

## **1) NRF Grant for 2014: Education Research in South Africa (ERGR)**

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Short title: Decolonizing Curricula in the Humanities in South African Universities

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Abstract:

Recent statistics released by the Council for Higher Education (CHE, 2012) on enrolment and success rates in South African universities show a lack of meaningful post-apartheid transformation; whilst qualitative research conducted into the experiences of 'previously disadvantaged' students shows that universities can be spaces of alienation rather than engagement (Kapp and Bongeni, 2009). The CHE has suggested an alternative, 4 year curriculum in response to low throughput-rates; and individual universities have also suggested curriculum reform. We argue that a transformative agenda needs to involve more than an extension of the time required to complete a degree and a shift in composition of student population, but also needs to include an examination of the content and positioning of our teaching. In this research project we are interested in exploring the ramifications of 'decolonised' curriculum in the Humanities (which for the purposes of this project, includes the Social Sciences). By 'decolonised', we mean curricula that deliberately aim to engage with alternative epistemologies, be it through explicitly teaching postcolonial theory; deconstructing dominant canons or worldviews; using local examples, texts and contexts; correspondent examples or theories from other parts of the so-called third world; or a pedagogy that uses indigenous South African languages as learning resources. How might curriculum materials of greater resonance with students' identities and backgrounds alter their engagement with the Humanities disciplines? Does the selection of materials that recognise black South African student identities and consciousness and position them as legitimate knowers, enhance their engagement with texts and ultimately their academic performance? Using a mixed method and cross-disciplinary research design based across three South African universities, we aim to explore the impact of curricula that are closer to students' subjective identities.