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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between political change and epistemologies and methodologies employed at doctorate level. It does so by analysing the range of topics, questions and methodologies used by doctoral students at the University of Pretoria?s Faculty of Education between 1985 and 2005?a time-frame that covers the decade before and the decade after South Africa?s historical transition to democracy in 1994. During this period the composition of doctoral students at that faculty changed from being largely white and male to a more diverse population in terms of gender and race. A crucial shift took place after 2000 with the arrival of a Black dean who sought to introduce a transformational shift. The paper makes use of Karmon?s notion of epistemic environment, which refers to the way knowledge is conceptualised at institutional level. The data shows how the authoritarian and regulated epistemic environment that shaped the conception of knowledge at the faculty until 2000 created doctoral dissertations that aimed to correct and guide the society but lacked critical discourse and relevance to South Africa?s political, social and educational

context. While the transition to democracy in 1994 produced merely semantic changes, if any, the strong internal initiative to change the research culture from 2000 onwards has managed to shift basic notions of truth and knowledge and the understanding of the role and nature of research. This movement was, however, constrained by the institution?s long-established epistemic environment. (HRK / Abstract übernommen) Herman, Chaya, E-Mail: chaya.herman@up.ac.za