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Abstract
In 2004 the universities of Durban-Westville and Natal merged as part of the national restructuring of higher education in South Africa. These institutions’ faculties and schools of education were, arguably, centres of excellence for research in adult education, teacher education and professional development, mathematics education and gender in education. In its institutional tagline of ‘the premier university of African Scholarship’, the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) expressed a vision that marked a significant departure from the past. Questions about the meaning of African Scholarship lead the authors to explore how the former institutions’ postgraduate research constitutes a gene pool that already included strands of the central concept in the merged institution’s vision statement.

This article explores the postgraduate educational research output stored in the PPER archive from the University of KwaZulu-Natal and its former institutions, a body of over 370 theses, with a focus on the Doctoral theses. We describe how the earlier and current institutions’ key areas of research foci manifest in these theses and critically interrogate the research output i.e. how the ‘ancestor’ institutions’ postgraduate research might have anticipated the UKZN vision. We argue that the postgraduate education research from the two ‘ancestor’ institutions shows evidence of similar formative DNA-like strands to African Scholarship, and were a necessary precondition and preparatory stage for UKZN’s emergence and adoption of an African Scholarship vision in 2004.

INTRODUCTION
Since the demise of Apartheid and the adoption of democracy in South Africa in 1994, higher education has been restructured to have fewer institutions serving the national redevelopment and transformation project (Parker 2003). One outcome of these socio-political changes is that higher education institutions have sought to redefine and reposition their organisations (governance, teaching, research and community service) in terms of a post-apartheid democratic and African discourse. The most highly publicised exposition of this discourse is former President Thabo...
Mbeki’s ‘I am an African’ speech delivered on 8 May 1996 at the parliamentary launch of the Constitution of South Africa (Gevisser 2008). Mbeki’s speech generated debate about the meaning of African renaissance, Africanisation and its form within the higher education sector, African Scholarship. This latter construct, African Scholarship, is the conceptual focus of this article.

Our purpose is to develop an understanding of the concept of African Scholarship, in relation to the University of KwaZulu-Natal which integrates the idea in its institutional vision and branding, and to explore how the notion of African Scholarship is borne out in the postgraduate education research completed between 1995–2004 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and its former universities of Natal and Durban-Westville.

CONCEPTUALISING AFRICAN SCHOLARSHIP

Among South African education scholars we see the question about African Scholarship emerging through attempts to define an African philosophy of education. Philip Higgs (2003) proposes that ubuntu, the Nguni humanistic idea that ‘I am a person through you’, is the fundamental element for conceptualising an African philosophy of education. Ben Parker (2003), however, argues that Higgs’ emphasis on communalism leads to an attenuated understanding of African education; instead he contends that an African philosophy of education must include the notion of a critical activism concerned with justice and human rights. To signal this difference he uses the term African(a) philosophy of education. Although Yusef Waghid (2004) sees Higgs’ and Parker’s contributions as complementary, he adds that African-African(a) education and scholarship takes a deliberative inquiry stance. It does this in order to be responsive to the African learner’s needs. Lesley le Grange (2004) sees a different strength in an African(a) approach to education; for le Grange it has potential to dislodge dominant normative discourses, including conventional notions of African and Western philosophy. He describes this capability as ‘reconstructive/deconstructive [...]’, recounting visions of Africa’s history and reconstructing it to the present’ (Le Grange 2004, 152). These ideas point to there being an African approach to research and teaching within higher education and are advanced by Kwasi Wiredu, an African scholar located in the United States.

Wiredu (2005) proposes that the Africanisation of higher education entails the coupling of African and Western knowledge, and a mix of African and Western ways of thinking, learning, and engaging in enquiry. The strengths and insights of African ideas are to be recognised, studied, and used to enhance and advance traditional Western approaches in the academy. For example, Wiredu identifies the integration and coherence of theory with practice as one of the strengths of traditional African methodologies. Importantly, Wiredu sees the defining feature of African Scholarship being that knowledge is used in the interests of Africa. Thus, within his framing of ideas, teaching and research in higher education in South Africa would be situated and orientated to the African environment, social context, and its challenges.
Although Kai Horsthemke (c2009) recognises the Afrocentrism in standpoints such as that held by Wiredu. Horsthemke refers to the Africanisation of higher education and knowledge as the pursuit of indigenisation as a (re)turn to African knowledge systems and having an emphasis on finding ‘African answers to African problems’ (Horsthemke c2009, 8–9). He also makes the point that indigenisation, which suggests the local, is in tension with the homogenising forces in internationalisation and globalisation. This raises questions about Wiredu’s idea of blending of Western and African knowledges and methodologies, and neither Wiredu nor Horsthemke begin to consider the form/s that African Scholarship takes in postgraduate research.

Beyond education, other South African scholars have considered what constitutes African Scholarship. For example, Makgoba and Seepe (2004, 19) contend that universities in Africa ‘are served not only by adapting [their] scholarship to the social structure and the cultural environment of Africa but by also producing knowledge that takes the African condition and the African identity as its central problem’. This understanding encompasses the topic and research question as well as the stance of the researcher, which would place ‘the African world-view at the centre of analysis’ (2004, 41). They differ from Wiredu’s moderate position on blending Western and African approaches to research; they hold that although Western research paradigms have value they have ‘proved to be inadequate for the challenges faced by the African continent’ (2004, 47). Makgoba and Seepe (2004, 27–28) describe the process of achieving African Scholarship within universities as transformative and refer to it as ‘Africanisation’, which they envisage as an ongoing process.

In summary: despite differences in emphasis, Wiredu and the other scholars conceive of African Scholarship as a broad construct that foregrounds the situatedness of Africa and the African, being attentive to communalism, social justice and deliberation, as well as blending Western and African methodologies. Although inexact and disparate, these features (or categories) provide, in our view, a starting point for researching a practice of African Scholarship among South Africa’s higher education institutions.

**HIGHER EDUCATION AND AFRICAN SCHOLARSHIP**

Higher education institutions in South Africa are deploying resources to indicate their organisational commitments to an Africanisation project. For example, an institution might forge an identity that foregrounds its location in Africa and service to Africa’s populations. Higher education institutions in South Africa have accepted their African locatedness and this is sometimes expressed explicitly. For example, the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) encapsulates its vision by branding itself as ‘The premier university of African Scholarship’. Such branding serves to distinguish the institution from other higher education institutions. An alternative way in which institutions might pursue an Africanisation project is to seek to infuse and prioritise an African perspective in the conduct of their affairs as well as the curriculum of their academic programmes and research agenda. This latter example would be about
Author

substantive scholarship as opposed to merely acknowledging the spatial locatedness. One example of this is when the University of South Africa (UNISA) established a research centre in 2003 to study the African renaissance (University of South Africa c2006).

The UKZN example is intriguing in that it employs the technique of branding to pronounce an African institutional identity while the content of the branding lays claim to scholarship that is essentially African. Thus, this higher education institution is the focus of this article.

On its website UKZN provides its interpretation of African Scholarship (University of KwaZulu-Natal c2005) as involving UKZN being grounded in and interfacing with its local, regional and continental context, while not neglecting global imperatives. It asserts that a commitment to African Scholarship means that UKZN recognises the legacy of apartheid in identity formation and the need to imagine and reconstruct post-apartheid society by an engagement with local communities’ issues through social partnership. This perspective on African Scholarship coheres with the conceptualisations of an African philosophy of education and the Africanisation of education as discussed above.

In this article we explore how aspects of these conceptualisations of African Scholarship are constituted in postgraduate educational research undertaken between 1995–2004 at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and its ancestor universities of Durban-Westville and Natal by posing several questions:

• To what extent does the research engage with ubuntu or communalism in education?
• How do the postgraduate researchers explore rights to education, power and justice issues?
• In what way is the research deliberative, opening up avenues for recounting and reconstructing African lived experience?
• Does research work towards a harmonisation of African and Western ways of knowing, understanding reality, and is there evidence of a deliberative research practice?
• How attentive are the postgraduate researchers to the African context and the African learner?

Thus, our focus is not the technique of superficially and extrinsically branding a scholarly African identity; rather our attention is on the substantive matter of scholarship that is intrinsically and distinctively African. We address these questions first by describing the data, our relationship to that data, and how we have endeavoured to ameliorate bias. Second, we overview the histories of the two institutions that were merged to form UKZN. We describe these two institutions as UKZN’s ‘ancestor’ institutions. We follow the UKZN overview with a statistical analysis of the PhD educational research data and an in-depth critical reading of three theses. The discussion of data from UKZN’s ‘ancestor’ institutions is a ‘backward mapping’ (Elmore 1979) exploration of UKZN’s African Scholarship
in relation to the theoretical construction of what constitutes an Africanisation of scholarship. We argue that the postgraduate educational research from the ‘ancestor’ institutions shows that some of the characteristics, which we describe metaphorically as ‘DNA material’, were already present. Notwithstanding the possibility of a weak commitment to Africanisation, or even resistance, we contend that traces of African Scholarship were in existence already by the start of 2004 and thus available to those at the merged UKZN and its vision statement about African Scholarship.

**METHODOLOGY**

We draw on a data set of 371 Doctoral and Masters degree theses on educational topics completed over 1995–2003 at the Universities of Durban-Westville, Natal and in 2004 at the merged institution of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. The total data set comprises 28 Doctoral and 343 Masters theses. The total number for each institution is: 115 from University of Durban-Westville, 176 from University of Natal, and 52 from University of KwaZulu-Natal. There were 28 theses and dissertations for which no indication of institutional affiliation was available on the title pages. Our argument is based on an analysis of a database containing information about the 28 doctoral theses and a close reading of three of these.

One danger in answering the questions above concerns bias. The questions require a respective analysis of studies that predate the UKZN vision about African Scholarship. Those researches were undertaken at the Universities of Durban-Westville and Natal. In addition, the authors of this article are associated with UKZN, either as present or past employees or as postgraduate students. These two aspects (retrospective analysis and institutional association) might blunt the critique such that it smacks of historical revisionism to fit notions of African Scholarship and triumphalism. In addition to adopting a critical self-reflective stance as researchers, our strategy to obviate these pitfalls entailed an iterative writing process that involved critical readers and independent reviewers.

The next section provides a brief history of the University of KwaZulu-Natal and its ‘ancestor’ institutions that facilitates the backward mapping approach used in the discussion of the data set.

**UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL**

Although the University of KwaZulu-Natal was established in 2004 as part of the national restructuring of higher education, its one hundred year history can be traced back through the merger between the University of Natal and the University of Durban-Westville (University of KwaZulu-Natal 2009). The ‘ancestor’ institutions are significant to the formation of the University of KwaZulu-Natal in that they contribute different histories that can be expressed simplistically in the nomenclature of historically black university (HBU) or historically disadvantaged institution (HDI) and historically white university (HWU). These terms signal and mask the
more nuanced differences, which are clarified in White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (Department of Education 1997, 8):

There is an inequitable distribution of access and opportunity for students and staff along lines of race, gender, class and geography ... gross discrepancies in the participation rates of students from different population groups, indefensible imbalances in the ratios of black and female staff compared to whites and males, and equally untenable disparities between historically black and historically white institutions in terms of facilities and capacities.

The Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions (Soudien et al. 2008) also refers to historically black/white institutions as well as English and Afrikaans medium institutions. To focus uncritically on such disparities and inequalities may corrode the transformative intention and cohesion sought through the merger. Thus, the University of KwaZulu-Natal website refers to the bringing together of ‘rich histories’ (University of KwaZulu-Natal 2009) yet it only provides the brief facts.

The University of Natal began as a college in Pietermaritzburg in 1910, with its commemorative Howard College campus being opened in 1931 after World War 1. The institution experienced expansion so that it was granted university status in 1949. Initially, the University served the broad higher education needs of the white community, but by 1947 a Medical School was added in Durban specifically for African, Indian and Coloured students. In the 1980s the University of Natal was among the higher education institutions with some staff and students organising to oppose the repressive apartheid regime and open the institution to students of all races for an example of such student activism see the report of the National Union of South African Students (1987) (for an example of such student activism see the report of the National Union of South African Students (1987)).

By 2004, the year of the merger, the University of Natal had become renowned nationally, indeed internationally, for its expertise in the fields of adult education (for example, see Aitchison 2000a, b, c; Aitchison 2000d; Baatjes 2003; Harley 2004; Hemson 1999) and gender and education (for example, see Morrell 2001a; Morrell 2001b; Morrell and Moletsane 2002). In addition, the Left-leaning Education Policy Unit (EPU), founded by the University and National Education Co-ordinating Committee in 1987, constituted an important node for mobilising groups within education, also nurturing researchers who have played significant roles as scholars and policy-makers (Education Policy Unit (Natal) 1998). For example, the current Minister for Higher and Further Education, Dr. Blade Nzimande, as well as one of the authors of this article held positions as director of the EPU at various times. In terms of conventional academic practice, the School of Education, Training and Development (Pietermaritzburg campus) was publisher of the Journal of Education. This initiative, nurtured by Ken Harley, achieved government recognition in 2004, and was an important move for the growing circle of South African scholars using the
Africanising scholarship: The case of UDW, Natal and UKZN postgraduate educational research

theoretical frames from Basil Bernstein. Several members from the Howard College and Pietermaritzburg campuses had, from time to time, participated on ministerial committees to review education policies and advise the Minister of Education (for example, Professor A Muthukrishna served on the Ministerial Committee to Review the Organisation, Governance and Funding of Schools (Hunter et al. 1995)), while others were appointed at national and provincial levels to head the government’s education departments.

The story of the University of Durban-Westville (UDW) is different. UDW’s origins are pegged to the middle years of the apartheid era (1948–2000) with government establishment in the 1960s as the University College for Indians, a community for whom education was highly prized as a means of achieving social mobility and professional status. This initial racialised institutional history as a college for Indians led to it being associated with apartheid and thus shunned by potential students. In 1971 it was granted university status and thereafter UDW became ‘a site of major anti-apartheid struggle’ until it was opened to all races in 1984 (University of KwaZulu-Natal 2009). Similar to the University of Natal’s initiative with the EPU, UDW founded the Macro Education Policy Unit (MEPU, later to be known as the Centre for Evaluation, Research and Education Policy), which served a similar formative role for many leading education researchers, and policy-makers. Some of the former directors have gone on to play key roles in the National Research Foundation, Human Sciences Research Council, and other universities. For example, Professor Jonathan Jansen, is Vice Chancellor of the University of the Free State and a popular commentator and scholarly author on South African politics and the education system.

Under Jansen’s leadership, the outspoken academic journal, Perspectives in Education, relocated from the University of the Witwatersrand to UDW for several years. Also significant were the numbers of staff and postgraduate students taking up innovative narrative and biographical approaches in their research. By the year of merger, 2004, members of the School of Education at UDW were at the forefront of fields such as teacher education and professional development as well as mathematics education. This is evident in their participation in government policy structures (for example, Professor M Samuels was seconded for three years to serve on the three-person Ministerial Committee on Teacher Education (Ministerial Committee on Teacher Education 2004)).

These snapshot histories of the two urban-based ancestor institutions illuminate the different ways in which they engaged in scholarship, to bring relevance to higher education in the historical and political context of the day.

The merged University of KwaZulu-Natal is the major higher education institution in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, serving a population of 10.25 million people in 2007 (Statistics South Africa 2009). This population is culturally, linguistically and racially diverse, with the majority (80.9%) speaking isiZulu as their first language, followed by 13.6 per cent claiming English as their first language and only 1.5 per cent being Afrikaans mother-tongue speakers (Statistics South Africa 2009). This
Author

demographic profile is compelling in terms of influencing the institution to prioritise an African Scholarship project. We take this up next by looking at the postgraduate education research from the institution.

DISCUSSION

The confluence of political activism and scholarship led some academics at both ‘ancestor’ institutions taking up influential national posts that were then instrumental in leading the education policy direction. Arguably these strands and their confluence yield the imperative for research to serve the community and uplift it, and were preparatory in the merged University’s vision of African Scholarship. This section provides evidence of African Scholarship as an emergent African approach to postgraduate educational research undertaken under the auspices of UKZN between 1995–2004. The discussion is presented in two parts. First, we provide a statistical analysis which yields institutional trends. Second, we analyse three theses, selected purposefully as exemplars of research promoted by scholars from the three Schools across the two institutions that eventually merged to form the single Faculty of Education in UKZN. Our rationale is that not all the features of an African notion of scholarship are found in every Doctoral thesis from the ‘ancestor’ universities. Thus, we take up theses written by three researchers, to explore how their work performs one or more of the features and how this might be considered as evidence of the tenor within the education academic community at the merged UKZN in 2004 to support the adoption of an African Scholarship vision.

Statistical description

A search conducted in July 2009 of the PPER database showed that 371 researchers wrote education theses (1995–2004) and dissertations at the ‘ancestor’ institutions and merged institution in that period. As mentioned above, title pages mentioning the relevant ‘ancestor’ or merged institution show that 115 studies were undertaken by postgraduate researchers at the University of Durban-Westville, 176 studies at the University of Natal (97 at the Howard College campus and 79 at the Pietermaritzburg campus), and 52 under the auspices of the merged University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2004, although a single Faculty of Education was only constituted in 2005. The remaining theses did not indicate institutional affiliation on their title pages.

All the theses were written in English, and, in all years except 1998 and 2004 there are more female authors than male authors (see Figure 1).
Apartheid higher education was a privileged and relatively exclusive domain for the White community in South Africa (Soudien et al. 2008). Thus, an analysis that tracks trends about the race of postgraduate researchers is important for understanding the progress made to transform higher education and access particularly to higher degrees. Using Apartheid racial categories, we analysed names as a proxy for racial classification. We recognised that this is a crude tool but, in the absence of reliable data, we decided that the proxy is sufficient for indicating a trend despite its weaknesses. Thus, we find that most authors are either Indian (141) or African (132), followed by those who are White (97) (see Figure 2). Only one Coloured postgraduate author was found.
This finding shows that by the first decade of democracy in South Africa, most postgraduate researchers of UKZN and its ancestor institutions comprised a racially heterogeneous group, with African researchers being a significant component of each year’s cohort.

A similar pattern about the racial categories of the Masters researchers emerges in the analysis of those dissertations (see Figure 3).

![Figure 3: Masters dissertations from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (1995–2004) by authors' race, excluding those 'not known'](image)

However, a different pattern emerges in relation to the racial categories of education researchers at doctoral level (see Figure 4) where we find that the majority are Indian. The proportion of African researchers at doctoral level decreases compared to the proportion of the Masters researchers who are African. The proportion of white researchers at Doctoral level increased slightly in comparison to the proportion of white researchers at Masters level. Although the number of Doctoral theses used for this racial analysis is too low to construct a statistically significant and reliable finding, the trend in the racial proportions of Doctoral researchers may be explained partly by the large concentrations of the Indian population in the urban areas where the University of KwaZulu-Natal is located. The trend may also be a residual influence from one of the ‘ancestor’ institutions, namely the University of Durban-Westville, having been established initially to serve the higher education needs of that Indian community. However, as we mentioned above, the apartheid-era mission of the University of Durban-Westville had been resisted in favour of non-racialism.
Most importantly, though, is the point that the trend in the racial profiles, which reflects the demography of the province rather than the race-based origins of the ‘ancestor’ institutions, would have favourably positioned the new University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2004 to consider an identity for itself that was aligned to an Africanisation of scholarship.

We conducted a content analysis of the Doctoral theses to identify the features of African Scholarship identified by education scholars such as Higgs, Parker, Le Grange, Waghid and Wiredu (see sample of this in Table 1).

Table 1: A sample from the content analysis of the African Scholarship generic features in 5 education Doctoral theses from UKZN

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theses</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>The five generic features of African Scholarship as proposed by various South African and African education scholars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ubuntu/Communalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>On becoming someone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>People who stutter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Life istory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Narrative of lives, practices and the evade…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers [in Durban]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Women’s transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Distance learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Distance learning in Kenya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>Use of Sketchpad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary schools [in Durban]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The major finding from this analysis is inconsistency, in that such features are not consistently present across all the Doctoral theses from UKZN. This is to be expected in that African Scholarship only becomes an explicit institutional goal after the merger in 2004. Nevertheless, we find the generic features present, though in some more than others, when we consider the whole body of Doctoral theses. Furthermore, African Scholarship is not unique or particular to UKZN and its ‘ancestor’ institutions; indeed, a similar finding may apply equally to other South African higher education institutions. However, the content analysis indicates that even before the merged UKZN committed itself to work consciously towards its vision of African Scholarship, its ‘ancestor’ institutions were already promoting research that was manifesting traces of the generic features. Even if the traces are not found in every one of the theses, they are evidence, by way of backward mapping, of ‘DNA material’ present within the values and thinking of many members of the academic community. Arguably this yielded UKZN’s public identification with and commitment to African Scholarship in 2004.

Critical reading of three Doctoral theses
This sub-section reviews three theses selected purposively to provide a spread (see Table 2) that takes into account the year of completion, ‘ancestor’ institution, the topic and methodology of the study, as well as assumptions about the researcher’s race, gender, and nationality.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria/Thesis</th>
<th>i</th>
<th>ii</th>
<th>iii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Natal</td>
<td>Natal</td>
<td>Durban-Westville</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of completion</td>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>2003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Theory and practice in teachers' work</td>
<td>Gender in early schooling</td>
<td>Self-esteem among disabled teenagers and inclusive schooling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The researcher's stated methodological approach</td>
<td>Case study and Participant observation</td>
<td>Multi-site ethnography</td>
<td>One-group post test and Case study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assumption about the researcher's gender</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
i) In her thesis on ‘Power and Identity in Theory-Practice Relationships: An Exploration of Teachers’ Work Through Qualitative Research’ (UN), Sharman Wickham engages two theoretical pursuits. The first concerns theorising the relationship of theory and practice in teachers’ work, and the second is a reflexive discussion of qualitative research, in relation to the development of her own understanding and practice as a qualitative researcher during the course of the study.

The first theme of ‘teachers’ work’ is significant because although her thesis was completed in 1997, she conducted her case studies of five teachers using a participant observation methodology in 1993–1994. The teachers were all white women employed at similar white middle-class schools. This, Wickham argues, was convenient at a time of rapid political and social change in South Africa because it effectively controlled other variables and thereby enabled her to more easily compare the teachers’ work than would have been possible if their race and school contexts had varied. Notwithstanding the merits of this rationale, it casts a shadow over the transferability of her findings about the theory-practice relationships in teachers’ work. This is because it is based on teachers from a minority (albeit economically powerful) racial group in South Africa, working in well-resourced schools that were designed to serve the educational needs of the same privileged minority group. On this count Wickham’s thesis appears not to contribute to African Scholarship.

In the second theme of her thesis, Wickham reflects critically on her understandings of, and the nature and practice of, qualitative research by drawing on several Western philosophers and theorists, particularly Foucault. Nevertheless, there is promise in her exposition of Foucault’s argument in favour of ‘local criticism’ rather than master theories and narratives, and the potential that ‘local criticism’ has to reveal ‘subjugated knowledges’ (441–442). In South Africa during the mid 1990s, an education researcher engaged in studying power and identity (as stated in Wickham’s thesis title) might have read a socio-political interpretation into such theoretical ideas. Indeed, social and political change was the historical characteristic of South Africa at the time. In the education sector teachers were facing non-discriminatory admission to schools, the re-organisation of the schooling sector, the abolition of corporal punishment, and a new curriculum and pedagogy, amongst other things (Chisholm 2004; Kallaway et al. 1997; Motala and Pampallis 2001). However, the South African context has no place in Wickham’s sense of her development as a qualitative researcher; power and identity are mostly decontextualised and

By locating itself solely in Western knowledge systems with no consideration of the African condition of ‘subjugated knowledges’, and realities that the majority of South African teachers face, Wickham’s study fails to mark a departure from the apartheid-era assumptions about HWUs. Although Wickham’s work is scholarly, it carries few characteristics of a scholarship that is African. Were the silences and solely Western focus found in Wickham’s thesis characteristic of postgraduate research from the University of Natal’s schools of education, or were other doctoral students oriented differently in relation to African Scholarship? To move towards the answer we look at Deevia Bhana’s thesis.

ii) The 2002 thesis ‘Making Gender in Early Schooling. A multi-sited ethnography of power and discourse: from grade one to two in Durban’ (UN) is relevant to our questions on African Scholarship. In this study, Deevia Bhana conducts a multi-site ethnography of power and discourse, of gender identity and gender discourses, among boys, girls and their teachers in a range of urban school sites. It is therefore significant for advancing scholarship about the possibilities for gender equality in post-apartheid South Africa.

By describing the intersections of schooling with girls, boys, teachers, the links between being masculine or feminine and the productions of gender in different ways and in different schooling contexts, Bhana’s contribution fits the description of African Scholarship at several levels. For example, she explores ubuntu as a cultural practice with possibilities of gender equality in post-apartheid South Africa: ‘based on positive relations and a more inclusive notion of mutual respect’ (196). Bhana also departs from traditional categories of Western notions of ‘fieldwork, textwork and headwork’ (Van Maanen 1988, 4) by challenging Western conventions of linearity showing how, within the structures of gender relations, the spirit of ubuntu may point to the small spaces for gender equality. Bhana’s discussion of ubuntu is singular as we did not find an explicit engagement with it in other theses.

Bhana advocates an exploration of gender identities framed within cultural definitions and discourses. This is because she finds that teachers of different racial groupings within South Africa’s social diversity draw upon and locate themselves within such cultural definitions and discourses. The thesis explores how, for example, an African female teacher acknowledges her power and authority as a teacher within a framework of cultural determination and patterns that are more peaceful, more humane and thus more gender friendly (198). In so doing Bhana illuminates an identity space that Le Grange (2004) might describe as disrupting Western notions of the individual, because it foregrounds a more shared and African way of constructing identity.
By using the voices of South African teachers and young boys and girls drawn from ‘early schooling sites ... overlooked by South African researchers’ (294) Bhana shows her awareness of the participants’ rights to power and justice in making sense of who and what they are. Bhana’s inquiry-based stance makes power central and in her ethnography she moves away from the well-ordered, linear process of Western science. Her descriptions and constructions of children and teachers consider their historical moments and locations. This is reflective of a methodological approach that works towards a harmonization of African and Western ways of knowing, understanding reality and a deliberative practice, and also contributing to the national reconstruction project. Moreover, in relation to the question on African Scholarship, it brings into focus the researcher’s attempt at exploring learners’ rights to education by opening up possibilities for ‘offering boys and girls a space in schooling which does not necessarily lock them into misogynist and violent subject positions’ (297). In summary, Bhana’s study exemplifies postgraduate education research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal’s ‘ancestor’ institution that was classed as HWU, by opening up to African scholars the sexuality and gendered identity among young children as a field of enquiry. Her study marks a departure from the apartheid-era assumptions about HWUs by locating itself unequivocally in an African context and contesting Western knowledge systems about childhood, gender and sexuality.

iii) Sulaiman Airat’s study on ‘Self-concept of the Physically Disabled in Inclusive Secondary Schools’ (UDW) was completed in October 2003. The inclusion of this thesis provides the opportunity to explore the notion of African Scholarship in research that goes beyond South Africa in its focus on education in another African context. Airat conducted a one-group post test and case study of a group of adolescents with physical disabilities, attending an inclusive secondary school in Lagos, Nigeria, in order to assess their self-concept. His topic is compelling in relation to our questions about African Scholarship because it requires him to reconcile, a traditional Western scientific approach and an African cultural orientation to the self concept. Airat discusses inadequacies in conventional psychology instruments and scales to assess the self-concept. He suggests that self-concept scales are measuring instruments that align to a positivist, quantitative and Western scientific approach that objectifies the respondent. In contrast, he asserts that members of Nigerian society are acculturated to conceive of themselves always within the context of community membership. Although Airat does not use the vocabulary of ubuntu in this discussion, his ideas nevertheless resonate with the conception. Thus Airat asserts that it was necessary to use scales developed by Nigerians ‘in Nigeria for Nigerians’ (77). Airat’s statement recalls Le Grange’s (2004) assertion that an Africanisation of scholarship has potential to dislodge dominant Western conventions and yield space for the reconstruction and deconstruction of African experience and knowledge systems. Even with using
African designed instruments, Airat offsets their statistical emphasis with thick-description methods of participant observation and interview, capable of eliciting rich experiential accounts from and about adolescents. Thus he finds a methodological approach that couples typical Western quantitative science with qualitative accounts that accommodate the Nigerian participants who may be more familiar with a story-telling tradition and group work rather than performing individual tasks. Wiredu (2005) sees this harmonisation of Western and African styles as characteristic of an Africanised scholarship.

Nigeria as a location of this study is significant for advancing scholarship and knowledge about education psychology in Africa. His study illuminates issues and dynamics surrounding adolescents and their self-concept, and thereby becomes an important contribution for an African-oriented education psychology.

Airat’s thesis contains evidence of the features of African Scholarship. Although there is little that speaks to deliberation with sampled participants, this does not detract from Airat’s important study. And, even if it is not located within the ‘ancestor’ institution’s fields of research excellence identified above, namely mathematics education and teacher education and professional development, Airat’s contribution is consistent with the institution’s history of social justice advocacy and researching redress for marginalised and oppressed groups. In this respect Airat’s study and the postgraduate education research from this ‘ancestor’ institution contradict the claim generally levelled against South African HBU’s and Africa’s universities as ‘institutions for producing manpower to indigenise the civil service following independence’ (Odora Hoppers 2005, 10).

CONCLUSION

Institutional identity may influence postgraduate research at an institution in subtle and overt ways, and institutional identity may also be influenced and shaped by that same postgraduate research. The second part of this epistemological assumption is relevant to our exploration of the postgraduate education research at the University of KwaZulu-Natal and its ‘ancestor’ institutions between 1995–2004. By probing postgraduate education research to identify characteristics of an African Scholarship, which predate UKZN’s vision statement in 2004, the evidence we have presented in our analysis of the three doctoral theses, suggests that the postgraduate education research from the two ‘ancestor’ institutions, sometimes (but not always) manifests traces of the characteristics of African Scholarship. Where they occur, these traces can be understood as formative DNA-like strands that begin to constitute a preparation for UKZN giving life to its 2004 vision of African Scholarship.

Bhana and Airat as two doctoral researchers working in the two historically separate ‘ancestor’ institutions exemplify the social dislocation and dislocated
struggles that was South Africa during that late period of apartheid, disrupting Western notions of how we come to know and what we come to know. These matters are addressed in South Africa’s Bill of Rights, and the two Doctoral theses provide a window through which to glimpse how some UKZN researchers explored those identity and social justice issues. Such shared concerns provide the necessary ‘DNA material’ for scholars from the ‘ancestor’ institutions to engage in African Scholarship in the merged University of KwaZulu-Natal. To embrace an identity inclusive of African Scholarship necessitates acknowledgement of the history of oppressions as undesirable DNA strands and a commitment to resist such tendencies in the future. Thus, to bring African Scholarship into being, the merged institution should have at its centre a focus on researching the African context, through deliberative ubuntu/communitarian approaches and yielding reconstructive narratives in the years post 2004. This is a worthwhile institutional project which might beckon future researchers.

NOTES

1. An earlier draft of this article was presented at the Kenton Conference in Stellenbosch in 2009. While we acknowledge the useful comments and suggestions from delegates, as well as reviewers and our colleagues in the Project, the findings and conclusions are our own. We especially thank Robert Balfour for his gentle encouragement and advice, and his expertise in cutting the article down to size.

2. One of the theses is a PhD in linguistics but it is included in the PPER database on the grounds that it is about teachers’ and young learners’ interaction during ‘news-time’ at pre-school and the first few grades of primary schooling.

3. The former principal of the University of Natal, Prof E. G. Malherbe (1981), provides a personal account of the institution’s history in his autobiography.

REFERENCES


