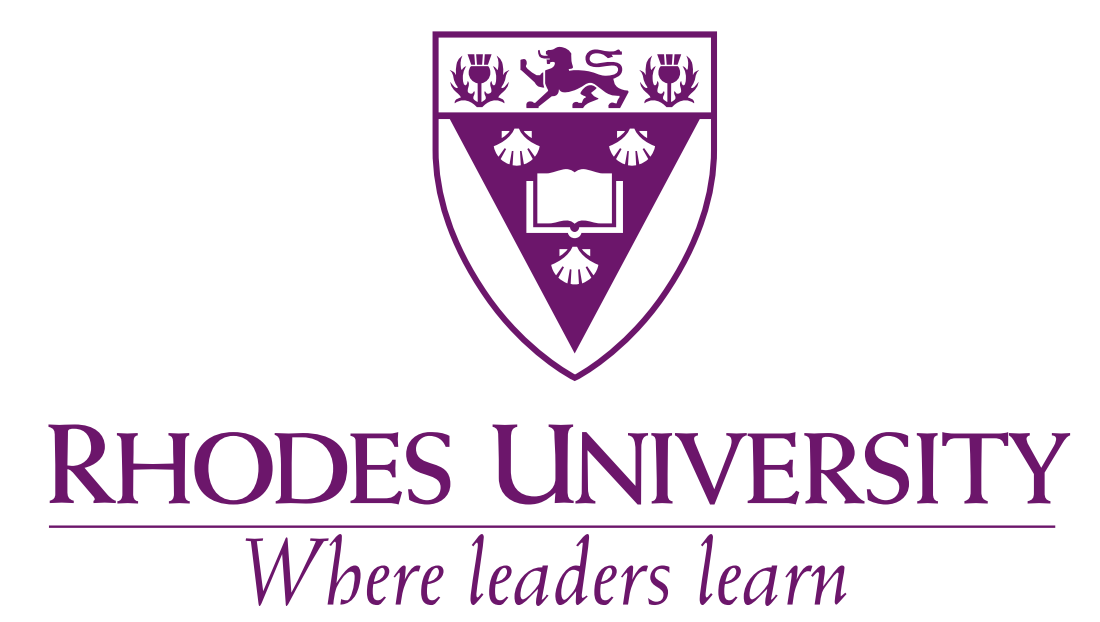


## Fundisa for Change: Teacher professional development research



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### BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The Fundisa for Change programme is a national multi-institutional teacher education programme focusing on transformative environment and sustainability education. It has its origins in the problem of poor systemic support for environment and sustainability education in the South African teacher education system and programmes, despite inclusion of these new knowledge areas in the national curriculum. Supported through a growing national professional learning community that was established in 2011, the Fundisa for Change programme has worked with over 2000 teachers and subject advisors to design, develop and implement formative interventions to address the lack of attention to environment and sustainability education teacher professional development in South Africa.

At a broader level, the programme responds to international and national calls for improving the relevance of education in ways that address three intersecting limits of modernity:

- 1) Ecological destruction of the planet based on a conceptualisation of nature as an exploitable object
- 2) Poverty and inequality based on ongoing exploitation and accumulation of wealth
- 3) Narrow rationalities epitomized by colonial and imperialist thinking (Dussel, 1998; Andreotti, 2011)

Dussel (1998) proposes a new transmodern civilization based on an absolute respect for life in general, and that of the human in particular, in which all other dimensions of existence must be reprogrammed on the postulate of 'perpetual life'. It is this that the Fundisa for Change programme seeks to support in the South African context through working with teachers to improve their subject knowledge, pedagogical praxis and assessment practice.

### RESEARCH PROGRAMME

The Fundisa for Change research programme focusses on new environmental / sustainability concepts in the CAPS curriculum namely, biodiversity, climate change, environmental health, sustainable development and water security. Studies focus on understandings of:

- 1) how situated learning pedagogy may contribute to acquisition of environmental disciplinary knowledge, and

- 2) the ontological and epistemological nature of new environmental knowledge and implications for the school context via teacher education programmes.

The study design involved development of over 20 in-depth case studies, as well as theoretical and thematic analysis. New studies are emerging that are focusing on e-learning pedagogy to support Fundisa for Change professional learning programmes.

### WHAT DID THIS PROJECT ACHIEVE?

Following an earlier baseline review in 2011 (Lotz-Sisitka, 2011) and ten years of research, in 2022 a book titled "Teaching and Learning for Change: Education and Sustainability in South Africa" (Schudel, Songqwaru, Tshininganyamwe & Lotz-Sisitka, 2023) was published capturing key insights from across the case studies, theoretical and thematic analysis along four lines:

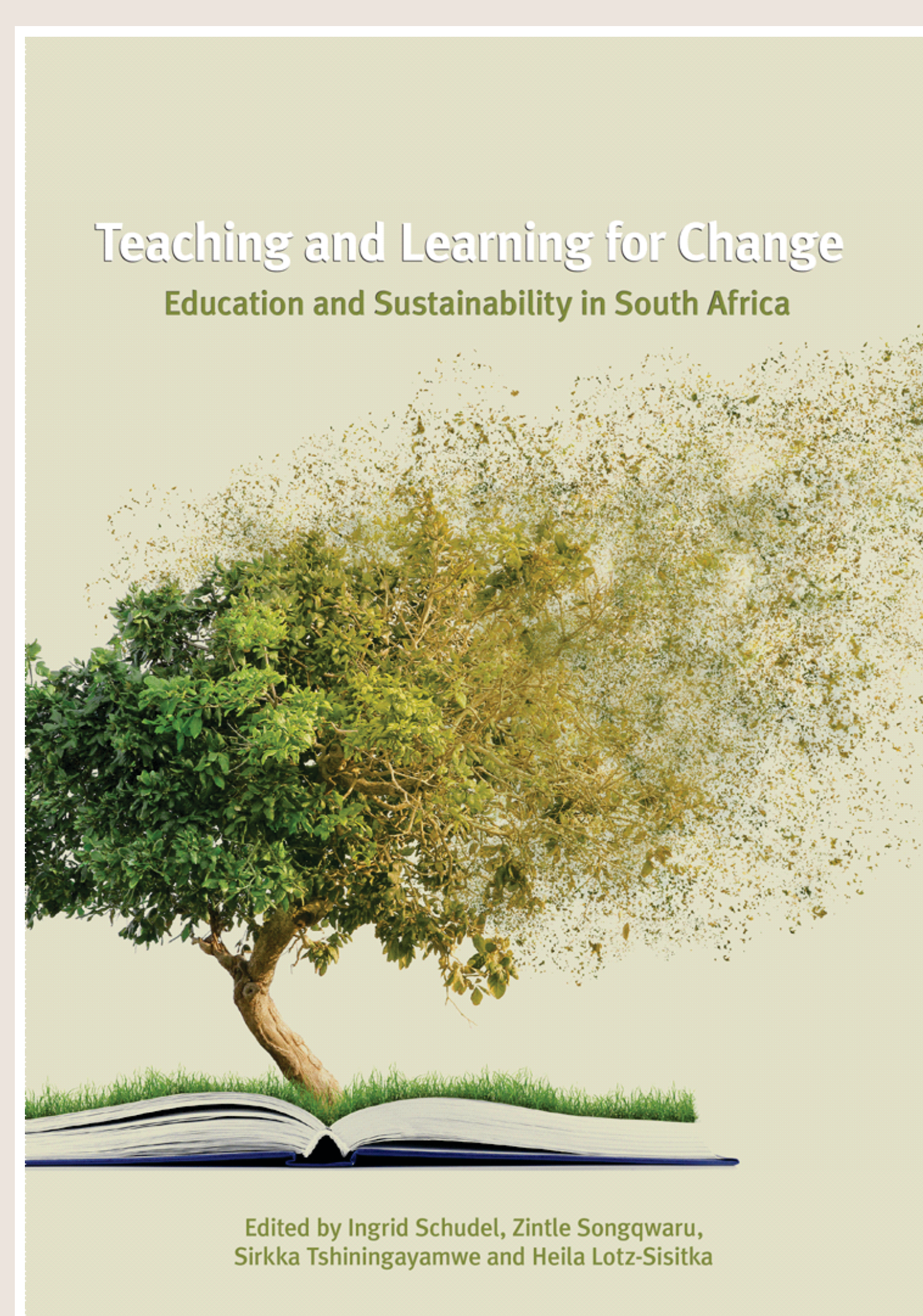
1. Environmental content knowledge in the curriculum
2. Transformative pedagogies for environment and sustainability orientated learning
3. Assessing environmental learning
4. Teacher professional development for environment and sustainability oriented learning

Key findings from the studies reveal that environment and sustainability knowledge is fragmented across the curriculum and lacks internal coherence and progression pathways. Despite this, teachers are able to

implement transformative pedagogies when encouraged to work in local contexts around matters of concern, linking these to curriculum imperatives. Assessing environmental learning requires a broader framing than currently articulated in the curriculum. More attention needs to be given to assessing higher order thinking skills, and values and ethics.

Overall, the programme shows that teacher professional development for environment and sustainability education needs to be mainstreamed into teacher education programmes in South Africa if teachers are to be properly supported to better prepare learners for a future characterised by challenges related to water security, biodiversity loss, climate change and if South Africans are to develop the foundational knowledge necessary for sustainable futures.

Valuable findings are available to inform curriculum development and to better articulate environment and sustainability education as cross cutting concern.



Download a free copy of the book here



Visit the Fundisa for Change website

