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***RE-MEMBERING THE ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL  
IN THE MIRROR***

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## RE-MEMBERING THE ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL IN THE MIRROR

by

Sechaba Mahlomaholo

### 1. RUPTURING AND DISMEMBERING THE AFRICAN IDENTITY

One story which to me epitomises the rupturing and the dismemberment of the African identity is that of Sara Baartman. At the age of 20 years, Saartjie was already a slave woman who was taken to London and then to Paris to be paraded and mocked in the streets, the circuses, the bars and most notably, the universities of Europe. She was paraded naked as an animal, most often obliged to walk, stand or sit as her keeper ordered so as to show off her protruding posterior and genitals which varied in appearance from those of Europeans (Transitional Writings on Africa, 2008).

This is the story of diversity and difference capturing the essence of; putting asunder that which belongs together. Sara Baartman's life is interrupted violently as she is plugged away from her people to live the life of an enslaved woman. Her life is doubly disrupted when she is separated from her place of birth to be paraded in those far off streets of Europe. Her ordeal worsens when, though human, she was treated as though she was an animal made to parade her naked to the amusement and awe of the European audiences. Even in her death she is dismembered, her brains and genitalia preserved in scientific jars in Parisian museums. The dissecting of Sara Baartman's body and soul is important to me because it was done in the name of diversity and science. The surgeon general to Napoleon Bonaparte and founder of Comparative Anatomy in science, Baron Georges Cuvier used her to demonstrate the difference and diversity hence superiority of European races to those of Africa (Transitional Writings on Africa, 2008).

Sara Baartman's anatomy which varied in appearance from that of Europeans became Monsieur Cuvier's scientific evidence and thesis as he argued that we are born different, nominal and rank ordered from savagery to civilization with Africans at the bottom rang (Alexander, 1990), very close to the animals in nature and appearance while Europeans were at the top most rang of the ladder, very closer to the gods and perfection (Memmi, 1969; Nicholas, 1993; Mahlomaholo & Bereng, 2005, Soudien, 2009; Wolf, 1994). Cuvier in his scientific report even noted that Sara Baartman's movements were having "something brusque and capricious about them that recalled those of monkeys" (Transitional Writings on Africa, 2008). Based on this thesis, several scientific papers were written about Baartman, and the story of diversity and difference was further inserted in the psyche and all the facets of life in Europe but most importantly in the psyche of Africa as played out in South Africa's apartheid history (Magubane, 2006; Mecoamere, 1999; Nkomo, & Seepe, 1999; Mecoamere, 1999).

Given the above, we have come to believe in this myth of dismemberment because it is based on the 'irrefutable' and canonised scientific knowledge (Hall, 1994; hooks, 2004). The magnification of the myth was completed when even after her death Sara Baartman's body was literally and physically cut up open, and piece by piece her brains and genitalia preserved in formaldehyde and kept forever in museums for future generations never to forget as to how different and diverse people are. Efforts were not spared to even duplicate Sara Baartman's distinguished features and these were cast in plaster so as to preserve this marvel in diversity for future generations never to forget that indeed Africans are different and that diversity is a fact of life.

For me what is worth noting is how Sara Baartman's story captures in a nutshell processes of disruption, interruption and dismemberment of the African at the global level, at the continental level, at the national level, at the institutional level, at the interpersonal and ultimately, at the intrapersonal level (Wright, 1986; Williams & Charisma, 1993). Transitional Writings on Africa (2008) have this to say regarding my observations above that;

there was never any light and air for Saartjie...she died in Paris, an impoverished prostitute, a lonely woman and an alcoholic who had come to be known as the Venus Hottentot ...'a derogatory term for the Khoisan people of South Africa' (p.1).

## 2. REDEFINING AFRICAN IDENTITY

The liberation effort against colonisation and apartheid (Bereng, 2007; Hongwane, 2007; Matobako, 2007; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, 2003), was embarked upon over this misconception about the human species, to the extent that after the removal of legal apartheid, Thabo Mbeki the then Deputy President of South Africa, was even triumphantly declaring on behalf of the people of this country that he was an African, and so were all of us irrespective of race, colour, gender, socio-economic status, special needs or race. This declaration was made on May 6, 1996 on the adoption of the South African Constitution.

This constitution, in spite of its imperfections, has been hailed as the most up to date and the most perfect ever in the world because it theorised away diversity and attempted to put back together and *re-membered* that which was violently torn asunder by the barbarism of colonialism and apartheid. Thabo Mbeki, when declaring on our behalf that he was an African, he was not arguing or celebrating his *diversity or difference*, quite on the contrary he was celebrating the transcendence of the human spirit over the adversarial intents, purposes and impacts of looking at some people(s) as '*the other*' (Bhabha, 1994), that is; the different other. According to Thabo Mbeki therefore, the conception of *the African* - which we as the

new South African nation subscribes to - is the one that includes; (i) the Khoi and San people whose desolate souls like the soul of Saartjie Baartman haunt the expanses of the beautiful Cape, (ii) the immigrants who left Europe to find a new home on our native land, (iii) the Malay slaves who came from the East, (iv) the warrior men and women that Hintsa and Sekhukhune led, (v) all those who were transported from India and China... and the list of all these people who make up the category African, is infinite (Mbheki, 1996).

Given the above therefore, the position that I assume and actively campaign for regarding African-ness or more specifically South African-ness when I do research, is the one that goes in tandem with this theorisation of an African which unapologetically moves away from apartheid, from colonialism, from diversity, from differentiation, or whatever euphemism one may use for this abhorrent system of social engineering. For me African-ness goes beyond any ethnic or tribal affiliation. It is not a biological categorisation and/or geographic location. It is about our common humanity that transcends real or imagined boundaries, it is *anti-diversity*.

Professor Tobias of Wits has also done us a great favour through his re-creation of the cradle of humankind. When one gets to Maropeng the home to 'Mrs Plez', one gets the feeling of the universal nature of the human species, because after all even (South) Africa is portrayed as the birth place of all humanity. To clarify my point, Alcoff (2006) from the feminist literature tends to argue that to talk about a *woman* is not to talk about a biological category. The word *woman*, according to her and the whole school of contemporary feminist thought, refers to a category to which a certain section of humanity has been relegated to. The category woman therefore is about how people marked out as feminine with particular biological features are positioned in discourses. Sometimes from the misogynistic discourses women are positioned as weak, emotional, incompetent, caring, you name it. This category of humanity is positioned as *the weaker sex* in those demeaning and sexist discourses which further claim that because of their inherent biological characteristics women need not to be given particular responsibilities and roles, for example of leadership, because their biology does not allow them to discharge those functions effectively (Berkin, Pinch & Appel, 2005; Davis, Evans & Lorber, 2006; Griffin, 2005; hooks, 2004) However Alcoff (2006) cautions that biological characteristics including, culture and language are arbitrary. They are mere markers, what counts is the substance of a person wearing those characteristics. Alcoff is very clear on this matter because she says the category woman depends on how they as women, define themselves and how they are defined in their respective social contexts.

From this instructive feminist explanation above, (South-) African-ness could also be theorised from a non-essentialist perspective which is *anti-diversity*. We could see (South-) African-ness in the same terms as Alcoff, or rather as Steve Biko (Mngxitana, Alexander & Gibson, 2008) who emphasised *that identity hence diversity/difference, is a state of mind*. It

is not a quality which some have, while others do not have. Steve Biko has reminded us that (South-) African-ness, just like Alcoff argues about the category woman, is how we are positioned in discourses. Our complexion, our languages, our biologies and our imagined differences are merely markers that make it easy for others to apportion privileges, status and resources or deny them based on these imagined diversities.

In the above discussion I have attempted to describe the context of my inauguration here today. As a member of the (South) African nation which we are all part of in the first instance, I seem to have a choice to make, that is; between advancing the divisive agenda of apartheid past or to choose in favour of advancing the agenda for the re-humanisation of our peoples who like Saartjie have been dismembered, stripped of respect and values and needs to be restored to their rightful status as full fledged human beings.

The words of Mbheki above are a beacon of hope for us all, but they remain mere words if not given content in action and in practice because the impact of the power of our historical past on our present is almost complete. To keep the achievements of our democratic state and constitution in tact we need to be vigilant and row even harder against the river of retrogression into the abyss of diversity and apartheid. The need for this focused effort is even more so apparent and urgent in the higher education sector now where we have experienced so many slippages (Boughie, 2006) in our quest for a re-humanizing higher education as promised in the constitution and many subsequent policy imperatives since the advent of the new democratic state in 1994.

### **3. THE SLIPPAGE**

Isaac Kamola (2007) in a very convincing argument demonstrates how fierce the contestation is between the divisive past and the new democratic re-humanising agenda in higher education. At the beginning of this lecture I attempted to use Sara Baartman's experiences as a metaphor to clarify and describe the alienation that all members of the *subaltern communities* have gone through and still go through in the South African society today, 15 years into democracy. The alienation I am referring to occurs within each one of us who has been exposed to the harshness of the apartheid system and/or its residues, especially in higher education settings. Professor Crain Soudien and his team have this to say about this alienation and racism which his Ministerial Committee on Transformational and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions discovered still rampant across campuses in South African higher education:

The committee was aware of costs to the individual, such as those pertaining to the opportunity for developing a sense of self awareness, and to the capacity for self development. The committee was aware of the important role that universities play in

helping individuals - both white and black – to discard the shackles of an apartheid past, and the important opportunity that higher learning offers the individual to understand himself/herself and his/her relationship with the social and the material world. The psychological costs, and the costs pertaining to the identity, of preserving an exclusionary and discriminatory system, would perpetuate the unhealthy self concept patterns that exist within the populations - those of inferiority amongst Black people and an inflated sense of superiority among White people and distorted ideas amongst all of what their entitlement, rights and privileges constitute (DoE, 2008, p.15).

The alienation caused by apartheid social engineering does not only occur intra-personally, but it also occurs within all structures of South African civil society such as schools and universities. In the words of the Minister of Higher Education and Training Dr Nzimande (2009), access to universities is still manipulated by the covert hand of apartheid and sometimes it uses the language of instruction and communication to exclude and at other times it uses seemingly legitimate criteria such as high entrance scores to bar learners coming from schools and undergraduate environments that had not prepared them so well to the challenges of the subsequent levels of learning. Professor Crain Soudien and his team also capture this second form of alienation aptly in these words:

This committee was aware of costs to institutions themselves brought about by the production and reproduction of inhospitable and even destructive academic and institutional environments. The committee saw these as almost inevitably leading to alienation, marginalisation, a low morale, a high failure rates, poor throughout rates ... furthermore the committee was aware of costs to society in terms of social cohesion and social economic development. In relation to the former with institutions failing to transform in higher education would not provide the leadership and the guidance to other areas of work and social delivery, via the kind of knowledge that would be useful in dealing with the country, endemic poverty and the attendant problem of crime and anti-social behaviour... (p. 116).

Kamola (2007) traces this contestation to the origins of higher education in South Africa circa 1892 - with the establishment of what he calls the first European style Higher Education institution in Southern Africa, namely; the South African College in Cape Town - to the current debates around transformation in higher education.

Kamola's thesis is that; universities ever since their inception in 1892 in South Africa were political and always advanced the views of the dominant class which then were English. This dominance according to Kamola made the much envisaged unification of the white nations difficult because Afrikaners felt that whatever happened was on the terms of the English and

they thus were suspicious. Kamola's story then proceeds to 1948 when the National party came to power. At that time power changed hands and Afrikaans Universities determined the agenda of higher education and of all the fabric of South African society. Kamola quoting Jonathan Jansen notes that many Afrikaner intellectuals worked hard to provide the intellectual scaffolding for the justification, pursuit and training for the apartheid state. In addition to providing research and training for the apartheid state, these universities also served as oligarchic Afrikaner cultural organisations which helped in advancing Afrikaner material interests and consolidating Afrikaner Power (Kamola, 2007, p.4). Unfortunately these material interests were most of the time advanced at the expense of the African majority who were pushed into separate and ethnic based inhabitable Bantustans which were euphemistically referred to as native homelands.

The Extension of University Education Act of 1959 which ensured that higher education remained racially and ethnically segregated was passed and new racially and ethnically segregated universities were created to educate the Bantu, the Coloured and the Indian populations away from the whites and away from one another. Bantus were further segregated into Sothos, Tswanas, Vendas, Tsongas, Xhosas, Zulu, Ndebele and so on in their ethnically diverse universities and Bantustans. This dismemberment was sealed when the apartheid regime also dictated as to what was to be taught at these institutions serving diversified ethnic and racial groups (Kamola, 2007). Again Kamola observes that:

white universities offered post graduate education as well as degrees in engineering, medicine, pharmacy and dentistry...while black university the vast majority of undergraduates in the humanities, liberal arts and education... in other words, subjects which did not undermine the existing racial division of labour and which fulfilled the administration and bureaucratic requirements of the Bantustan Project. There also existed a *de facto* division between research (i.e. white) and teaching (i.e. black) Universities (Kamola, 2007, p. 6).

Kamola's story (2007) then shifts to the end of *legal apartheid* in the 1990s which was made possible by the mounting international and domestic pressure on the National Party to relinquish power. The new democratic South African state that came into being after April 27, 1994 had a very huge herculean task on it's hands to undo years of diversity, inequity, social injustice, oppression, strife, internecine wars and lack of hope. The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was thus appointed to deal with these problems in as far as higher education was concerned. The NCHE produced in 1996 'A Framework for Transformation' document (Reddy, 2004).

This 'Framework for Transformation' was the higher education's version of the new South African government's Reconstruction and Development Plan (RDP) which aimed at doing



away once and for all of all economic, social and educational differentiation or diversities (Badat Barron, Fisher, Pillay, Wolpe, 1994). Both the RDP and the Framework for Transformation intended to broaden the base of economic participation of all South Africans (African National Congress, 1992; 1994; Figaji, 1999). No longer were so called Coloureds, Indians and Blacks to swell the ranks of the underclass, the subaltern, the poor, the uneducated and the marginalised (African National Congress, 1992; 1994; Figaji, 1999). Both policy documents were intended to deal a blow to these instances of diversity through a redistributive process. Doors of learning, including of learning in higher education institutions were to be open for all (African National Congress, 1992; 1994; Figaji, 1999). All learners were considered as deserving equally to better education. No child was to be left without any education or higher education for that matter. Higher education as part of the RDP would not only aim "at economic growth and at meeting the basic, material needs" but would also be part of...

transforming social relations in the society (towards non-racism, non-sexism, democratic transparency in administration, etc.) since students should be steeped not only in technical skills (although these are indispensable) but also in values of democracy, the ethos of accountability and service, etc. (p.9).

In the words of Kamola the RDP, hence higher education was "to force capital to follow a long-term rational, non-racial logic and also facilitate access to basic goods and services, to environmental and consumer protection, or to industrial and technological development" (Kamola, 2007, p. 9).

Thus symbolically around the same time, Sara Baartman as epitomising the excesses of inequity, social injustice, oppression, marginalisation, diversity, interracial strife, wars and lack of hope was finally to be reburied with dignity and *re-membered*, that is; reconciled to herself, to her soul, to her people and to her land. The South African government, after close to 200 years of Sara Baartman's dismemberment, humiliation, stripping of her dignity and respect, finally managed in 2002, to have her restored to her people, to her home, to the Gamtoos valley. But she came back not as a *diverse* Khoisan woman, she came back reconstructed and developed as a transcendental symbol of equity, social justice, freedom, peace, hope and the universality of the human spirit. The whole of South Africa, the African continent, the African Diaspora and humanity as a whole, just like through Mandela the icon, came together in unison, not to celebrate diversity but to celebrate unity and oneness in Sara Baartman.

The symbolic gesture of re-burying Saartjie with dignity was supposed to be materially and practically enacted through the RDP and the Framework of Transformation in higher education, a kind of RDP of the soul, but unfortunately this was not to be. Kamola supported

by Andre Kraak (2001) noted very telling cracks in the reconstructive and *re-membering* agenda of the RDP in higher education. Chrissie Boughie described this festering wound that threatened to bring down our march as a united nation towards equity, social justice, freedom, peace and hope as **the slippage (2006)**.

The above mentioned luminaries agree that this slippage was caused by the South African government's shift from the RDP policy and transformed high education to what was to be known as GEAR, that is; Growth, Employment and Redistribution (Department of Finance, 1996). The story of how the RDP was abandoned and discarded as official policy is scary because it talks of high levels of intrigue and deceit. It is reported that the South African and international business interests as members of Development Bank of South Africa, the IMF, the World Bank and other pro-neoliberalization activities gained access to those sites in which the ANC's economic policy was being developed and the new dominant perspective canvassed therein was that there was no alternative for the South African nation but to give-in to the unfettered power hence interference of the global markets in dictating policy. When the South African government then discarded the RDP, the Framework for Transformation of higher education and some of those policies that promised to promote equity, social justice, freedom, peace and hope, Chrissie Boughie captures the situation in the following words:

The focus of the democratic government elected in 1994 has shifted from the need to achieve equity in relation to access to higher education to the need to achieve greater efficiency in terms of the way tertiary system functions as a whole. One result of this shift is that debates about what it means to provide 'epistemological access' in terms of curricula and teaching methodologies have been sidelined in favour of need to develop curricular which will allow students to have become members of a global work force (Boughie, 2006, 66).

What resulted from this slippage is now well documented. For example, universities were closed down, especially those that served the poor and the marginalised. Many of the academics at those closed institutions, mainly Blacks, including yours truly, had to scurry around in search of employment with caps in hand. Many of those academics who were not lucky enough to get *accommodated* into formerly white institutions are still milling in the streets pretending to still being *in-between jobs*. For majority of Black students, the closure of these universities was devastating. Many had to terminate their promising and budding higher education studies because they could not afford the fees at the new merged formerly white institutions. Some of these students dropped out because they could not afford to leave their homes in the rural settings to study at these formerly white institutions which are - almost without exception, located in the urban centres - because of the exorbitant boarding and lodging costs. Some of these promising students were working people who were also breadwinners who could not interrupt their continued employment to go to the urban centres

where the remaining universities were located because so many people depended on the bread which they were able to put on the table every day. In fact even at these remaining universities they could not gain access because they did not have the requisite admission aggregates required. They were also not eligible for bursaries because of their mature ages and low pass marks. However, at the same time the now famous occupation specific dispensation (OSD) required them to improve their qualifications if they wanted to keep their positions and/or progress in their careers. Now, the questions remains: where could they go to when even the colleges of education were closed down?

I must admit that the situation of higher education (and of education) in South Africa in general is more complex than I have mapped out above, but the fact of the matter is that at the political level it required the robustness of the now famous Polokwane conference of December 2007 to reverse the country and higher education from the slippage and the slippery road they were on. Immediately thereafter we witnessed the venom with which the so-called markets, through their access and control of the public media, attempted in vain to reverse the advances towards a genuine transformation of South African society.

When the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr. Blade Nzimande, cited the findings of the Ford Foundation research that showed that 3 million young South Africans between the ages of 18 and 24 years are neither in employment, education or training (2009) and that higher education and training system must ensure that their prospects are substantially improved by the expansion of education and training opportunities in the universities, colleges and workplace I became more convinced than ever before that we needed a supportive research agenda to be mounted to assist to respond to these challenges and thereby facilitate the *re-membering* of ourselves as organic intellectuals, our society and our united South African nation by making education, including higher education, accessible to all.

Other than problems of our youth not being provided with requisite education and skills for employment now and in the future, there is a myriad of other attended issues relating to education in general. Among these I can cite the following; that our education does not equip its graduates well with skills to enable them to find employment and/or create it themselves in the technologically advanced era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, that there is racism rampant in higher education institutions which are supposed to lead the charge towards re-humanisation of the South African Society; that there is higher education sector which is not representative of the social, racial, gender demographics of the country in terms of its academic and professional personnel and sometimes students, that school education is not preparing learners well enough for participation in higher education and beyond, that admission requirements into higher education are not sensitive to the impact of historical legacies of apartheid education, that there are unacceptably high levels of drop out rates in higher education sector and school education level, that there is inadequate supply of postgraduate researchers (MEds and

PhDs) to sustain the country's research effort and its international competitiveness in the knowledge era as well as that there is inadequate provision of teacher education opportunities to meet the needs of the country (DoE, 2009; Kraak, 2002; Kamola, 2007; Nzimande, 2009). The list is long but the above seem to be the most urgent needs.

#### **4. THE ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL**

All the mentioned problems above can be traced to the impact of our colonial apartheid past which has ripped not only our societies apart but has also alienated us, one against another in terms of some marker that justifies diversity. Jean Paul Sartre (Wahl, 2004) captures this notion of alienation when he asserts that to oppress or discriminate against another person, as in Sara Baartman's story, is an attempt to validate one's self by denying the freedom of another.

As a response to all the above problems, I found Gramsci notion of *the organic intellectual* very appropriate to map out the way forward for me as a researcher. An organic intellectual as theorised by Antonio Gramsci,

unlike a traditional intellectual, is a bourgeoisie scholar who cultivates strong roots in his/her community, working to maintain links with local issues and struggles that connect to the people and their experiences. While traditional intellectuals imagine themselves as an autonomous group with an historical presence above and separate from the subaltern categories' struggles (Boggs, 1984, p.68).

The North West University policy (Post Profile: Research Professor, n.d) through the post position profile of the research professor and the expectations from all academics, already acknowledges the fact that we all have to get involved in the problems that bedevil our society, hence education as organic intellectuals.

##### **4.1 North West University Policy Context for the Organic Intellectualism**

Since joining the Potchefstroom Campus of the North West University as Research Professor in the School of Education on June 01, 2008, two policy documents have guided me in the operationalisation of my new role and my imagined status as an *emergent organic intellectual*. The first document describes the research trajectory in the University as a whole (Criteria and Development Trajectory of Research Entities, n.d) while the other document describes in broad terms what one could call the job-description of the Research Professor in Teaching and Learning (Post Profile: Research Professor, n.d).

According to the first-mentioned policy document which the University Research Management has formulated, four levels or stages describe how research has to develop and thus be

conceptualised at this institution. The first level of this trajectory is referred to as the **Niche Area** where a team of researchers come together towards a common research goal. Upon accomplishment of specified criteria set out in that document, then the team could achieve the second higher status of a **Research Focus** after a thorough peer review process of the Niche Area based upon more advanced requirements. When those have been met, then the team can qualify for the higher status of a **Research Unit** and finally move to the highest status of a Research **Centre** based on the achievement of specified criteria as assessed by independent peer review mechanisms.

I will not detail all these levels, but suffice it to mention that this trajectory as defined in policy documents encourages collaboration among academics doing research within their respective subject-groups/academic departments. Then these academics could/should coagulate within their academic School and then the Faculty, cumulatively in that way. The critical point for me regarding this trajectory is that it captures neatly for me what the meaning of an *organic intellectual* is and how he/she should function like, as theorised by Gramsci (Litowitz, 2002). I must however hasten to add that the status of the organic intellectual in South Africa for an example, is not just mechanistically assigned but it is earned through informed and passionate praxis in advancing the course of the subaltern as well as in creating/supporting counter-hegemony discourses against to those of apartheid hegemony.

Now, the second policy document which constitutes the parameters within which my inaugural lecture here this evening is couched is the one describing the post profile of the Research Professor in the School of Education. I will therefore continue my lecture by using each of the points in this job description to indicate to the audience how I interpret each of those policy directives, what I have done to date and what I plan to do in the next five years, assuming that I will still be in this role by that time.

The overall purpose of the position and role of the Research Professor in the School of Education is described as; 'to develop and establish a research specialisation area/niche area in teaching-learning to support and expand the research focus area of the Faculty (Post Profile: Research Professor, n.d). To me this overacting purpose means capitalising on the knowledge base and capacity of **all academics** (without exception) in the School of Education, and in furtherance of this purpose we have finally coagulated into six teams in the above mentioned School bringing all our intellectual capital together under the following theme; '**Creation of Sustainable Support and working Environments in Diverse Educational Context**'. This theme recognises that as a School of Education our research, teaching and community engagement which are the pillars of our academic action have to be responsive and relevant to issues of teaching and learning within the university and beyond.

This theme recognises that there are very serious problems with regard to the theory and practice of teaching and learning from the General Education and Training Band including the grade R class, through the Further Education and Training Band, the Higher Education and Training Band as well as the Adult Basis Education and Training. This theme thus proposes that as a School of education, with the privilege of our intellectual capital and other requisite resources, we bind ourselves once and severally that we shall do everything in our power to *create sustainable support and conducive working environments* at all the above mentioned levels across the board. This theme also recognises that our country comes from an extremely divided past which has resulted in diversified educational provisioning along racial, socio-economic status, gender, special needs and rural versus urban divides. This diversity which is central also to our university's mission statement says to us that we need to play our roles significantly through our research, teaching and community engagement towards a more equitable, socially just, free, peaceful and hopeful united South African nation. As an emerging team we say through this theme that diversity justified on the bases of race, socio-economic status, gender, greed or creed, special needs and any other form will constitute the focal point of entry in our quest for a better education and better future for all, away from all the afore mentioned forms of discrimination.

#### **4.2 Sub Programmes doing Research, Teaching and Community Engagement Work in/through this Theme (see TABLE 1 below)**

In order to systematically formulate effective strategies towards operationalising the theme of our **overall programme** as described above, we organised ourselves into the following six teams: *the first team* or *Sub-programme* under the leadership of Professor Petrusa du Toit focuses on designing , developing and implementing *Support strategies for learner and teacher support* in all the schools of the Department of Education both locally and nationally although due to constraints of resources the sub-programme has concentrated mainly at the local schools. Almost all colleagues with Master's and PhD qualifications in Educational Psychology and Special Education specialisms, mainly in the Faculty of Education Sciences and beyond work together towards achieving the objectives of this sub-programme. It is worth nothing that this sub-programme already receives financial support from the National Research Foundation in recognition of its work. The second point worth nothing is that this sub-programme works very closely with the relevant divisions in the North West Provincial Education Department (NWED) dealing with matters of support strategies for learners and teacher support especially for those with special educational needs, in need of support in inclusive educational settings, and so on. The sub-programme is also gearing itself for an even more expanded engagement with the Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), Community Based Organisations, Church groups in the operationalisation of the objectives of the sub-programme.

The second sub-programme led by Prof Phillip van der Westhuizen who is a C1 rated researcher and editor of the South African Journal of Education (SAJE) among many of his accolades, focuses mainly on a theme titled; *Effective Working Environments in Diverse Education Organisation*. Many of the leading scholars in Educational Management related specialisms in the Faculty of Education Sciences are located and work together in this sub-programme. The objective again is to look at all education organisations be they at General Education and Training (GET), Further Education and Training (FET), Higher Education and Training (HET) or Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) bands or any organisation that could be defined as an education organisation with the aim of improving effectiveness of practices in that respective environment.

The third sub-programme led by Dr Marius Smit who is one of the top 10 researchers across the whole of North West University focuses on issues of safety and discipline in educational settings generally. Their theme is titled; *Policy implementation and evaluation as determinants for geborgenheit in education*. This sub-programme consists of almost all the Educational Law experts, Educational Psychologists and all academics in the Faculty of Education Sciences (the Faculty) working on issues of *geborgenheit*, loosely translated in English as *discipline and safety* in schools. The team also has very close working relations with the Department of Education and in fact all the significant stakeholders in discipline and safety in schools. Members of this sub-programme, like the rest of the others in the Faculty are widely published locally and internationally and are interested in broadening even further their engagement with the broader society.

The fourth sub-programme is lead by Dr Charles Viljoen and their theme is titled *Health Promotion through Education Innovation, Development and Intervention* brings together expertise in the Faculty around matters of nutrition, health, discipline, wellness, including HIV/AIDS and so on at all levels of education.

The fifth sub-programme which is the second last is led by Prof Carisma Nel under the theme of *Quality Literacy within Diverse Teaching and Learning Environments*. This sub-programme is engaged in very crucial research and intervention at all levels of education but the one aspect that stands out for me is their work on the transition from high school education to university where many students fall in the cracks due to problems of language and literacy skills generally.

As a Research Professor it was a singular honour for me to facilitate the process that led to the firm and sustainable establishment of all the above mentioned sub-programmes towards jointly and collaboratively formulated research themes, hence the theme for the whole programme. My discussion of the sub-programmes above may have given the impression that the academics leading and inhabiting them operate in water-tight groupings. However I

need to immediately add that all sub-programmes while providing the home for academics in their respective specialisms, there are far greater collaboration and working together interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary across the faculty, the university as well as nationally and internationally. It must be added that while focus seems to be on research, all the other two legs of an academic activity, namely teaching and community engagement are seamlessly integrated in all the sub-programme themes and action.

**TABLE 1 (Monteith, 2009)**

Creation of Sustainable Support and Working Environments in Diverse Educational Contexts Programme Leader: Sechaba Mahlomaholo						
Sub-Program	Support Strategies for Learner and Teacher Support	Effective Working Environments in Diverse Education Organisations	Policy implementation and evaluation as determinants for geborgenheit in education	Quality Literacy within Diverse Teaching & Learning Environments	Health Promotion through Education Innovation Development and Intervention	Sustainable Empowering Learning Environments
Leader:	P du Toit	Philp van der Westhuizen	Marius Smit	Carisma Nel	Charles Viljoen	S Mahlomaholo

### 4.3 Focus on the Sustainable Empowering Learning Environments (SELE) sub-programme

#### 4.3.1 Background to the founding of the SELE sub-background

The very brief discussion above of the five sub-programmes - I am charged with the responsibility of coordinating as a Research Professor in the School of Education - has given an idea of how I interpret the two policy documents of the NWU which I have alluded to earlier. Now I want to focus on describing the *Sixth sub-programme* whose establishment and activities I coordinate and facilitate, directly. Through this description I hope to be better able to explain how I plan to play the role of my position and thereby achieve the purposes and goals set out by the university. I also intend to elucidate how I come to see my role as that of an emerging organic intellectual. I will at the same time be indirectly indicating how each of the leaders of the five sub-programmes mentioned above is also going about their tasks of leading their respective teams. The role of Research Professor requires of me to wear at least two hats in as far as research in the School of Education is concerned. One hat describe me as coordinator and facilitator of the **Research Programme** comprising all the six sub-programmes in the School of Education while the second hat describes me as



coordinator and facilitator of this sixth sub-programme titled: *Sustainable Empowering Learning Environments (SELEN)*

When the North West University through the Executive Dean of the faculty of Education Science at Potchefstroom, Prof Petra Engelbrecht informed me that I would be honoured on August 21, 2009 and inaugurated as a Research Professor in the School of Education I realised that, that was the ideal moment to officially launch the *Sustainable Empowering Learning Environments (SELEN)* as a research sub-programme. The colloquium which builds up from the morning of Thursday August 20 to the afternoon of Friday August 21, 2009 culminating in this inaugural speech this evening is thus the opportunity for us all to celebrate the launch of the *Sustainable Empowering Learning Environments* as the theme of this evolving research sub-programme which is build and based on the fears, experiences and aspirations of the people within and beyond the confines of my School of Education, my Faculty, and my University.

#### **4.3.2 Acknowledgements and a brief progress report to date on the activities of the SELEN sub-programme**

It is thus a singular honour for me to thank God for having made this celebratory moment possible. I see it not only as an academic activity belonging to the realm of the public, the cognitive and the rational, but I also see it as encompassing my personal, private and emotional dimensions as well. It is a moment of celebrating the coming together out of an experience of dismemberment described earlier in this lecture. Through the colloquium culminating in the inaugural lecture this evening I am able to imagine our toddler steps towards a more unified sub-programme, programme, school, faculty, university, province, country, continent, humanity, whole creation (that includes animals, plants, the environment and the whole universe). This lecture is thus for me a moment to celebrate this coming together, this *re-membering* and this initial steps towards the deconstruction of diversity which has been canonised and has fossilised to the extent that we assume that it is a way of life or how things are supposed to be.

**TABLE 2**

Sustainable Empowering Learning Environments (SELEN)

Sub-programme: Leader Sechaba Mahlomaholo

Researcher	Research Topic/Project
Prof Sechaba Mahlomaholo	Creating sustainable empowering learning environments: A Critical emancipatory analysis of classroom Discourses Potchefstroom Campus -Potchefstroom
Mr Louis Kruger	Mentoring as praxis for aspirant teachers for SELEN :Potchefstroom Campus

	<b>Teaching and Learning Subject Group - Potchefstroom</b>
<b>Dr Carl Kirstein</b>	<b>Mentoring as praxis for SELEN School of Education: Potchefstroom Campus</b> <b>Teaching and learning Subject Group -Potchefstroom</b>
<b>Prof Hennie Steyn</b>	<b>Creating sustainable learning environments in schools by means of strategic planning</b>
PhD student Mr Samson Tshabala	Assessment practices in problem based class rooms towards SELEN
PhD student Mr Charles Maqalika	Analysis of new NCS graduates' performance at learning NQF level 5 and 6 mathematics and science: The case for the creation of SELEN
MEd student Mrs Ntswaki Morabe	Implementation of cooperative learning strategies towards the creation of SELEN
MEd student Mrs Betty Mothea	Barriers towards the creation of SELEN in physical education in schools
MEd student Mrs Beauty Mokua	An evaluation of the role of the teachers towards curriculum development in the creation of SELEN
MEd student Mr Sello Galo	Formative assessment practices in the creation of SELEN
<b>Prof Joseph Mosoge</b>	<b>Teachers' perceptions about their own professionalism towards the creation of SELEN</b> <b>School of Education (Secondary Member) - Potchefstroom</b>
<b>Me Dolly Dlavane</b>	<b>The role of Language teaching in the creation of SELEN</b> <b>School of Curriculum Based Education -Potchefstroom</b>
<b>Dr Vussy Hongwane</b>	<b>Racial identity in the creation of SELEN in South African higher education</b> <b>School of Continuing Education -Potchefstroom</b>
<b>Dr Masabata Ranko-Ramaili</b>	<b>An alternative framework for teacher professional development towards the creation of SELEN in South Africa</b> <b>Mafikeng Campus</b>
<b>Prof Thapelo Mamiala</b>	<b>The utility of explanatory frameworks as a tool to create SELEN</b> <b>Mafikeng Campus</b>
<b>Dr Monica Rakoma</b>	<b>ABET in the creating of SELEN in rural schools</b> <b>Mafikeng Campus</b>
<b>Dr Thami Sithebe</b>	<b>SELEN: Perceptions of biological sciences students</b>
<b>***SELEN stands for Sustainable Empowering Learning Environments</b>	

#### **4.3.2.1 Membership of SELEN in the Teaching and Learning Subject Group at the Potchefstroom Campus**

This sub-programme (see TABLE 2 above) consists of academics who teach, are involved in community engagement activities and research within the School of Education at the Potchefstroom Campus. Mr Louis Kruger leads the subject-group/academic department where the sub-programme is located. His research on *Mentoring as praxis for aspirant teachers for SELEN* is conducted jointly with Dr Carl Kirstein. The two colleagues intend creating sustainable empowering environments both at the pre- and in-service phases for aspirant teachers. They are experimenting with various models on how best to train future educators such that they function effectively in the post 1994 South African schools' settings. Their research therefore involves interacting with schools where the aspirant teachers being trained in the Faculty are placed for practice teaching so as to facilitate good mentoring processes therein. I thus want to acknowledge the above colleagues for providing the sub-programme on *sustainable empowering learning environments* hereafter referred to as **SELEN** with a home and support within their subject-group.

#### **4.3.2.2 SELEN Network in the Faculty of Education –Potchefstroom Campus**

Beyond the subject-group I want to thank Professor Hercules Nieuwoudt who provided the leadership in the School of Education to the extent that the SELEN sub-programme could come into being towards the end of June 2009 after one year of discussions and constructive debates. Prof Connie Moloi is also thanked for having taken on the baton from Prof Nieuwoudt in the School of Education and enabled the sub-programme to grow from strength to strength.

I also wish to thank Prof Hennie Steyn for supporting the SELEN sub-programme through his research that looks at creating *SELEN in schools by means of strategic planning*. My sincerest thanks also go to Dr Vussy Hongwane who provided morale, material and conceptual support to the founding of the sub-programme. His contributions through his research on issues of *poverty, socio-economic status and racism in education* gave a very sound theoretical basis for the sub-programme. I also wish to thank Prof Joseph Mosoge for supporting SELEN in terms of enriching our reflections and interactions with schools and the Department of Education around issues of management. Although Prof Mosoge serves as the main member in another sub-programme he graciously agreed to support us as a secondary member of SELEN with his research focusing on *teachers' perceptions about their own professionalism towards the creation of SELEN*. Mrs. Dolly Dlavane who investigates the role of *mother tongue as language of learning towards the creation of SELEN* is especially

thanked for the interesting debates she brings to the sub-programme around issues of identity, culture and diversity in education.

#### **4.3.2.3 SELEN Network at the Mafikeng Campus**

The sub-programme is also firmly rooted at the Mafikeng Campus of the North West University where Prof Thapelo Mamiala investigates *the utility of explanatory frameworks as a tool to create SELEN*. The involvement of Prof Mamiala who is also the Director of the School of Undergraduate Studies at the Mafikeng Campus is greatly valued as he also adds to the multi disciplinary nature of SELEN given his prowess as a mathematics educator of note. Other distinguished members of the sub-programme from Mafikeng whom I wish to acknowledge are Dr Mohlouwa Mokoena focusing on creating *SELEN for mathematical literacy in the FET phase*, Mrs Masechaba Molukanele investigating *how sustainable and empowering education environments can be created for teenage mothers*, Dr Mababata Ranko Ramaili looks at *an alternative framework for teacher professional development towards the creation of SELEN in South African schools*. Dr Monica Rakoma analyses *SELEN at ABET level* and Dr Thami Sithebe who looks at *how positive perceptions of biological sciences students are created in SELEN*.

#### **4.3.3.4 SELEN Network at the Vaal Triangle Campus**

At the Vaal Triangle Campus Prof Thapelo Selepe adds value to the sub-programme as he revisits *the use of African literacy history for teaching and research in creating SELEN* and, Dr J Seema from the same campus looks at the *contradictions between what he calls African philosophy and Eurocentric system in creating SELEN*.

#### **4.3.3.5 SELEN Network with other Universities in South African**

Beyond North West University the sub-programme is strongly supported by colleagues working on related research themes in the School of Social Sciences led by Prof Dennis Francis who is very passionate about issues of *Social justice in education* supported by Dr Murthee Maistry and Dr Milton Nkoane. The SELEN network also extends to the University of the Free State, UNISA and the University of Venda exploring similar and related themes like *poverty and development in rural settings*. The programme of the colloquium of August 20 and 21 provides further details on the matter. From Wits University, as leader of the sub-programme, I am especially grateful for academic support and mentoring from Prof Norman Duncan who is the leading scholar internationally on Critical Race Theory and has played a significant role in the Truth and Re-Conciliation Commission and beyond. He is the head of the School of Human and Social Development.

#### **4.3.3.6 SELEN Network Internationally**

Internationally SELEN is supported by Dr. Jennifer Lavia and Ms Themesa Neckles from Sheffield University in the United Kingdom. The former has already co-edited a book which will be published early in 2010 titled *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Policy and Practice: Decolonizing Community Contexts*, New York published by Routledge wherein I have member contributed a chapter as a member of SELEN (see list of references). The next collaborative research work on SELEN with Dr Lavia is being prepared jointly to be published later in 2010. Currently some members of SELEN are working with international specialists on *Problem based learning* from Aalborg University Denmark. A joint paper is presented and a workshop conducted by a partnership between Prof Mona Dahms, Prof Jens Christensen and me at the colloquium of August 20, while we are at the same time working towards the next joint publication. Prof Mona Dahms is especially thanked for her insights in assisting us in the formulation of SELEN's research theme and for providing leadership for our joint research work. Our first joint paper on *PBL in creating SELEN* is to be submitted for publication early in 2010. The story of the international network and collaboration for our sub-programme cannot be complete without mention of Prof David Burghes and Dr. Liz Holland from Plymouth University in UK with whom we have worked for a period spanning over six years tracing the development of mathematical conceptualisation among grade 1-6 learners in 17 countries across the world. This relationship has resulted in two Monographs being published and I was privileged to present the results of some of these at conferences in the UK, Hungary and Sweden.

#### **4.3.2.6 SELEN in the community**

The SELEN sub-programme since its inception to date has managed to establish very long lasting relationships which have resulted in three commissioned research work with at least three Education Districts in the North West Province namely; (i) the Dr Kenneth Kaunda District led by the *Executive Manager Dr Shadrack Mvula* (Mahlomaholo & Hongwane 2009a), (ii) the Ngaka Modiri Molema District led by the *Executive Manager Mrs Semaswe* (Mahlomaholo & Hongwane 2009b), and (iii) the Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompoti District led by the *Executive Manager Mrs Daphne Mohube* (Mahlomaholo & Hongwane 2009c). The SELEN sub-programme works very closely with UMALUSI led by Dr Mafu Rakometsi and two of our PhD students registered in our subject group (see Table 2 above) work on a project in conjunction with this National Quality Assurance body in the area of SELEN.

Given all the above I can safely conclude that as Research Professor the SELEN sub programme is now firmly on its feet and very ready to move on towards the next level where

there will be (i) more active steps in the acquisition of funds, facilities and research equipment, (ii) further introduction and marketing of SELEN research sub-programme by establishing research contracts nationally and internationally. To date the sub-programme enjoys a modest cash flow due to the generous financial support from our partners in the North West Education Department and the City of Tlokwe.

What I have successfully achieved since June 01, 2008 to date as described in the discussion above and as envisaged in the Post Profile of the Research Professor in the School of Education are the following: I have

- (i) participated in the planning and presentation of training opportunities in research methodology with the aim of elevating research expertise in the programme and sub-programme and Focus Area. At the Potchefstroom and the Mafikeng Campuses respectively, I conducted three such workshops in 2009. At the University of the Free State and the University of KwaZulu-Natal respectively one workshop at each institution was held for colleagues in SELEN and related research projects in 2009
- (ii) have published 2 papers in accredited scientific journals (Mahlomaholo, 2009a; 2009b)
- (iii) have also published two Chapters in two books respectively co-authored with international experts (Mahlomaholo, 2009c; 2009d)
- (iv) have edited and published one book which met all DoE criteria for subsidy as well as created spaces for more members of the SELEN programme to publish (Mahlomaholo 2009e)
- (iii) have recruited researchers to participate in the programme as described earlier in this inaugural lecture
- (iv) have recruited and supervised 4 MEd and 3 PhD students within the programme. I am co-supervising; 3 other MEd students who are registered in the Health Promotion sub programme, 1 in the Information and Communication Technology Niche Area and *informally* supporting 5 MEd students registered in the Mathematics Education subject group in the Faculty and
- (v) have 'mentored' many researchers and created spaces for their work to be presented to the wider scientific audiences (as in the colloquium of August 20 and 21, 2009) and finally to be published in accredited publications. As the guest editor of the *South African Journal of Higher Education (SAJHE)* in 2009/10 and co-editor of the second volume of the SELEN book titled; *Educational Research and Transformation in South Africa*, this objective will be accomplished and the basis for further opportunities created for us all.

## 5. THE MIRROR

In attempting to make sense of the role of research and of the Research Professor above, in the context of our problematic past, I found Jacques Lacan's theory on the mirror stage very helpful. Lacan (Felluga, 2002; Klages, 2001; The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2006) says there comes that moment in the growth and development of every child when it for the first time sees itself in the mirror. This mirror according to Lacan presents back to the child its own image. When the child looks at itself in the mirror it sees itself as somebody else that is more mature and in control of his/her faculties. The image that the child sees in the mirror is of a more competent, more complete and more whole than the child's existential and corporeal self. The mirror thus presents to the child the future, that is, what it can become in the future while at the same time the past of the child is continually present. The concrete corporeal reality is that the child is not exactly the same as its image in the mirror. In its current state the child is still in bits and pieces, uncoordinated and incoherent and not totally in charge of itself and its body. Lacan (Felluga, 2002; Klages, 2001; The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2006) calls this state of lack of control; *corpse morcelle* or *being in bits and pieces*. What looks like a contradiction therefore occurs at that moment where the past and the future meet in the mirror. The child in the mirror is both itself and that which is not itself. What in its concrete corporeal being is the left eye is actually the right eye in the mirror.

But this mirror provides the child with the future, that is, the image and possibility of what it can become away from its present state of being. The mirror is therefore the hybridised place and space for the confluence of the contradictory as well as for the productive, re-creative, re-inventive and re-imaginative action. It is in a sense the place and space for imagining the future, a better future away from the vicissitudes of the past. The mirror for me as Jacques Lacan asserts (Felluga, 2002; Klages, 2001; The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2006) represents the future in retrospect. The mirror image is an idealised sense of ourselves and how we would want to be like in the future. The concept of the mirror has been successfully theorised by Carl Rogers when he formulated his construct of the *ideal self* so as to be able to explain how our identities are constructed much in the future by what is reflected back to us by society and the significant other(s) out there (Barrett-Lennard, 1998; Rogers, 1951). The Gestalt psychologists also affirm the possibility of re-creation when they expound their now famous *a-ha* experience theory (van Wagner, 2005). It is that *existential moment of discovery* in the mirror that our research is in search for and wants to re-create and magnify in our findings especially about the hitherto excluded and marginalised students/learners and teachers in schools, universities and any other educational environments.

To take the story further, the kind of research that I am pleading for and am engaged in through the SELEN sub-programme serves the same purpose as the mirror. It provides me with the **solemn occasion** wherein I together with the researched in higher education or

schools in FET, GET and ABET - in the rural or urban, black or white, poor or affluent, to name a few settings - look at ourselves in the mirror such that we see our disintegrated selves in bits and pieces. In the mirror we may see our dismembered selves as in Sara Baartman's situation. We may see our horrific past that has torn us asunder. In the mirror we may see our *corpse morcelle*, our helplessness reflected back to us. Our dysfunctionality and our trapped-ness as South (Africans) may be reflected back to us in research. It may become apparent that our education does not equip its graduates well with skills to enable them to find employment and/or create employment themselves in the technologically advanced era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and that there is racism rampant in higher education institutions which are supposed to lead the charge towards re-humanisation of the South African Society (see page 9 of this lecture for more details)

But through research that I am pleading for, in as much as our past will be reflected, it should primarily focus on mirroring the future retrospectively. It should mirror our imagined future of maturity, competence, equity, social justice, freedom, peace and hope. It should project that which we want to be as a nation and as a South African people away from diversity and legacies of the era gone by. As we come together towards *creating sustainable empowering learning environments* we commit ourselves to move away from our divided past, away from our dysfunctional past and away from our trapped and racialised past. From the above it is clear that the kind of research I am advocating for is biased in favour of the re-humanisation agenda.

## **6. RE-MEMBERING THE ORGANIC INTELLECTUAL IN THE MIRROR: REFLECTING ON RESEARCH AND PEDAGOGY**

### **6.1 Critical Emancipatory Research as the Theoretical Framework for Re-membering the Organic Intellectual**

The re-humanisation agenda in education starts with responding to the issues identified earlier in this lecture. My assumption is that as an institution of higher learning, we come to our fullness when we consciously and conscientiously respond and attempt to solve these problems. My role as a Research Professor therefore, is to ensure that the university is able to operationalise its mandate in responding to these problems by being actively involved in relevant research, teaching and community engagement projects. When we as academics **consciously and genuinely** get engaged with problems in our communities and our schools towards the amelioration thereof through research, teaching and community engagement, then we get transformed into *organic intellectuals*. Such an engagement also needs to be informed by mutual respect and reciprocity between the university and the schools/DoE (Mahlomaholo and Matobako, 2006). As discussed under the preceding subheading, there is a possibility of us as organic intellectuals resolving these problems if we work closely with the



communities and the schools through the Department of Education (DoE) and/or the North West Education Department (NWED) locally. Working closely with the schools means that we jointly identify the problem(s) to be investigated and together we design the research project(s) and operationalise it in the interest of both the schools/communities and the university (see Mahlomaholo & Hongwane, 2009c). The findings of such a research are then implemented in the respective school(s), again in partnership with the DoE and the respective school(s).

With regard to problems identified earlier in this paper there seems to be those that go beyond what I as a researcher can resolve and those that I can contribute, in a small way towards resolving. For example, in order to resolve the problem of unemployment among youth there are programmes in place towards giving such individuals a second chance in life although I am also aware that many of the youth still fall outside the reach of these programmes. The only thing I can do presently is to play advocacy role by way of bringing the plight of these youth to the public conversations with the hope that something can be done to help them. The same goes for the problem of racism, although to some extent I can be involved in research projects aimed at eradicating such and assisting in channelling such energy into socially productive activities (Duncan, 2005).

The second category of problems are those I am attempting to solve through research, and they are about; providing requisite skills to students/learners/youth/people generally for employment now and in the future, facilitating access with success at higher education, preparing learners at school level for successful entry and participation in higher education, adequate provision of teacher education and supply of postgraduate researchers. All these problems are enshrined in what the research project titled; *Creating sustainable empowering learning environments: A Critical Emancipatory Analysis of classroom Discourses* (see Table 2 above) entails as they all centre around supporting the schools (DoE and NWED as examples) to teach effectively and thus provide empowering learning environments for the students/learner and teachers. The project described below is designed in pursuance of this goal.

For the research described below to be coherent and to achieve the envisaged transformational agenda, I have mounted it on Critical Emancipatory Theoretical framework of Jürgen Habermas. According to Habermas (Mahlomaholo and Matobako, 2006), human society is organised based on the need to control the environment for purposes of work, hence technical and empiricist work carried out through positivistic means. Human society is also organised based on mutual validation brought about through communication, use of language and inter-subjectivity and this corresponds to interpretative hermeneuticism, phenomenology, existentialism, etc. kind of knowledge. Human society is also organised based on the exercise of power for purposes of bringing order, but sometimes power can be

too excessive hence oppressive requiring it to be challenged and subverted, hence Critical Research.

It thematises power. It critiques the hold of ideology over human being's meaning construction, hence actions and interactions. It posits that the hold of ideology can never be complete hence the possibility of transformation and change in meaning construction. It argues that this is due to the contradictions in the material conditions as Karl Marx asserts in *Das Kapital* (Held, 1993). It argues that research among humans, hence education should focus on the *speaking person* hence a being that constructs meaning and cannot be adequately defined and describe from outside like objects in a natural science laboratory. Nothing is fixed and/or has intrinsic *reality*, that is; everything is relative depending on how one sees it. Reality is fluid and multiple and non-essentialistic. Reality is created in discourses, in the interstices of relational conversations. Reality is about imagination and imagining, it is ideational. Reality is always coloured by the perspective we assume towards it. Reality is constructed in the regimes of truth as Michael Foucault asserts (Fairclough, 1993)

Thus objectivity, reliability and validity can never be attained as they are mere figmentation of the researchers' imaginations. The truth is not one thing but an ever increasing complexity, which is never finite or attained (see Patti Lather, 1986). Quantification, formulation of general laws, predictability, causality, etc. totally miss the point with regard to researching and understanding human phenomena like education. Research needs to always declare its biases for it to be useful because the truth can never be told.

In a relationship of mutual respect which is reciprocal, my role as researcher therefore is to make sense of this reality of education under investigation in conjunction with my community/school/NWED partners. I also have to be cautious and become aware that I am privileged in having the opportunity to interpret other human beings' interpretation and as such treat have them as equals (Bringle, 2004). I should also be able to step outside of myself and attempt to understand the world of education together with the researched. My role as researcher is also about bringing into the centre of academic discourses the meanings of the researched which may be marginalised and excluded. As theory on Critical Research suggests the researcher has to be overtly subjective in subverting the excesses of power through research geared towards praxis (Lather, 1986). In this research I am doing, I am thus openly take sides in favour of the oppressed and excluded because objectivity is a myth. Through research, my project continues to critique apartheid ideology with the intentions of creating more fault lines and cracks on its hold of our education. Such a research thus helps to advance the liberatory and emancipatory agenda by advocating for freedom from distorted modes of meaning construction

## **6.2 Creating sustainable empowering learning environments: A Critical Emancipatory Analysis of classroom Discourses**

As an example of what the above discussion refers to, I now provide a brief outline of what this research project I am involved in within the SELEN sub-programme entails.

In creating learning environments that do empower all the stakeholders in education and most importantly the learners, the project proposes to firstly identify barriers to optimal learning and determine how some individuals in similar circumstances have overcome them and then on the bases thereof to formulate research based strategies for enabling others to adopt them for the resolution of similar or related problems. In this way it will be possible to contribute significantly towards the Learner Attainment Implementation Plan (LAIP) of the North West Provincial Government's Department of Education (NWPG) which stipulates what the regional priorities are and operationalises them in education. The LAIP as a regional priority also brings to the level of the provincial educational stakeholders, the enabling contexts for achieving the national Critical Cross-Field Outcomes (SAQA, 2006).

Sufficiently significant body of knowledge already exists (Darling-Hammond, 2008; de Bruijn, 2003) with regard to the creation of powerful, conducive and empowering learning environments. However recent literature tends to emphasise the constructivist theorisation thereof (Sadinsky & Tuke, 2003). In this project we propose to contribute to this growing body of knowledge by focusing on discourses that go on in and around learning contexts. To date the constructivist literature (Darling-Hammond, 2008; de Bruijn, 2003) has focused mainly on non-discursive elements of these environments, and merely gave a cursory look at the discourses in these contexts without problematising issues of inequality, gender, race and class that are embedded in these relationships of knowledge/ power in learning environments, sufficiently. In this project we investigate the co-constitutive processes of discourses and the non-discursive elements in the creation of empowering learning environments. Our argument is that in as much as the presence or absence of non-discursive elements like school buildings, learning media and other educational resources do impact on the construction of empowering learning environments, what seems to be equally important is the role that meaning construction and 'making sense of' by the learners themselves in such environments, also seem to have an even more stronger constitutive power on all the learning environments.

Put differently, our project attempts to find out whether and how perceptions, views and attitudes of learners have influenced and could be influenced in their environment(s) of learning such that they are more ready to learn in spite of the limitations that may be impeding proper, hence, successful learning. Such impediments or barriers could be as a result of the *subaltern-ity* of their positioning in the discourses, like; their race, gender, socio-economic status and/or special needs as overwhelming number of research findings seem to suggest (Darling-Hammond, 2008; de Bruijn, 2003). In concrete terms this means that this project will clearly identify in the learners' discourses the significant marker(s) that have been used as basis for marginalisation and hence negative positioning in discourses that constitute their learning environments. Then the project will proceed to find out how learners in such defined positioning(s) construct meaning of themselves, their world and their own processes of learning given the nature of their contexts. It will be possible given the information thus gathered to closely look at the discourses of those that learn successfully in order to find out the patterns of their discourses in comparison to those of their peers who are not so successful so that on the bases thereof our project could be able to suggest strategies that could be implemented in order to structure the learning environment such that the resultant discourses are those empowering learners to learn more successfully.

This investigation on discourses will not exclude non-discursive elements of the learning environment as the argument is that, in as much as discourses constitute non-discursive elements of the setting; the reverse process also occurs simultaneously where the non-discursive elements influence the discourses. The approach therefore will be to look at both the discourses and the non-discursive elements as co-constitutive.

While focus will be on interrogating discourses of the learners as they manifest themselves 'naturally' - the study will at the same time intervene by way of introducing social constructive strategies (like Problem Based Learning, Resources Based Learning and Outcome Based Learning) with the aim of influencing the negative discourses to change such that they are positive.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

Through this inaugural lecture I had set out to describe how within one South African nation we have come to be pitted one against another by the abhorrent system of racial differentiation called apartheid. I then continued to argue that the diversity and differences that we experience and assume to be natural, are actually mere social constructs in discourses. While not denying the value of individual person's agency in complying with the dictates of the abovementioned flawed social arrangement, I further argue that the latter has had very profound impact on how we look at each other, especially in terms of racialised categories.

Against this backdrop I propose that as researchers we should adopt Thabo Mbeki's definition of (South) African-ness which is all inclusive and in tandem with Yusuf Waghid's (2009) notion of cosmopolitanism. This universalising definition for me is important because it serves as an antidote to the excesses and still rife legacies of apartheid in all of our lives as (South) Africans. I argue that from such a position it will be possible to march together in unison towards a united (South) African nation. My point is that rather than celebrate and thus magnify diversity and/or differences it would be in the best interest of all to valorise unity and universality of the human condition. My reason for such an approach is that there is nowhere in the world where diversity/difference has borne positive results. The internecine wars of Burundi, Darfur, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the World Wars, the infinite Middle East conflicts are all based on tribal, ethnic and/or national diversities, which we can ill afford in South Africa. My point is that the whole liberation struggle that culminated in the launching of a new South African state in 1994 was geared towards the eradication these negative constructions in reality.

Then I show how the hand of diversity and separateness/apartheid continued to bedevil South African higher education from as early as 1892 to date. In spite of the many efforts to eradicate apartheid in higher education specifically, seemingly it has managed to mutate and take on new forms which have made it difficult for it to be detected and thus dealt with. The climaxing of such insipient involvement of this horrific past are aptly captured in the Ministerial Report of the Committee led by Prof Crain Soudien in 2008.

I then propose that perhaps the solution lies in conducting research aimed at humanising South African population across the board. My argument is that research is not neutral and if we can conduct research which is unashamedly biased in favour of the under classes and the subaltern communities that continue to be marginalised and excluded then perhaps we could be in a position to reverse the negative legacies of apartheid from education, at least. Educational research is singled out mainly because it is the discipline I have worked within for over two decades and the fact that it is pivotal in social transformation.

Then I discuss how the NWU research policy context has made it possible for me to assemble a team of experts in the Subject-Group/Academic Department of Teaching and Learning at the Potchefstroom Campus. This policy has also made it almost compulsory to extend this emerging team to the School of Education and the Faculty of Education at the Potchefstroom Campus and to the Mafikeng and the Vaal Triangle Campuses of North West University as well. Still being guided by these research policy imperative I was also able to recruit membership to my evolving research sub-programme at the University of KwaZulu-

Natal, Wits, Free State and Venda. There has really been a lot of enthusiasm across these institutions, and the support from the academic colleagues from there is incredible. With the confidence gained from this massive support, I report that I even managed to extend the team to Aalborg (Denmark), Sheffield, Plymouth and Manchester Metropolitan (United Kingdom) Universities. Colleagues from local institutions and Europe are coming together in a colloquium on August 20 and 21, 2009 to celebrate through paper presentations the launch of the research sub-programme and my inauguration as research professor in the School of education at the Potchefstroom campus of the North West University. Although the latter discussion looks digressive from the theoretical position I have been advancing, upon closer look one discovers that I am trying to describe how theory and practice of research meet to produce an *organic intellectual* who is positioned such that he/she can tackle the negative impact of apartheid past on our education head-on with this massive international, local, institutional and personal levels intellectual capital.

Again using my job-description as the organising principle I demonstrate how I have come to see myself as an emerging organic intellectual because of my research and interventions which are firmly initiated and located in the local schools and communities. I also demonstrate how this local focus has also enabled me to be able to bring *knowledge to the international and local academic conversations* through a developing research publication track record.

I then reflect on the future and the possibility of doing research, through the sub-programme, that can reconcile us as the South African nation by bringing all of us who have been marginalised to the same level of competence as the rest, in our search for our common humanity. I use the metaphor of the mirror as a way of explaining the possibility of a better future together while being cognisant and keeping check of the horrific apartheid past.

The process of reconciliation or *re-membering* is very central to my presentation and it involves bringing together people across the historical race, colour, socio-economic status, rural versus urban, gender, and so-called cultural divides. This process of re-membering goes even further towards reconciling the university with the communities and schools we are supposed to serve. My argument is that; all people deserve better and the question of celebrating diversity hence apartheid is a luxury we can ill afford. Thus through research as a medium we need to foster those things that bring us together in unison. In conclusion I describe my research project and demonstrate how theoretically and practically it is located within a paradigm that advances equity, social justice, freedom, peace and hope as criteria of quality.

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