



## Centre for health Systems Research & Development

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### Training for advanced research in the narrative study of lives within the context of political and educational transformation: a case study in South Africa

#### CITATION

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#### ABSTRACT

It is widely accepted that the humanities and social sciences in South Africa have stagnated since the end of the anti-apartheid struggle in this country. This article argues that a programme in The Narrative Study of Lives provides a platform for establishing and strengthening a significant component of the training of social and human scientists. Its essence is epistemologically related to indigenous knowledge, cultural transmission and community engagement, and it can therefore contribute towards a democratisation of knowledge. The programme is situated in a participatory learning environment and the supervisors aim for students to assimilate new knowledge at a deep level, engage critically with it and apply it in ways that demonstrate their solid grasp of content and research processes. In addition to this focus on thesis-as-product, supervision is also concerned with the person-as-product.

The programme aims at building students' capacity to master and apply metatheory, substantive theory as well as qualitative research methodology. The epistemology of The Narrative Study of Lives programme is largely based on the phenomenological/interpretivist tradition and it largely operates within an idealist theory of knowledge. The program does emphasise, however, the need to straddle the often-irresolvable antagonisms of subject and object, micro and macro, objectivist and constructivist, and structure and agency. For this reason students are sensitised to distinguish between the biographical, institutional/organisational and the societal contexts within which narratives should be analysed.