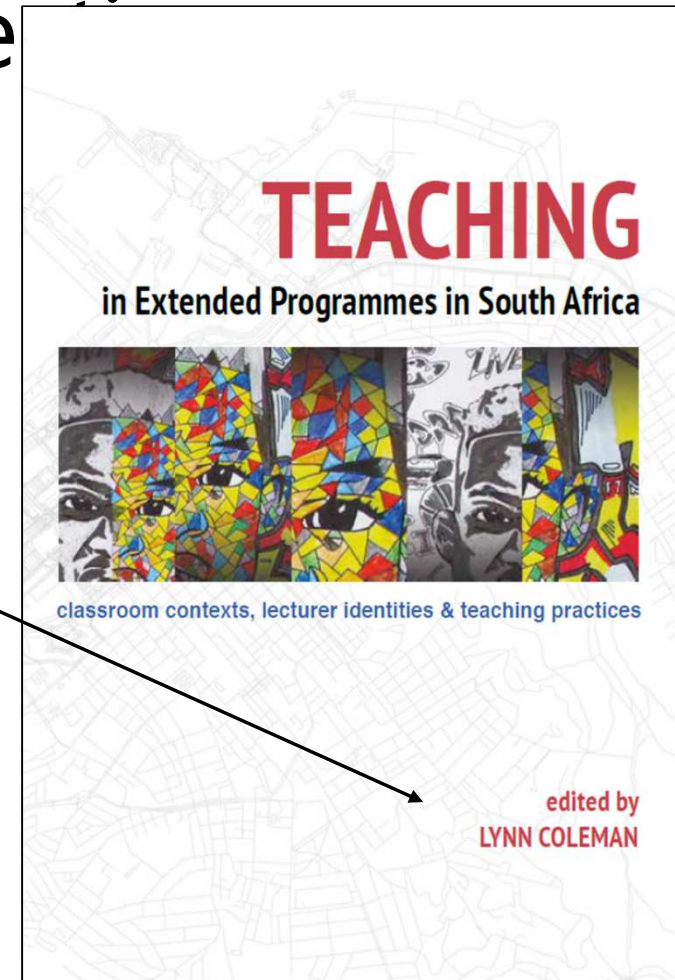
# "The developmentalist paradigm" (Luckett 2019: 41-42).

- "The colonial powers initially supported missionary education endeavours, legitimating their rule through a discourse of improving and 'civilizing the natives' to make them fit for modernity (Kallaway & Swartz 2016)"
- "In his critique of colonial and post-colonial states, Chatterjee (2011) explains how this worked via what he terms the 'norm-deviation-exception' paradigm - the imperial power was obliged to take responsibility for educating and disciplining the colonized to bring them up to European norms. In the post-colonial era, developmental states continue to adopt this norm-deviation-norm exception strategy, now applying the normative standards of the West to their own population groups, using statistics to show a 'norm-deviation' and thus the need for state intervention (Murray Li 2007)."
- "As noted by Chatterjee (2011), working in India, there is certain irony that post-colonial states often perpetuate the developmental paradigm. For example, in South Africa, the DHET has set up race-based redress and equity projects that require universities to report student performance using the old race-based population groups. At national level, this perennially shows a norm-deviation in graduation rates by students in the black groups. The DHET uses this discrepancy in performance by race to justify its Foundation Grant policy whereby black students are positioned as the exception to the white norm."

- “separate Extended Curriculum or Extended Degree Programmes are no longer tenable” (Lockett 2019: 37).

# Tools for critical self-reflection

- “Most practitioners and scholars working in the university will readily accept that teaching and learning are inextricably linked.”
- Texts in the Humanities 123
  - Identity construction in academic discourses and texts.
- Autoethnography
  - Journaling



# Critical reflection used to transform classroom practice

I “became aware of how much I valued ‘hard work’ as a mechanism to reach success and financial independence, and I found myself sending out such messages repeatedly to the class. However, during a classroom discussion around contemporary race discourses of white privilege, a student responded emotionally by saying, ‘This is a discourse, yes. Because as black people we are always told that if we just work hard enough...’”

# Critical reflection used to transform classroom practice

## “I don’t know . . . it contradicts”: identity construction and the use of English by high school learners in a desegregated school space

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This article explores the English language practices of four Grade 10 learners in a desegregated Johannesburg high school, as well as the ways in which the learners position themselves and others as users of English and other languages. The overall design of the research was qualitative, using ethnographic methods and drawing on the traditions of school ethnography. It draws on a post-structuralist theorising of language and identity in thinking about the relationship between language and identity, with an emphasis on the productive force of language in constituting identity. The article argues that English plays a significant role in how learners imagine themselves as members of the school community and, for some learners, constitutes an important part of their identities. It explores how multiple, and at times contradictory, identities are continually being constructed and reconstructed through learners’ language practices and positioning of themselves and others as speakers of different languages. Further, it highlights processes of inclusion and exclusion that may be taking place in schools through language. An important implication of the study for schooling in South Africa is to see English as a ‘commodity in great demand’.

**Keywords:** English; language; school desegregation; South Africa; youth identity

### Introduction

‘Elana, drop the phoney twang, girl’ is the headline of a newspaper column (Motuba 2006) in reference to the accent of a black South African DJ of a national radio station. ‘If I didn’t know she was black,’ the columnist writes, ‘I swear I would never have been able to tell from the way she speaks’.<sup>1</sup> The columnist complains that ‘[t]here is not the slightest hint of blackness’ in the way the DJ speaks English and ends the column by advising the DJ to ‘get real’ stating that ‘[i]t would not hurt a single bit if we could just once acknowledge who we are’. Issues concerning language and identity, especially in

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## Post-structuralism

- “**Post-structuralism**, movement in [literary criticism](#) and [philosophy](#) begun in [France](#) in the late 1960s. Drawing upon the linguistic theories of [Ferdinand de Saussure](#), the anthropology of [Claude Lévi-Strauss](#) (see [structuralism](#)), and the deconstructionist theories of [Jacques Derrida](#) (see [deconstruction](#)), it held that language is not a transparent medium that connects one directly with a “truth” or “reality” outside it but rather a structure or code, whose parts derive their meaning from their contrast with one another and not from any connection with an outside world. Writers associated with the movement include [Roland Barthes](#), [Jacques Lacan](#), [Julia Kristeva](#), and [Michel Foucault](#).” (<https://www.britannica.com/art/poststructuralism>)

## Vorster and Quinn (2017: 43)

- Why do you only draw knowledge from Europe, the USA, the Western world or the global North?
- Can you use examples of how this knowledge is used in Africa/the global South?
- How is this knowledge linked to the histories of different students in your class?
- How does it validate their lives?
- Have you critically examined your curricula, pedagogy and assessment methods for practices which some students may find alienating?

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