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# Transformational Approach to Assessment Practices: AI Strategies for Honours Level Assessments

Doniwen Pietersen[1] & Mbusiseni Celimpilo Dube[1]
[1] Department of Educational Foundations, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

## ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore decolonised strategies for challenging hegemonic assessment practices in teacher education, which often equate academic quality with dominant English-language writing conventions. It confronts the perception that effective assessment inherently privileges specific linguistic norms, arguing instead for a social justice approach that reconceptualises evaluation to empower all students. The purpose is to propose how Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be harnessed within a decolonised framework to develop inclusive assessment methods that assess for learning at the Department of Educational Foundations ' B.Ed. Honours programme at the University of South Africa. The methodology involved a systematic literature review across major academic databases (ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar) and specialised journals. Initial searches using terms related to decolonised pedagogy, inclusive assessment, and AI in education yielded approximately 100 papers. After screening titles, abstracts, and full texts for theoretical depth and conceptual relevance, 24 publications were selected for in-depth analysis based on strict criteria of relevance, rigour, and contribution to the synthesis of a decolonised AI approach. The discussion synthesises the literature to argue that AI strategies, when guided by a decolonial ethos, may provide innovative models for supporting academic writing and reframing assessment. This approach may help dismantle repressive structures by moving away from a deficit model and towards one that values diverse student voices and backgrounds. The study recommends that academics intentionally integrate prescribed AI tools into Honours-level assessments to promote learning and equity. The conclusion asserts that a decolonised approach to assessment, augmented by AI, may transform standard practices to advantage historically underrepresented students, ultimately aligning assessment with the goals of social justice and inclusive education.

*Keywords: Transformation, Social Justice, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Assessment, B.Ed. Honours Students, Learning*

**Correspondence**
Doniwen Pietersen
Email:
epietecd1@unisa.ac.za

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## INTRODUCTION

Did you know that Artificial Intelligence (AI) strategies may be used to transform assessment practices at higher education institutions? Crossouard and Oprandi alluded that formative assessment is a critical concern within higher education due to an alarming amount of feedback that students receive after assessment.[1] This has called for the transformation of assessment in higher education institutions, which

[1] Barbara Crossouard and Paolo Oprandi, "Decolonising Formative Assessment," in *Theory and Method in Higher Education Research*, vol. 8 (Emerald Publishing Limited, 2022), 181–96.

first emerged in post-colonial contexts of the global south. This is informed by a claim from Maine and Wagner that higher education institutions should reflect on the epistemological complexities of the communities they serve.[2] This implies that higher education institutions should always keep a check on the behaviour of their students towards teaching, learning and assessment practices. Higher education institutions should always reflect on the welfare of their students. Kivijärvi and Rautiainen suggested that there is a need to administer individual assessments to ensure that all students have the same opportunity to succeed, and using an AI strategy may help in that regard.[3] Using an AI strategy may ensure that assessment design is inclusive through diverse assessment practices that can provide multiple ways for students to represent their knowledge.[4] An AI strategy may be an answer to the assessment of Honours students through a transformative approach. This research was informed by two reasons. Firstly, a lot has been said about transforming the curriculum to be in line with the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR), hence, the authors are of the opinion that assessment strategies should be transformed as well. Secondly, they deem it necessary to advocate for an AI assessment strategy for Honours students, because they need to be free to use AI during their assessments.

AI in education necessitates a decolonial, inclusive approach that fosters social justice, equity and inclusion, thus preventing the perpetuation of existing power imbalances, biases and discriminations.[5] According to Zembylas, this includes decolonising AI, specifically in higher education, which ought to involve recognising the colonial features and racialising forces of AI technologies.[6] This means redesigning AI in terms of decolonial ethics and solidarity. Similarly, Bhattacharya argued that decolonising AI requires challenging the power structures and biases that are ingrained within AI systems and technologies, and creating a more equitable and inclusive future.[7] Sequel to these issues, the authors argue that transformation may be an answer to decolonisation.

In the context of South Africa (SA), where historical inequalities and injustices persist in the educational system and society, adopting a transformative approach relative to AI is a crucial and urgent task.[8] For instance, AI systems that are used for student assessment and feedback may reflect the biases and discriminations of the colonial era, leading to unfair and inaccurate outcomes for students from marginalised groups.[9] Denying and policing students against using this tool in higher education may only propagate the status quo, meaning that it only favours certain students coming from higher quintile schools, whilst forgetting and denying lower quintile school students the opportunity to be on par with other students.[10]

In his opening remarks during the Artificial Intelligence in Research workshop, the Director of Research Support (H M Bopape), affirmed that AI has great potential to accelerate scientific discovery and improve the effectiveness and pace of research and verification processes.[11] He noted that the workshop was about deepening understanding and application of AI principles within the realm of research. His assertions prove beyond any doubt that with AI, students can discover things they did not know before, and they can undertake research effectively. Additionally, his view is that students should

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[2] Kenneth Maine and Claire Wagner, "Student Voices in Studies on Curriculum Decolonisation: A Scoping Review," *Psychology in Society*, no. 61 (2021): 27–53.

[3] Sanna Kivijärvi and Pauli Rautiainen, "Contesting Music Education Policies through the Concept of Reasonable Accommodation: Teacher Autonomy and Equity Enactment in Finnish Music Education," *Research Studies in Music Education* 43, no. 2 (2021): 91–109.

[4] Joanna Tai, Rola Ajjawi, and Anastasiya Umarova, "How Do Students Experience Inclusive Assessment? A Critical Review of Contemporary Literature," *International Journal of Inclusive Education* 28, no. 9 (July 28, 2024): 1936–53, https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2021.2011441.

[5] Dean Collin Langeveldt and Doniwen Pietersen, "Decolonising AI: A Critical Approach to Education and Social Justice," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Education Research* 6, no. s1 (2024): 1–9; R. Schaerer, "Inclusive Artificial Intelligence for Education: Challenges and Opportunities," *AI & Society* 35, no. 1 (2024): 29–38.

[6] M. Zembylas, " Decolonizing Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education: A Critical Review and Agenda," *Higher Education* 75, no. 1 (2023): 111–27.

[7] K. Bhattacharya, "Decolonizing Artificial Intelligence: A Manifesto," *Journal of Decolonial Studies* 1, no. 1 (2023): 1–15.

[8] Olúfẹ́mi Táíwò, *Against Decolonisation: Taking African Agency Seriously* (Hurst Publishers, 2022).

[9] Lindsay Weinberg, "Rethinking Fairness: An Interdisciplinary Survey of Critiques of Hegemonic ML Fairness Approaches," *Journal of Artificial Intelligence Research* 74 (2022): 75–109.

[10] C J White and H Van Dyk, "Theory and Practice of the Quintile Ranking of Schools in South Africa: A Financial Management Perspective," *South African Journal of Education* 39, no. Supplement 1 (2019): s1-19.

[11] Harry Bopape, Retha Visagie, and Sidney Engelbrecht, "Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Research - Opening Address," *UNISA - Research and Innovation Week* (Pretoria, May 22, 2024).

understand and apply AI as they engage with their studies. The fact is, with his deep understanding of AI, he is not downplaying the positive impact that AI may have on students.

This research, therefore, aims to address this issue by exploring how academics using AI in (SA) may integrate a transformative approach and inclusive perspectives into their assessment practices in higher education settings. This includes how AI may be integrated and used as a strategy that aims to challenge and transform the colonial education system, empowering learners and educators as agents of change and social justice in the education spaces they find themselves.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Transformation Theory

This paper was framed using the transformation theory of Jack Mezirow.[12] The theory alludes to the movement of students progressing from one phase or stage of development to the next. As students move through these phases, they become emancipated from constraining habits of expectations, and these expectations are more inclusive, differentiating, permeable and integrative of experience.[13] AI is a new stage of learning that should be incorporated; and allowing students to navigate through it will allow them to achieve their expectations. Furthermore, this theory argues that a transformative perspective "enables us to see how dependency producing and oppressive institutionalized social practices, norms and cultural codes must be changed through social action".[14] The implementation of AI is a social practice that is aligned with the 4IR. This revolution from a higher education environment foregrounds the importance of learning with new technologies. In other words,

> Transformative learning is a highly reflective outcome of student engagement that considers the 'humanisation' or identity building that occurs through tertiary education. It both requires and creates a sense of maturity, independence and acceptance of oneself and others and arises from deep engagement with multiple aspects of the tertiary experience.[15]

The transformative approach advocates for the change of social practices, norms and cultural codes, hence it is apt for the arguments of this paper which are central to transformation and AI. This means there is a need to change the way AI is perceived in relation to students; the stigma that most academics attach to the incorporation of AI in students' learning should be done away with. Incorporating AI in students' learning does not mean that they will use it 'raw', as it is, but transformation is constructivist in nature.[16] This implies that transformation does not require total assimilation of practice or knowledge, but students should exercise their knowledge construction as they adopt AI. This should be encouraged with the university's B.Ed. Honours students.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design grounded in systematic documentary analysis to examine the transformational approach to assessment practices via AI strategies for honours level assessments at Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) institutions. The research was conducted across academic databases, including ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, as well as specialised journals.[17] The goal was to locate publications on decolonised pedagogy, inclusive management, and AI in education. Using specific search terms, the initial search yielded approximately 100 papers. After reviewing titles and abstracts for relevance, the pool was reduced to 60 articles. A full-text evaluation was then conducted to assess the articles for theoretical depth and conceptual insights, as well as their contribution to synthesising ideas on a decolonised AI approach in higher education. This process reduced the selection to 55 items. The final selection was based on strict criteria whereby relevance, theoretical

[12] Jack Mezirow, "Perspective Transformation," *Adult Education* 28, no. 2 (1978): 100–110.
[13] Jack Mezirow, "Understanding Transformation Theory," *Adult Education Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1994): 222–32.
[14] Mezirow, "Understanding Transformation Theory."
[15] Jana Lay-Hwa Bowden, Leonie Tickle, and Kay Naumann, "The Four Pillars of Tertiary Student Engagement and Success: A Holistic Measurement Approach," *Studies in Higher Education* 46, no. 6 (2021): 1207–24.
[16] Jack Mezirow, "Transformation Theory and Social Action: A Response to Collard and Law," *Adult Education Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (1989): 169–75.
[17] Doniwen Pietersen, *Caring for Students Who Need It Most in Open Distance E-Learning Environments: This Is (Not) Hidden Philosophy* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2025).

depth, conceptual breakthroughs, contribution to the synthesis of ideas, and reputable publication sources were tested by the researchers' niche areas in research. Applying these criteria resulted in a final sample of 24 publications.

## DISCUSSIONS

### Supporting Honours Students in Higher Education vis-à-vis Artificial Intelligence Strategies

B.Ed. Honours students, like any other students, need support that can help them master the content. They have new knowledge to acquire, hence they should be supported. In other words, they rely on academics/lecturers to provide them with whatever support they can provide to acquire and master new knowledge.

In line with this, Netanda, Mamabolo and Themane posited that it is important to increase student success rates for the continued survival in a competitive higher education terrain.[18] This increase can be achieved if students are supported adequately. They further argued that there are financial rewards attached when students complete their qualifications, hence they need support. Chen, Chen and Lin accentuated that AI helps to improve the learning experience.[19] This is also highlighted by the profound work *Integrating artificial intelligence in higher education: Empirical insights from students about using ChatGPT,* which states,

> Chatbots are being used to provide support to students around the clock, especially in administrative tasks such as scheduling appointments, answering questions about university policies and procedures, and providing guidance on academic programs and career options [19–21]. Chatbots can also be used to facilitate communication between students and teachers, thereby providing a platform for students to ask questions and receive feedback from their instructors in a timely manner.[20]

AI helps academics and allows learners to develop their knowledge and flexible skills for a constantly changing world: it provides adaptive learning methods and personalised learning approaches producing new teaching and learning solutions that are now undergoing testing in different contexts.[21] Furthermore, AI may promote personalisation and better learning outcomes, and favour access to education, collaborative environments and intelligent tutoring systems.[22] Lastly, it may support students by providing specialised support and raising knowledge-gap awareness.[23] The incorporation of AI in curriculum activities may help students develop new knowledge relevant to their qualifications.

> This was thoroughly canvassed at an international conference where scholars ironed out the potential of AI in the education space; collectively affirming that,
>
> AI is continuously transforming education by not only altering the way curricula are taught but also by assisting content creation in smart classrooms. As an essential part of the educational system, lesson planning demands time and energy from an educator of any subject.[24]

At the Artificial Intelligence in Research workshop, (mentioned earlier in this study), Engelbrecht argued that B.Ed. Honours students need to adhere to the ethical principles of AI, such as transparency and explainability, responsibility and accountability, fairness and discrimination.[25] Visagie elaborated on reliability, honesty and respect when using AI, plus the fact that these students need to unveil clearly and

[18] Rendani Sipho Netanda, Joel Mamabolo, and Mahlapahlapana Themane, "Do or Die: Student Support Interventions for the Survival of Distance Education Institutions in a Competitive Higher Education System," *Studies in Higher Education* 44, no. 2 (2019): 397–414.
[19] Lijia Chen, Pingping Chen, and Zhijian Lin, "Artificial Intelligence in Education: A Review," *IEEE Access* 8 (2020): 75264–78.
[20] Kevin Fuchs and Veronica Aguilos, "Integrating Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education: Empirical Insights from Students about Using ChatGPT," *International Journal of Information and Education Technology* 13,no.9(2023):1365–71.
[21] Chen, Chen, and Lin, "Artificial Intelligence in Education: A Review."
[22] Francesc Pedro et al., "Artificial Intelligence in Education: Challenges and Opportunities for Sustainable Development," 2019.
[23] Chong Guan, Jian Mou, and Zhiying Jiang, "Artificial Intelligence Innovation in Education: A Twenty-Year Data-Driven Historical Analysis," *International Journal of Innovation Studies* 4, no. 4 (December 2020): 134–47, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijis.2020.09.001.
[24] Surayyo Amonova, Gulkhayo Juraeva, and Mirjon Khidoyatov, "Harnessing the Potential of Artificial Intelligence in Language Learning: Is AI Threat or Opportunity?," in *Proceedings of the 7th International Conference on Future Networks and Distributed Systems*, 2023, 292–97.
[25] Bopape, Visagie, and Engelbrecht, "Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Research - Opening Address."

thoroughly how they use it in their studies: they should act responsibly, taking into cognisance that they are accountable for the work they produce.[26]

Students need to use AI fairly so that it does not replace them as humans, as argued by Yereslov.[27] For B.Ed. Honours students should definitely not do the work by relying only on AI, without exercising their thinking and activating their own skills. Students also need to exercise honesty as they incorporate AI during their studies. In other words, AI has the potential to support students, but they also have a responsibility to adhere to ethical principles for AI.

**An Integrated Education Curriculum that fosters Assesment Transformative Practices**

Today's Honours students live in the 4IR era, where technological practices are the order of the day. This calls for the transformation of traditional ways, to new ways of thinking and doing things. There is a great need for transformation practices that will align with the 4IR, and AI implementation is among these. Bygstad et al.[28] advocated for digital transformation, which is enabled by the inclusion of technology.[29] On the same note, Selwyn added that higher education institutions are the perfect places for creating the new knowledge economies, and digital technologies are a means of achieving this.[30] This indicates that the use of AI as a means of transforming the curriculum and assessment strategies is in line with digital transformation.[31] Reflective assignments, for example, may be used alongside AI strategies using AI-generating tools. Vandeyar opined in a university opinion piece that,

> A curriculum aimed not only at preparing students for the future, but one that nurtures the humane element by addressing the dynamics of power and social, cultural, and cognitive justice education … the transformation of the curriculum should focus on race (in)equalities and all other kinds of inequalities that are produced and reproduced in educational spaces by educational processes, practices, and discourses.[32]

For some time now, electronic assessment has seen the use of electronic technology and tools to design and administer assessments, collect and store students' assessment evidence, grade performance, provide feedback and generate reports.[33] However, it is now time for a paradigm shift to complement assessment strategies with a transformative approach, using AI. Bosch et al. argued for the importance of aligning AI initiatives and the data used to train AI models with the specific needs and characteristics of local communities in Africa.[34] This calls for contextualising the AI initiatives to African communities and taking their needs into account.

The African philosophy of Ubuntu ("I am because you are") can be used to allow for a sustainable global AI ethics narrative, focusing such a narrative on living in harmony, shared human values and on the ultimate interconnectedness of all humans.[35]

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[26] Bopape, Visagie, and Engelbrecht, "Responsible Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Research - Opening Address."

[27] E. Yereslov, " Calculators Didn't Replace Mathematicians, and AI Won't Replace Humans," 2019, https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/01/calculators-didnt-replace-mathematicians-ai-automati on-work/.

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[29] Bendik Bygstad et al., "From Dual Digitalization to Digital Learning Space: Exploring the Digital Transformation of Higher Education," *Computers & Education* 182 (2022): 104463; Dean Collin Langeveldt, Doniwen Pietersen, and Arrie van Wyk, "South African Legal Framework to Prepare Pre-Service Teacher Education Programmes: A Freirean Approach," *Research in Educational Policy and Management* 5, no. 3 (2023): 95–107.

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[32] S. Vandeyar, " Curriculum Transformation – How Do We Do It? Whose Knowledge Counts?," 2021, https://www.up.ac.za/centre-for-diversity-and-social-cohesion/news/post_3034434-curriculum-transformation-how-do-we-do-it-whose-knowledge-counts.

[33] Indira Koneru, "Exploring Moodle Functionality for Managing Open Distance Learning E-Assessments," *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education* 18, no. 4 (2017): 129–41.

[34] Tanja Bosch et al., "South African University Students' Use of AI-Powered Tools for Engaged Learning," *Available at SSRN 4595655*, 2023.

[35] C.T. Okolo, K. Aruleba, and G. Obaido, " Responsible AI in Africa—Challenges and Opportunities.," 2023.

**Transforming Assessment Practices for Learning Through Assessing Knowledge and Skills**

Is assessment an appraisal, or is it geared for looking at what is wrong, rather than looking at what is right? Is assessment about assessment of learning or assessment for learning? Do assessment practices need to be transformed? These are buzzing questions relative to assessment that should be answered. Assessment should promote knowledge, skills and competency development.[36] Manyike submitted that since assessment in ODeL institutions aims to overcome barriers of distance, time and space, it should be coupled with opportunities for students to engage with the lecturer other students and more knowledgeable fellow students to enhance their learning opportunities.[37]

These approaches emphasise adaptability, diversity and ongoing feedback, enabling students to show their learning in ways that are appropriate for their particular circumstances.[38] Transformative assessments include a variety of techniques, including project-based assignments, reflective diaries, peer assessments and e-portfolios, in addition to standard tests. These diverse assessment forms foster critical thinking, creativity and the application of course material in real-world contexts, in addition to evaluating a student's knowledge and abilities.[39] These are essential ingredients for an education space to work towards transforming curricula and assessment practices, but more particularly, to also think of how to include AI and its use towards transformation.

Furthermore, ODeL universities should use technology to improve the assessment process through transformative assessment approaches. Digital tools such as learning management systems (LMS) offer interactive assessment platforms, immediate feedback and continuous assistance.[40] Examples of interactive and captivating learning environments include online forums, virtual simulations and automated tests. These technical linkages facilitate the tracking of students' progress, the identification of areas in which they might need further assistance and the provision of tailored feedback.

ODeL has an important role in socio-economic development, especially in Africa, where a large percentage of the population lives below the poverty line. In such cases, ODeL advances access to higher education to people whose prospects are to improve their own, and the situations of their communities.[41] Assessment in ODeL institutions should bridge the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged persons by providing equal opportunities. Assessment is meant to assist people in ameliorating their situations. Fyn and Mashile argued that one cannot divorce alignment between learning and teaching and assessment.[42] This suggests that if learning and teaching are aligned with an ODeL situation, so should be assessment. This is affirmed by Chan who posited that,

> Universities must take responsibility for decisions made regarding the use of generative AI in teaching and learning, which includes being transparent about data collection and usage, and being receptive to feedback and criticism. By disclosing information about the implementation of generative AI, including the algorithms employed, their functions, and any potential biases or limitations, universities can foster trust and confidence among students and staff in AI technology usage.[43]

[36] Lorette Jacobs, "Openness in Assessment Practices: Reviewing Assessment in an Open Distance ELearning (ODeL) Environment," *Https://Wcol2019. Ie*, 2019, 453.

[37] Tintswalo Vivian Manyike, "Postgraduate Supervision at an Open Distance E-Learning Institution in South Africa," *South African Journal of Education* 37, no. 2 (2017); S Chaudhary and Niradhar Dey, "Assessment in Open and Distance Learning System (ODL): A Challenge," *Open Praxis* 5, no. 3 (2013): 207–16.

[38] J.W. Gikandi, D. Morrow, and N.E. Davis, "Online Formative Assessment in Higher Education: A Review of the Literature," *Computers & Education* 57, no. 4 (December 2011): 2333–51, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2011.06.004.

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[42] Angelo Fynn and Elias Oupa Mashile, "Continuous Online Assessment at a South African Open Distance and E-Learning Institution," in *Frontiers in Education*, vol. 7 (Frontiers Media SA, 2022), 791271.

[43] Cecilia Ka Yuk Chan, "A Comprehensive AI Policy Education Framework for University Teaching and Learning," *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* 20, no. 1 (2023): 38.

Assessment strategies should aim to judge students' targeted learning outcomes, creating learning opportunities and promoting self-directed learning[44]. Therefore, as assessors in ODeL institutions employ their assessment strategies, they should always take into cognisance the purpose of assessment, which is to create learning opportunities and promote self-directed learning.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The integration of generative AI into higher education assessment presents a pivotal opportunity to advance decolonial agendas by moving beyond standardised practices in ODeL, towards linguistically hegemonic grading practices.[45] Research indicates that, when critically deployed, AI tools may provide personalised, formative feedback that supports diverse writing styles and cultural expressions, thereby challenging the privileging of dominant academic English. This aligns with a social justice approach to assessment, which seeks to disrupt entrenched biases and create more equitable learning experiences for students from historically marginalised backgrounds.[46] Consequently, AI is increasingly framed not as a threat to academic integrity, but as a potential partner in decolonising pedagogy and fostering inclusive assessment for learning.

## CONCLUSION

AI may transform assessment practices in higher education institutions, addressing formative assessment concerns and promoting transformation on various educational levels. To think transformatively about education assessment practices requires institutions to reflect on the complexities of their communities and ensure equal opportunities for all students. AI may be used to design inclusive assessments, providing multiple ways for students to represent their knowledge. This is particularly important for B.Ed. Honours students' need to be free to use AI during their assessments. Decolonising AI in higher education requires recognising the colonial features and racialising forces of AI technologies, redesigning AI in terms of decolonial ethics and solidarity. However, this does not take away from stakeholders' challenging power structures and biases within AI systems and technologies in the higher education space, where inequity is still rising, and inclusive and transformative futures should be the order of the day. In SA, where historical inequalities persist in the educational system, adopting a transformative approach relative to AI is crucial. AI systems used for student assessment may reflect biases and discrimination from the colonial era, leading to unfair outcomes for many marginalised groups. However, AI has the potential to accelerate scientific discovery and improve research effectiveness for Unisa B.Ed. Honours students, as shown in this work, particularly foreground in the transformation theory of Jack Mezirow to challenge lecturers, but also to encourage students to shift from one developmental phase or stage to the next while they are studying. As students progress through these stages, they are liberated from stifling patterns of expectation. These expectations are increasingly experience-integrative, inclusive, distinctive and porous in assessment practices at higher education spaces such as the Department of Educational Foundations at UNISA.

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## ABOUT AUTHORS

Doniwen Pietersen is Professor in the College of Education at the University of South Africa (Unisa), where he also serves as Co-Chair of Research in the Department of Education Foundation. He is also Editor-in-Chief Mentee of a prestigious South African Science Journal, called SAJS. He holds doctoral degrees in Philosophy and in Policy Studies in Education. His research interests lie in the philosophy of education, particularly in issues related to Freirean humanising frameworks, critical pedagogy, feminist theory, the pedagogy of care, social justice, and education policy, with a specific focus on how these disciplines inform transformative pedagogies and equity-driven policy reform. He has published a monograph and several co-edited books, and has contributed widely to accredited journals, further

enriching scholarly discourse through peer review, postgraduate supervision, and participation in national and international research conferences. He is committed to ethical scholarship, inclusive knowledge production, and expanding access to academic research.

Mbusiseni Celimpilo Dube is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Foundations in the College of Education at the University of South Africa, Pretoria. He started his academic journey at the University of Zululand, moved to North-West University on AP promotion, and now works for the University of South Africa. He has made an impact on his niche area, which is student support within History Education and History of Education scholarships. He has also contributed to the scholarship of student teachers and dynamics of teaching practice, as well as trust as the cornerstone of a successful supervisor-student relationship. He has published papers in accredited journals and some book chapters as well. He has supervised and co-supervised masters and doctoral students to completion. He has presented many papers at national and international conferences. He has externally examined many dissertations and theses from national and international institutions of higher education. He has also peer-reviewed many scholarly articles and served as an external moderator for some modules in domestic higher education institutions.