
AWARDS: EASA Research Medal 2020



Prof Elsa Mentz

The EASA Research Medal was awarded to Professor Elsa Mentz for her consistent achievement in the field of Education in South Africa over the past decades. Prof Mentz is the Director of the Research Focus Area Self-Directed Learning (SDL) at the North-West University. Under her leadership, SDL has grown from strength to strength, and recently the Research Support Committee of the NWU has recommended that the Research Focus Area is upgraded to Unit status. This speaks of visionary leadership. John Quincy Adams once said: “If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader”. This is a very apt description of the leadership style of Prof Elsa Mentz. Within SDL she has established a very supportive community of practice, that nurture the scholarship development of post-graduate students and staff.

Elsa is a NRF rated researcher (established researcher), and her scholarship centres around self-directed learning and cooperative learning. Having a strong background in computer science, she also does significant work in blended learning. She is also a leading researcher in terms of the use of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory in research. She is a very productive researcher, and she has published in leading accredited journals such as the International Journal of Mobile and Blended Learning, the International Journal of Lifelong Education, and the African Journal of Research in mathematics, Science and Technology Education, amongst others. (Refer to her comprehensive CV). Prof Mentz has published a number of prestigious books as editor, for example “Self-directed learning research: An imperative for transforming the educational landscape” (AOSIS), and “Self-directed learning for the 21st Century: Implications for Higher Education” (AOSIS). She is often invited to present keynote addresses at international conferences, due to her strong footprint in self-directed learning research.

Prof Mentz has built capacity among young scholars by acting as study leader for a large number of students. To date, eleven (11) PhD and twelve (12) M.Ed students have graduated under her supervision. Currently she supervises five postgraduate students, despite her responsibilities as Director (and acting as Executive Dean from time to time).

She served on the Editorial Board of several respected journals, e.g. the African Journal of Research in Mathematics, Science and Technology Education, the International Journal for Self-Directed Learning, and the Journal of Transformation in Higher Education. Prof Mentz has also championed a Special Interest Group (SIG) on Self-Directed Learning under the auspices of EASA.

She also successfully completed large funded research studies (of which she was the principal investigator), e.g. a NRF research project (with funding of R 2,142,000) on cooperative learning strategies to promote self-directed learning (2014 – 2016), and a SANPAD funded project on empowering IT teachers in economically deprived rural schools (with funding of R 668,000, over the period 2010 – 2013). Apart from the practical contribution of this research (improved teaching and

learning practice), she also builds capacity of neophyte scholars, as she involves inexperienced researchers, who she mentors.

If one would ask scholars in the field of self-directed learning (SDL) who the most influential researchers are in the field, the name Elsa Mentz will definitely feature, alongside international leaders such as Lucy Guglielmino and Philip Candy. It is for this reason that we put this nomination forward.