ABSTRACT
Teacher education in South Africa has always been intricately interwoven with the history of the country. From the first antecedents in small Protestant missions, which were established in colonial South Africa, through the ravages of racially separate education systems under apartheid, to the pioneering educational models within an emerging democracy, teacher education has always been made to conform with prevailing political dogmas and aspirations. Its effectiveness as a vehicle for political and social transformation, demonstrates just how well teacher education in South Africa has adapted itself to ideologues and policy makers with different social and political agendas. While enormous challenges such as the closure of teacher training colleges, inadequate investment in language diversity, and questions about the status of the profession remain, teacher education at universities is characterized by high levels of responsiveness to societal demands and a deep commitment to quality. This address reflects on some of the key historical moments of teacher education in South Africa, ponders the current challenges in an emerging democracy, and shares some thoughts about the future of teacher education and educational research in the global context.
Prof Irma Eloff is the dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria. She is the seventh dean and the first woman to hold this position. She is the founder of the continental African Deans of Education Forum – a platform that seeks to present a stronger African voice for deans of Education in the global arena.

In 2012 she was chosen amongst the top three Most Influential Women in Business and Government in South Africa - in the Education category. Irma has worked for the transformation of educational systems in both her research and academic leadership roles. She seeks social justice for all - especially for vulnerable children, schools and communities. Working within the context of an emerging democracy in South Africa, her work with children with disabilities and families affected by HIV/AIDS has spanned multiple scientific disciplines. In July 2014 she won the international Prize for Excellence in HIV Research Related to Children from the International AIDS Society (IAS) and the Coalition for Children Affected by AIDS, in Melbourne. Irma is an alumnus of the Universities of Pretoria, Stellenbosch and Northwest.

Irma is a National Research Foundation-rated researcher and a registered psychologist. A former head of department for Educational Psychology and School Chair for Educational Studies at Pretoria, she has also been a visiting professor in the Psychology department at Yale University during 2001-2002.

She is a past President of the Education Association of South Africa and currently the Chair of the Education Commission of the SA Akademie vir Wetenskap en Kuns. She is an ASSAf member and she was the first Education academic to win the Exceptional Young Researcher Award of the University of Pretoria. She was also amongst the first wave of NRF-rated researchers when the rating system was expanded to social scientists.

Irma has published more than 70 academic articles and book chapters and 49 master’s and doctoral students in Education have completed their studies under her supervision. She has co-authored the book, Life Skills & Assets and she is co-editor of the book Keys to Educational Psychology.

During her term as dean, Education at the University of Pretoria achieved a ranking in the top 150 of the world on the World QS World university rankings.