

## CHAT RESEARCH PROFILE: JOSEF DE BEER



Research Professor

Research Unit Self-Directed Learning

Faculty of Education

North-West University

Potchefstroom

South Africa

Email: [Josef.debeer@nwu.ac.za](mailto:Josef.debeer@nwu.ac.za)

Josef de Beer's research niche is the epistemological border-crossing between the natural sciences and indigenous knowledge systems, and how indigenous knowledge could be used in the curriculum to contextualize science themes for culturally diverse learners. When Josef joined the Research Unit Self-Directed Learning at the North-West University in 2015, he and Elsa Mentz (see her CHAT research profile) started to focus on how the holders of indigenous knowledge were,

per definition, self-directed learners. Josef and Elsa soon realized that CHAT provides an effective research lens to juxtapose two activity systems (on institutional plane), namely self-directed learning as a subject in one activity system, and indigenous knowledge as subject in the second activity system. They realized that the same tools apply in both activity systems, e.g., cooperative learning and problem-based learning. This research could be summarized by the Latin expression, '*respice, prospice*', as we sometimes need to look back first, in order to look forward. Indigenous knowledge systems have profound insights to offer modern school education.

However, both Josef and Elsa are involved in teacher education, and the two researchers also used CHAT as a lens in research on teacher education in respectively Finland and South Africa, and which Finnish best practices could be applied to the South African context.

In 2021, based on five years' experience of using CHAT in self-directed learning research, Josef and Elsa published a paper in the *South African Journal of Higher Education*, hailing CHAT as a research lens in mixed-methods research. Josef and Elsa suggested in this paper that quantitative data (from the various SDL instruments) should be supplemented by qualitative data, and that CHAT could then be used as a research lens in such mixed-methods research, to provide more nuanced understandings of changes in peoples' self-directed learning. CHAT is a robust meta-theoretical framework, the authors claim, which could provide a thick description of the findings in self-directed learning research.

Currently Josef and Elsa are researching the role of Change Laboratories and fourth-generation CHAT, in bringing about much-needed change in the South African educational sector.

### **Some publications**

Mentz, E., & De Beer, J. (2021). Cultural-Historical Activity Theory as a lens in mixed methods research on self-directed learning. *South African Journal of Higher Education* 35(5), 163-183.

Mentz, E., & De Beer, J. (2020). Self-directed learning in teacher education: Lessons from Finland. In: J de Beer, N. Petersen & H van Vuuren (eds), *Becoming a teacher: Research on the work-integrated learning of student teachers*. Stellenbosch: AOSIS.

Mentz, E., & De Beer, J. (2019). The use of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory in researching the affordances of indigenous knowledge for self-directed learning. In: J. de Beer (Ed), *The decolonization of the curriculum project: The affordances of indigenous knowledge for self-directed learning*. Stellenbosch: AOSIS.

Mentz, E. & De Beer, J. (2019). The affordances of Change Laboratories for improved sustainability and impact of in-service teacher professional development programmes. *Proceedings of the IISES 8th Teaching and Education Conference*, Vienna, Austria, 17 – 20 September 2019, pp 252-271.