

**A Comprehensive University at the Heart
of its Communities:
Establishing a Framework for Engagement**

John Desmond Boughey

Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Philosophiae Doctor in Higher Education Studies
(Five-article option)

in the

School of Higher Education Studies

Faculty of Education

University of the Free State

Bloemfontein

January 2014

Promoter:

Prof. M.A. Erasmus

Declaration

I hereby declare that the work which is submitted here is the result of my own independent investigation and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. I further declare that the work was submitted for the first time at this university/faculty towards the Philosophiae Doctor degree and that it has never been submitted to any other university/faculty for the purpose of obtaining a degree.



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Abstract

The thesis documents the construction of a coherent conceptual and practical framework in which to locate the quest to establish community engagement as a legitimate, feasible and viable undertaking in higher education alongside its more established and accepted counterparts of teaching and research, with particular focus on the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) – a rural-based comprehensive university with an urban footprint.

The thesis begins with a brief outline of the national context of community engagement before moving on to a more specific description of the context and recent history of UNIZULU. Certain key concepts are then clarified. A statement of the research concern and objectives of the study is followed by an account of the theoretical framework and research perspective underpinning the thesis, and a description of the methodology employed in the research. Ethical considerations are noted. There then follows a brief indication of the scope and intention of each of the papers, and the rationale behind the order in which they appear in the thesis. This brief introductory section concludes with speculation on what the significance of this study might be.

Paper 1, *Notions of 'community engagement' appropriate to a Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP) in a South African rural-based comprehensive university – Siyanibona!*, seeks to tease out contested understandings of the notions of 'identity', 'community' and 'engagement'. In so doing it explores three particular ideas, taken up in later papers, namely: the notion of 'relationships of fate' needing to transform into 'partnerships of choice'; the link between the circumstances of a particular university's birth, and its acceptance or otherwise of its responsibility to its locale; and the need for all stakeholders in the community-university engagement endeavour to know more about each other at a level deeper than simply the institutional or organisational.

Paper 2, *From pillars to people: Reconceptualising the integration of teaching, research and community engagement in higher education*, addresses the struggle community engagement has faced in achieving par with higher education's other core activities of teaching-and-learning and research in a way which chooses not to look at teaching, research and community engagement as activities or objects, but from the perspective of the individual stakeholders (staff, students and community members) engaged in those activities. The exploration of this idea picks up on the distinction between 'relationships of fate' and 'partnerships of choice' first articulated in Paper I and expands the concept of 'engagement' to encompass the relationships between staff and students (not just those between the university and community members), and discusses ways in which staff, students and communities might more usefully interact with each other.

Paper 3, *SMMEs and higher education: Possibilities for partnership?* homes in on a particular sector of the business community, to ascertain the extent to which the sector might be able to partner with the University to their mutual benefit. Using data from a questionnaire and interviews the study reveals that opportunities for work experience for students in micro and survivalist enterprises are limited but that the University could be doing more to 'reach out' to its communities by making them aware of who the university is, what it can offer, how it can assist, and perhaps most importantly, how it can be accessed.

Paper 4, *ProAct: An integrated model of action research and project management for capacitating universities and their communities in the co-production of useful knowledge*, tells the story of the evolution of a hybrid model of action research and project management (ProAct) which takes account of the need for research in the university-community context to be accomplished democratically, but within specific parameters of time and other resources by grafting selected project management tools onto the basic action research cycle. The model gives practical and concrete form to the conceptual and theoretical constructs of other researchers who have considered the linking of action research and project management.

Paper 5, *A comprehensive university and its local communities: Establishing a framework for engagement*, addresses the overarching question of how to establish a framework for engagement between a university and its communities. The paper employs the well-used 'building construction' metaphor, identifying the management and governance building blocks (including institutional self-identity, unequivocal support from institutional executive leadership, plans, policies, structures, and funding), and the 'cement' for holding the framework together (including familiarity with communities and knowing how to interact with them, changing mindsets and building capacity). The paper offers the opinion that the necessary foundation for the edifice is the institutional belief that engaging with communities is actually an integral and enhancing enabler of the higher education learning experience, not something which one is empowered to do after having been prepared exclusively in the lecture hall. The paper avers that if an institution does not come close to holding the view that the purpose of higher education is to provide something useful to society, starting with the communities that surround them, community engagement will always struggle to be accepted by the academy.

In considering the significance of this whole study the thesis identifies the key 'realisations' which have given food for thought and which other researchers might find worthwhile exploring further too. These are: the significance of how institutional and community identities are established, by choice, fate or fiat; re-thinking the concept of 'engagement' to focus not on the activities *per se* of teaching, research and community engagement but on all of the stakeholders working as willing partners; the need for institutions and communities to embrace the belief that university-community interaction is one of the purposes of higher education, and the belief that community engagement is a vehicle for staff, student, curriculum and institutional development.

In concluding, the thesis additionally notes the significance to the author himself of having taken this research journey. As a consequence he feels he is in a better position to promote a more integrated model of teaching, research and community engagement to his university, community colleagues, students, and community engagement peers in other universities. However, the author indicates that in furthering the cause of community engagement in higher education he will need to explore alternative paradigms, notably complexity science, and systemic action research.

Abstrak

In hierdie tesis is die konstruksie van 'n samehangende konseptuele en praktiese raamwerk gedokumenteer, waarbinne die strewe om gemeenskaps-betrokkenheid as 'n legitieme, haalbare en lewensvatbare onderneming in hoër onderwys, tesame met die meer gevestigde en aanvaarde gelyke vennote, onderrig en navorsing, te vestig. Die fokus is spesifiek op die Universiteit van Zoeloeland (UNIZULU) – 'n landelike, komprehensiewe universiteit met 'n stedelike voetspoor.

Die tesis skop af met 'n bondige oorsig van die nasionale konteks van gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid voordat daar oorgegaan word na 'n meer spesifieke beskrywing van die konteks en onlangse geskiedenis van UNIZULU. Bepaalde sleutelkonsepte word daarna uitgeklaar. 'n Stelling aangaande die navorsingsprobleem en doelwitte van die studie word gevolg deur 'n weergawe van die teoretiese raamwerk en navorsingsperspektief onderliggend aan die tesis, asook 'n beskrywing van die metodologie wat in die navorsing gebruik is. Etiese oorwegings word vermeld. Dan volg 'n kort beskrywing van die omvang en doel van elk van die referate, en die rasionaal vir die volgorde waarin hulle in die tesis verskyn. Hierdie kort inleidende afdeling word afgesluit met 'n bespiegeling oor wat die belang van die studie mag wees.

Referaat 1, *Gedagtes oor 'gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid' soos toepaslik in 'n Gemeenskap-Universiteit-Vennootskapsprogram (GUVV) in 'n Suid-Afrikaanse landelike komprehensiewe universiteit – Siyanibona!*, poog om omstrede wyses waarop die idees van 'identiteit', 'gemeenskap' en 'betrokkenheid' verstaan word, uit te pluus. In die proses word drie spesifieke idees, wat in latere referate onder die loep kom, ondersoek, naamlik die idee van 'lotsverhoudings' wat in 'vennootskappe van keuse' moet verander; die verband tussen die omstandighede waaronder 'n bepaalde universiteit in die lewe geroep is en die aanvaarding al dan nie van die verantwoordelikheid teenoor sy lokaliteit; en die nodigheid dat almal wat belang het by die strewe na betrokkenheid tussen gemeenskap en universiteit op 'n dieper vlak as bloot die institusionele of organisatoriese meer van mekaar te wete te kom.

Referaat 2, *Van steunpilare na mense: Herkonseptualisering van die integrasie van onderrig, navorsing en gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid in hoër onderwys*, skenk aandag aan die stryd wat gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid moes voer om op gelyke voet te kom met die ander kernaktiwiteite van hoër onderwys, naamlik onderrig-leer en navorsing, op 'n wyse waar onderrig, navorsing en gemeenskaps-betrokkenheid nie as aktiwiteite of voorwerpe beskou word nie, maar vanuit die perspektief van die individuele belanghebbendes (personeel, studente en gemeenskapslede) betrokke by daardie aktiwiteite. Die verkenning van hierdie idee raak weer die onderskeid tussen 'lotsverhoudings' en 'vennootskappe van keuse' aan

wat aanvanklik in Referaat 1 bespreek is, en brei die konsep van 'betrokkenheid' uit om die verhoudings tussen personeel en studente in te sluit (nie net dié tussen die universiteit en die gemeenskapslede nie), en bespreek wyses waarop personeel, studente en gemeenskappe op meer nuttige wyses met mekaar in wisselwerking kan tree.

Referaat 3, *KMMOs en hoër onderwys: Moontlikhede vir vennootskap?* is afgestem op 'n bepaalde sektor in die sakegemeenskap om die mate te bepaal waartoe die sektor in staat mag wees om 'n vennootskap met die universiteit aan te gaan tot wedersydse voordeel. Uit data ingesamel deur middel van 'n vraelysondersoek en onderhoude maak die studie dit duidelik dat geleenthede vir werkervaring vir studente in mikro- en oorlewingsondernemings beperk is, maar dat die universiteit meer kan doen om 'uit te reik' na sy gemeenskappe deur hulle bewus te maak van wie die universiteit is, wat dit kan bied, hoe dit hulp kan verleen, en, miskien die belangrikste, hoe toegang tot die universiteit verkry kan word.

Referaat 4, *ProAct: 'n Geïntegreerde model van aksienavorsing en projekbestuur om universiteite en hul gemeenskappe in staat te stel om die gesamentlike produksie van nuttige kennis te verweselik*, vertel die verhaal van die evolusie van 'n hibriede model van aksienavorsing en projekbestuur (ProAct) wat in ag neem dat daar 'n behoefte aan navorsing bestaan in die universiteit-gemeenskapskonteks, waaraan op demokratiese wyse voldoen moet word, maar wel binne die spesifieke parameters van tyd en hulpbronne deur geselekteerde projekbestuursinstrumente op die basiese aksienavorsingsiklus oor te dra. Hierdie model gee praktiese en konkrete vorm aan die konseptuele en teoretiese konstruksie van ander navorsers wat oorweging skenk aan die koppeling van aksienavorsing en projekbestuur.

Referaat 5, *'n Komprehensiewe universiteit en sy plaaslike gemeenskappe: Die vestiging van 'n raamwerk vir betrokkenheid*, gee aandag aan die oorkoepelende vraag van hoe om 'n raamwerk vir betrokkenheid tussen 'n universiteit en sy gemeenskappe te vestig. Die referaat benut die welbekende metafoer van 'boukonstruksie', waarvolgens die bestuurs- en beheerboublokke (insluitend institusionele self-identiteit, onomwonde ondersteuning van institusionele uitvoerende leierskap, planne, beleide, strukture en befondsing), en die 'sement' wat die raamwerk bymekaar moet hou (insluitend ingeligtheid rakende gemeenskappe en hoe om met hulle in interaksie te tree, veranderende ingesteldhede, en kapasiteitsbou) geïdentifiseer word. Die referaat spreek die mening uit dat die nodige fondasie vir die gebou die institusionele oortuiging is dat om by gemeenskappe betrokke te raak in werklikheid 'n integrale en versterkende bemagtiger van leerervarings in hoër onderwys is, nie iets wat 'n mens bemagtig is om te doen nadat jy uitsluitlik in die lesingsaal voorberei is nie. Die referaat verklaar dat indien 'n instelling nog nie naby die siening kom

dat dit die doel van hoër onderwys is om iets nuttig aan die gemeenskap te voorsien nie – beginnende by die gemeenskappe reg rondom hulle – sal gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid altyd 'n stryd voer om deur die akademie aanvaar te word.

Wanneer die veelseggendheid van hierdie studie in oënskou geneem word, identifiseer die tesis die sleutel-‘bewuswordings’ wat stof tot nadenke was en wat ander navorsers ook die moeite werd mag ag om verder te ondersoek. Dit sluit in dat dit betekenisvol is hoe institusionele en gemeenskapsidentiteite gevestig word, deur keuse, die noodlot of op bevel; herbesinning oor die konsep van ‘betrokkenheid’ sodat daar nie op die onderrig-, navorsings- en gemeenskaps-betrokkenheidsaktiwiteite *per se* gefokus word nie, maar op al die belanghebbendes wat as gewillige vennote werk; die noodsaaklikheid daarvan dat instellings en gemeenskappe wesenlik oortuig is dat universiteit-gemeenskap-interaksie een van die doelwitte van hoër onderwys is; en die oortuiging dat gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid 'n medium is vir personeel-, studente-, kurrikulum- en institusionele ontwikkeling.

Ten slotte dui die tesis ook die betekenis wat die navorsingsreis vir die navorser self ingehou het, aan. As gevolg hiervan voel hy dat hy beter toegerus is om 'n geïntegreerde model van onderrig, navorsing en gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid by sy universiteit, gemeenskapskollegas, studente en eweknieë in gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid aan ander universiteite te bevorder. Die skrywer dui egter aan dat om die saak van gemeenskapsbetrokkenheid verder te bevorder in hoër onderwys sal hy alternatiewe paradigmas moet ondersoek, veral kompleksiteitswetenskap en sistematiese aksienavorsing.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the tremendous contribution that my supervisor, Professor Mabel Erasmus has made to this project. Her judicious mixing of encouragement and cajolery was most helpful, as were her insights and comments on the various drafts of the papers constituting this thesis. Grateful thanks also go to Mabel's technical assistant, Dora du Plessis, for licking the papers into Free State shape.

It would be invidious to name individuals, but to all my friends and colleagues in higher education and in local communities I extend my appreciation and grateful thanks. This thesis would not have been completed without those conversations and experiences we shared.

To Vicki and Zimele go my heartfelt thanks for the understanding and forbearance you showed when the writing of this thesis took precedence over family matters.

Lastly, a dedication. My first doctoral thesis was dedicated to the memory of my late father, John Desmond Boughey. I dedicate this one to the latest addition to the Boughey clan, my beautiful baby daughter Emily-Jane Michaela Ebube Boughey.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

BEN	Business-Education Network
CBO	Community-based Organisations
CEWG	Community Engagement Working Group
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CHESP	Community-Higher Education-Service Partnerships
COAL	Committee for Outreach and Linkages
CUPP	Community-University Partnership Programme
COWG	Community Outreach Working Group
CUT, FS	Central University of Technology, Free State
DoE	Department of Education
DST	Department of Science and Technology
FBO	Faith-based organisations
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
IDP	Integrated Development Plan
JET	Joint Education Trust
JTC	Joint Training Committee
KELT	Key English Language Teacher
KZN	KwaZulu-Natal
LED	Local Economic Development
MRGO	Mission, Roles, Goals and Objectives
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NPO	Non-profit Organisation
NWG	National Working Group
NRF	National Research Foundation

ODA	Oversees Development Administration
ORC	Overarching Reconfiguration Committee
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SAHECEF	South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum
SEDA	Small Enterprise Development Agency
SMME	Small Medium and Micro Enterprises
SOFAR	Students, community organisations, faculty (academic staff), university administrators, and community residents
UNIZULU	University of Zululand
UWC	University of the Western Cape
WIL	Work-integrated Learning
ZCCI	Zululand Chamber of Commerce and Industry

Orientation to the Study

1. Introduction

The purpose of this orientation is to introduce the five papers which constitute this thesis on the establishment of a framework of community engagement appropriate to a comprehensive university in South Africa. It begins with a brief outline of the national context of community engagement before moving on to a more specific description of the context and recent history of the higher education institution which is the focus of this thesis, namely the comprehensive University of Zululand (UNIZULU). Certain key concepts are then clarified. This is followed by a statement of the research concern and objectives of the study, followed by an account of the theoretical framework and research perspective underpinning the thesis, and a description of the methodology employed in the research. Ethical considerations are noted. This is then followed by a brief indication of the scope and intention of each of the papers, and the rationale behind the order in which they appear in the thesis. The piece concludes with speculation on what the significance of this study might be.

2. Community Engagement in South African Higher Education: The National Context

Consonant with a global trend in higher education (see, for example, Arredondo and De la Garza 2007; Hall 2008; Kaburise 2007; Percy, Zimpher and Brukaradt 2006; Shah 2007; Taylor 2007; Temple, Story and Delaforce 2005) South African higher education institutions (HEIs) over the past decade and a half have to greater or lesser degrees begun to address the issue of recognising engagement with their local communities as a legitimate concern, alongside the traditional roles of teaching and research. The foundations were laid in the Department of Education's *Higher Education White Paper* (RSA DoE 1997), reiterated in the Ministry of Education's *National Plan for Higher Education* (RSA DoE 2001) and in the founding document of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC 2001) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and cemented in the HEQC's *Criteria for Programme Accreditation* (2004a) and its *Criteria for Institutional Audits* (2004b).

Further impetus was given by the HEQC through its co-hosting with the Community-Higher Education-Service Partnerships (CHESP) initiative of the Joint Education Trust's Education Services of an international conference in Cape Town in 2006 on the theme of community engagement in higher education. Momentum was maintained through the Council on Higher Education's (CHE) Symposium on Community Engagement in 2009 and an international

conference on *Community Engagement: The Changing Role of South African Universities in Development* in 2011 hosted in East London by the University of Fort Hare. The year 2012 witnessed a mini-conference, hosted by the Durban University of Technology, on China–South Africa–USA Collaboration on Community Engagement in Higher Education (although, regrettably, China was not able to send delegates), while in 2013 Stellenbosch University hosted the 5th *International Service Learning Symposium, Service-Learning across the globe: from local to transnational*.

The cause of community engagement in higher education in South Africa has also benefitted greatly from the inauguration in 2009 of the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum (SAHECEF), of which all twenty-three South African public HEIs and the South African campus of Monash University are members.

The most recent milestone in the development of community engagement in higher education in South Africa is the publication of the *White Paper for Post-school Education and Training* (November 2013). The White Paper reaffirms previous statements in White Paper 3 (1997) and in the *National Plan for Higher Education* (2001) on the recognition of community engagement as one of the three core functions of universities, along with research and teaching. It also confirms that community engagement, albeit in various forms, “has become a part of the work of universities in South Africa”.

3. Community Engagement in South African Higher Education: The Institutional Context

UNIZULU was established in the *apartheid* era as a rural-based university serving the needs of its local black community. As noted by Nkomo and Sehoole (2007:2) rural-based black universities were spawned by the *apartheid* policy of ‘separate development’ and became institutionalised as ethnic universities through the Extension of University Education Act of 1959. Nkomo and Sehole (p.2) go on to point out that in the absence of any academic need, the establishment of these institutions was overtly instrumental and political by simultaneously turning out primarily the black teachers required by the black school system and serving to perpetuate and reinforce the *apartheid* system of separate development.

Although its rural location was initially a product of *apartheid* planning the appellation of ‘rural’ takes on more legitimate significance when one considers that the University is the only residential higher education institution in a geographical area which is predominantly rural and home to more than 2 million people carrying the burdens of poverty, unemployment, low levels of education, high levels of sickness and disease, and poor infrastructure. As pointed out later in this thesis, the ‘rural-based’ nature of UNIZULU has

always been fundamental to the operation of a number of university departments including Agriculture, Consumer Science, Nursing Science, Recreation and Tourism, Social Work, (Community) Psychology, Development Studies, Geography and Hydrology. The significance of rural location was recognised by the Department of Science and Technology when selecting the country's rural-based higher education institutions as sites for the establishment of community-university partnership programmes, based on the assumption that these HEIs are key in shaping social, economic and scientific development within their geographical space by forming university–community partnerships which are effective vehicles for solving problems, facilitating development, sharing lessons, generating knowledge, and adopting new techniques and innovations (RSA DST/NRF 2009).

As noted in the Department of Education's concept document on creating comprehensive universities in South Africa (2004), following on the National Plan for Higher Education (2001a) a National Working Group (DoE 2002) was set up to restructure the higher education landscape and create new institutional and organisational norms. These deliberations resulted in recommendations for a number of institutional mergers and incorporations and the establishment of an institution new to South Africa – the 'comprehensive' university. The concept document (p.6) notes that these comprehensive institutions were designed to make a contribution to meeting the goals set down in the National Plan and in line with the Government's Human Resource Development Strategy with particular reference to: increasing access to higher education by offering prospective students a wider variety of programmes with different entry requirements; increasing student mobility by easing articulation between career-focused and general academic programmes; strengthening applied research capacity by allying the practical research foci of the then technikons with the existing research strengths of universities; enhancing capacity to the country's social and economic needs. It is also important to note that in this restructuring of the higher education landscape the two rural-based universities of Venda and Zululand were the only two to be re-designated as 'comprehensive' *per se*, i.e. not through the merger of a university and a technikon – meaning that sub-degree vocational programmes (certificates and diplomas) had to be created *de novo* with no existing vocational programmes or human resource expertise to draw on.

Accordingly, UNIZULU was redesignated as a 'comprehensive' institution by the National Working Group in 2002, and tasked with reconfiguring its suite of programmes to comprise a majority of sub-degree qualifications (certificates and diplomas) "serving communities in northern KwaZulu-Natal" by assisting in rural development (including teaching, nursing and agriculture) and with technical and technological competency training for local industry (University of Zululand 2010:125). To assist with the transformation to a comprehensive

institution, the University's Council in 2003 established an Overarching Reconfiguration Committee (ORC). Chaired by the vice-chancellor, this committee comprised 13 sub-committees and working groups, including the Community Engagement Working Group (CEWG) which until the relinquishing of its responsibilities to the Senate Committee for Community Engagement in 2013, was responsible for the promotion and management of community engagement at UNIZULU. *Inter alia*, the CEWG was responsible for initiating the production of an institutional community engagement policy, motivating for the establishment of a Senate Committee on Community Engagement, creating a Community Engagement Award scheme, mounting departmental and faculty orientation and capacity-building workshops on community engagement, and distributing and managing funding for individual and departmental community engagement projects.

The quest to establish community engagement as a major activity at UNIZULU was given a major boost in 2010 with the launching of a Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP). This came about as a result of submitting a successful proposal in response to the Department of Science and Technology's (DST) and National Research Foundation's (NRF) closed invitation to the five rural-based universities in South Africa to design such programmes. The CUPP project offered two important factors in the development of community engagement at UNIZULU, namely significant funding, and a vision and model to aspire to. It has been through the process of leading the team implementing the CUPP that I have been afforded the opportunity to interrogate issues of 'community' and 'engagement' more rigorously and imaginatively than might otherwise have been the case.

4. Clarification of Key Concepts

There are a number of key concepts which are threads running through the whole fabric of the thesis. Apart from the overarching term *higher education* it should be borne in mind that there are no single, universally accepted definitions of the other concepts listed here. Indeed, one of the main purposes of the thesis is to explore these concepts, especially 'community' and 'community engagement', and what it means to be a 'comprehensive' institution.

4.1 Higher education

According to the Higher Education Act 1997, amended in 2010, the term 'higher education' means all learning programmes leading to a qualification that meets the requirements of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF). As used in this thesis, the term 'higher education' is used to cover the profile and activities of all 23 state-funded (public) tertiary institutions, comprising 11 universities, six universities of technology, and six comprehensive institutions.

4.2 Community

'Community' refers to collective interest groups and like-minded people sharing common goals who are interested in collaborating with the university in search of sustainable development solutions (University of Zululand, Policy on Community Engagement 2013).

4.3 Community engagement

The HEQC (2004b:24) defines community engagement as: "Initiatives and processes through which the expertise of the higher education institution in the areas of teaching and research are applied to address issues relevant to its community."

4.4 Comprehensive university

Comprehensive universities offer programmes across the spectrum, from research degrees to career-oriented diplomas (CHE 2009:8).

4.5 Community-University Partnership Programme

A Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP) is an equal and fair partnership between rural-based HEIs and their communities, based on the assumption that these HEIs are key in shaping social, economic and scientific development within their geographical space by forming university–community partnerships which are effective vehicles for solving problems, facilitating development, sharing lessons, generating knowledge, and adopting new techniques and innovations (RSA DST/NRF 2009).

4.6 Service learning

Service learning, a curriculum-based form of community engagement, is defined by Bringle and Hatcher (1995:112) as "a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students: (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility".

4.7 Work-integrated Learning

Work-integrated learning (WIL) describes an approach to career-focused education that includes theoretical forms of learning that are appropriate for technical/professional qualifications, problem-based learning, project-based learning, and workplace learning. What distinguishes WIL is the emphasis on the integrative aspects of such learning. WIL could

thus be described as an educational approach that *aligns* academic and workplace practices for the mutual benefit of students and workplaces (Engel-Hills, Garraway, Jacobs, Volbrecht and Winberg 2010). At UNIZULU WIL is classified as a community engagement activity.

4.8 Action research

Action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (Reason and Bradbury 2001).

5. Research Concern and Questions

At the *Community Engagement in Higher Education* international conference in Cape Town in 2006, Prof Frederick Fourie, then vice-chancellor of the University of the Free State, posed two pertinent questions (Fourie 2007): “Does community engagement belong at a university?” and, more specifically, “Does community engagement belong at *this* University?” As mentioned above, community engagement in higher education has a national mandate, which is being pursued to varying degrees by individual institutions of higher learning. With regard to the particular institution which is the focus of this thesis, namely UNIZULU, institutional documentation (e.g. strategic and operational plans and policies) indicates, albeit to varying degrees at different times in its history, that community engagement does belong at this University.

Inherent in the title of this thesis – *A comprehensive university at the heart of its communities: Establishing a framework for engagement* – is an assumption that it is indeed right and proper for a university, particularly one designated as ‘comprehensive’, to identify itself strongly with its local communities. This thesis set out to substantiate this espoused belief by exploring the boundaries, dynamics and possibilities of community engagement as viewed through the lens of a rural-based comprehensive university which takes as its mantra the phrase ‘Restructured for Relevance’, and to arrive at conclusions and recommendations for the creation of a framework of engagement between university and community, in terms both of its component parts and the processes required for establishing and maintaining such a framework.

The specific research questions to be addressed are as follows:

1. What constitutes 'community' for a re-designated 'comprehensive' rural-based university?

Up until now, staff at the University of Zululand have worked with a tacit, intuitive and relatively unstructured understanding of 'community'. The re-designation of UNIZULU as a 'comprehensive' university tasked, *inter alia*, with assisting in the development of its locale, requires more structured and systematic defining and profiling. Answering the questions of what constitutes 'community', and also what constitutes 'engagement', will help the University to further clarify its identity as a rural-based comprehensive institution with an urban footprint.

2. Do we need to reconceptualise the integration of teaching, research and community engagement in higher education?

Community engagement has faced a struggle in achieving par with higher education's other core activities of teaching-and-learning, and research. Traditionally, the research perspective has been concerned with the three pillars, or activities of higher education, namely teaching, research, and community engagement.

From defining terms (Paper 1) the aim of the second paper was to broaden the field of vision to address the struggle community engagement has faced in achieving par with higher education's other core activities of teaching-and-learning, and research. Consonant with Dervin's (1983) sense-making approach (as interpreted by Spurgin 2006), which focuses on what *people* do, how they do it, and why they do it that way, rather than on *the objects* that people do things with, might it not be more productive to explore the activities of teaching, research and community engagement not as pillars or silos of activity, but from the perspective of the individual stakeholders (staff, students and community members) engaged in those activities?

3. SMMEs and higher education: Possibilities for partnership?

The University of Zululand is a predominantly rural-based institution which has been designated as a comprehensive university. As the former, UNIZULU is seen as a potentially key stakeholder in shaping local economic development by forming university-community partnerships. As the latter, it is expected to develop vocationally oriented programmes in addition to traditional degree programme. The confluence of these two identities, together with the national impetus for greater interaction with local communities led to the idea of exploring the local SMME (Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises) sector as a potential partner for service learning (SL) and work-integrated learning (WIL) (both of which are regarded as curriculum-based community engagement, on the basis that this sector provides

more than ninety percent of the country's workforce. What is the potential of this sector to partner with the University?

4. ProAct: An Integrated model of action research and project management for capacitating universities and their communities in the co-production of knowledge

In the context of a Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP) which seeks to facilitate change in a higher education institution and in its surrounding communities through collective, fair and reciprocal interaction, what sort of research methodology is appropriate for university and community working in tandem in the co-production of knowledge? The paper explores the development of a hybrid model of action research and project management which encourages stakeholders to work together within specific parameters of time and other resources.

5. A comprehensive university and its local communities: Establishing a framework for engagement

The research concern in this the final paper of the thesis is the overarching question of how to establish a framework for engagement between a university and its communities. What are the mindsets, structures, policies, strategies, leadership and management necessary for the creation of an accepted and viable model of a university engaging with its local communities?

6. Theoretical Framework

At a meta-theoretical (i.e. philosophical and epistemological) level, the five papers are couched broadly within the phenomenological/interpretivist tradition of social science (Babbie and Mouton 2001) which seeks to understand how individuals within their institutional and social structures make sense of, and give meaning to, their social practices. It is important to emphasise that the individuals referred to include myself, as practitioner and researcher. This locates my research essentially within the so-called 'qualitative' research paradigm, a "generic research approach in social research according to which research takes its departure point as the insider perspective on social action" (Babbie and Mouton 2001:646). As Merriam (2009:13) notes "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world". Denzin and Lincoln (2005:3) elaborate:

"Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices

transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”.

However, as Beukema (2009:209) observes, “when the researcher enters a certain domain of research ‘from the outside’, he or she has goals stemming from a personal context, political views and personal biography.” A similar assertion is made by Spurgin (2006:103) in her paper on Dervin’s¹ (1983) sense-making approach and the study of personal information management, when she says that “all researchers come to their work through the lenses of their own experiences, biases, theories, understandings, and hunches”.

Moreover, as Spurgin also states (p.103): “a Sense-Making Approach requires a focus on what people do, how they do it, and why they do it that way, rather than on the objects that people do things with.” This view is echoed by Somekh and Thaler (1997:283): “Those who are responsible for implementing change need to ‘make sense’ of what the change is about and the reasoning behind its introduction.” These notions of personal sense-making are in harmony with the basic tenets of action research (which is the methodology adopted in this thesis) in that theory develops from practice as the research develops. As Whitehead and McNiff (2006:3) state: “These theories are living in the sense that they are our theories of practice, generated from within our living practices, our present best thinking that incorporates yesterday into today, and which holds tomorrow already within itself.”

Fullan (1991) stresses the importance of “integrating general knowledge of change with detailed knowledge of the politics, personalities and history peculiar to the setting in question”. Given the history of South Africa and its lingering legacy of *apartheid*, and the onus on comprehensive universities such as UNIZULU to make a difference in the lives of their immediate communities, research must move beyond the explanatory, the ‘sense-

¹ It should be noted here that while I have quoted an observation concerning Barbara Dervin’s Sense-making model, I would not presume to be intimately *au fait* with, nor necessarily subscribe to the conceptually elaborated and empirically validated (Savolainan 1993:15) “sense-making theory” which she seems to have made her own, and which Savolainan (1993:16) characterises as “a piece of programmatic research which focuses on the development of alternative approaches to the study of human use of information and information systems. The theory’s philosophical foundations rest on constructivist assumptions, and it has absorbed elements from several conceptions and theories in various disciplines. Most of these contributions stress the importance of the individual actor, adopting a critical stance towards objectivism and positivism”.

making', of the interpretive mode into the realm of critical social science where explanations are only the foundation for transformation and change in the world (Babbie and Mouton 2001:38).

Somekh and Thaler (1997:283) make the further point that 'personal meaning', i.e. making personal sense of the worlds we inhabit, and the commitment we make to change, cannot be divorced from our personal and professional values. Wenger (1998:4) makes two insightful observations in this regard, when he says that 'knowledge' is a matter of competence with respect to 'valued' enterprises, and that 'community' is a way of talking about the social configurations in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing (i.e. valued). McNiff (2010:18) notes how "[a]ction research begins with values. As a self-reflective practitioner you need to be aware of what drives your life and work, so you can be clear about what you are doing and why you are doing it".

7. Research Perspective: Personal 'Sense-Making'

As an action researcher, committed to the statements made above, I think it would be appropriate to draw an autobiographical thumbnail sketch to inform the reader of the personal 'sense-making' journey I have been on, and continue to be on in writing these five papers over the past four years.

I first came to South Africa in 1989 on a joint British Council/Overseas Development Administration (ODA) contract as a Key English Language Teacher (KELT) officer at the University of the Western Cape (UWC). The four years I spent there coincided with a momentous time of transition for the country, including the release of Nelson Mandela. It was there that I got my first taste of tear-gas (as we call it in Britain), and where I completed my first doctorate – a DEd in the field of academic development. It was one of the most significant periods in my life – a time when I felt that I cut my intellectual and political teeth and really started to crystallise the educational beliefs and principles which had begun to form during my previous four years at the University of Sana'a in the then North Yemen. As a teacher of adjunct English language classes to medical and engineering students at the University of Sana'a I had begun to realise that the real test of students' language was not their performance in their English tests and examinations, but in the quality of their thinking and language use in their disciplines. There, I was 'before my time', as the saying goes, but I arrived at UWC at a time when they were trying to introduce the so-called 'infusion' model of academic development. This fortuitous confluence meant that I was very soon developing a model of interaction with departments which entailed my working as a teaching-and-learning development consultant (i.e. not simply as an English language teacher) working closely with staff and their students in a participatory action research manner. It was during this time that

I started my apprenticeship as a collaborative investigator, learning both the value of partnerships and some of the difficulties that go with the turf of that *modus operandi*. It was also at that time that I came to appreciate the absolute relevance for theory and practice of David Ausubel's summation of all his work (1968), when he said that "if I had to reduce all of Educational Psychology to just one principle I would say this: The most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach them accordingly." In essence, we can only start from where we currently are in our knowledge, our thinking, our values, so trying to start somewhere else is pointless.

I carried what I had learnt at UWC to my next, and as it happens, current post as Director of Academic Development at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU), where I have continued to promote the collaboration of academic staff, student and teaching-and-learning specialist as the prime form of engagement. Speaking of engagement brings me to the latest personal chapter, and really the foundation of my present PhD studies, namely my involvement in UNIZULU's engagement with its local communities. For the past twenty years my participation in both university and local structures and initiatives has been quite extensive. Within the University itself, I have chaired the University's Community Engagement Working Group and, in the absence of a Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the Senate Committee on Community Engagement. I have been the main initiator of the creation of the Senate Committee and the policy on community engagement and am currently team leader for the pilot project of the Department of Science and Technology and the National Research Foundation on the establishment of a CUPP at UNIZULU. Within the local government community I am a member of the district municipality's Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMME) Forum and Local Economic Development (LED) working group. In promoting ties with local business I served as Chair of the Business-Education Network (BEN) and as a member of the Joint Training Committee (JTC) as well as serving for a year as deputy chair of the local branch (Empangeni) and executive member of the Zululand Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

The principal driver which underpins my interactions with communities, particularly since the advent of the CUPP, is encapsulated in the late Nelson Mandela's declaration in his 'Make poverty history in 2005' speech in Trafalgar Square London in 2005 that "overcoming poverty is not a gesture of charity. It is an act of justice. It is the protection of a fundamental human right, the right to dignity and a decent life. While poverty persists, there is no true freedom." (Mandela 2005). With South Africa continuing to be adjudged as one of the most unequal countries in the world (World Bank 2012) there is much for all of us to contribute to rectifying the situation.

8. Methodology

As noted in the theoretical framework and research perspective (sections 6 and 7 above), the thesis is broadly couched within a phenomenological/interpretivist framework which seeks to understand how individuals give meaning to their life and work by striving to make personal sense of the social practices in which they partake in a world of multiple and complex interpretations of reality. The research methodology considered most appropriate within this philosophical and epistemological framework is Action Research (AR). As defined in section 4.8 above, Action Research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (Reason and Bradbury 2001).

As averred by Stephens, Barton and Haslett (2007:5) there is no simple answer to the question 'what is AR', but Reason and Bradbury's definition (2001) quoted in section 4.8 of this thesis provides a useful summary of its essence. In terms of the focus of the research, its concern is to find practical solutions to issues of importance to people, either as individuals or groups or communities in their particular and specific contexts. In terms of enactment, Action Research is seen as an iterative process bringing together observation, reflection, planning and action. From an epistemological point of view AR works from the perspective that there are multiple and often conflicting constructions of our social world, with the 'observed' being constructed by 'the observer' (Wadsworth 1998). Montibeller (2007) notes how Action Research has been used in a number of fields including health, development, education, conflict resolution, criminology, and social psychology, and has had a strong influence on Information Systems Research. Action Research is also essentially collaborative and participatory.

Action Research, as with participatory research methodology in general, has not been without its critics. Nearly twenty years ago Cornwall and Jewkes (1995:1667) noted that participatory research was a source of considerable contention, with its detractors adjudging it as biased, impressionistic and unreliable. To this criticism we could add questions about Action Research's validity as a mode of inquiry leading to defensible and potentially transferable results (Checkland and Holwell 1998:9). These arguments persist today. Cornwall and Jewkes (ibid) further noted that participatory research often becomes 'embroiled in the qualitative-quantitative divide' – a debate which 'obscures issues of agency, representation and power which lie at the core of the methodological critiques from which the development of participatory approaches stem' (p.1667). They go on to say (p.1668) that the most striking difference between participatory and conventional methodologies lies in how answer the questions of who defines the research problems and who 'generates, analyses, represents, owns and acts on the information which is sought'. These issues of power and

control are central to any methodology which claims to be participatory. As Cornwall and Jewkes (1995:1672) note, participatory research never proceeds as smoothly in practice as it does in theory. Potential pitfalls include raising false hopes whilst generating sufficient interest for participation (p.1673), the generation of unintended and negative consequences (p.1673), and having to bear in mind that researchers from local communities, like academics, carry their own biases, prejudices and beliefs into research (p. 1674). Their conclusion, however, is positive, adjudging that the pitfalls “do not devalue the important part a participatory attitude and approach can play as a force for empowerment and development” (p.1674).

The methodological implications of working as an action researcher within both phenomenological/interpretivist and critical theory paradigms are that, overall, the research design is decidedly more ‘qualitative’ than ‘quantitative’, although as Cornwall and Jewkes (1995:1668) note, one of the characteristics of participatory approaches lies in innovative adaptations of methods drawn from conventional research and their use in new contexts. This variety is reflected in the five papers in this thesis. Paper 1, in charting the changing mission statements and strategic plans of UNIZULU over the past twenty years, includes a significant element of document analysis and interpretation – ‘making sense of policies and plans’. In line with Spurgin’s (2006:103) assertion, quoted above, that a sense-making approach to research requires a focus on people (what they do, how they do it, and why they do it that way), rather than on the objects that they do things with, Paper 2 is discursive and polemical, in its advocacy of re-orientating our thinking in a higher education away from the so-called pillars of teaching, research and community engagement towards the actual stakeholders involved in these activities. Paper 3, offers a quantitative and qualitative analysis of a questionnaire assessing the capacity of local informal businesses to offer work experience to UNIZULU students, and ascertaining the perceptions of respondents concerning how the University might reciprocate. Paper 4, in documenting the evolution of a practical model of community engagement melding action research and project management, is in effect action research about action research. Paper 5, in being a summation (well, so far, at least!) of the quest for a philosophical, conceptual and practical framework of engagement between university and community, is analytical in the sense that it draws on the experience of others, but reflective of the lessons from my experience at UNIZULU, enriched by the observations and insights of staff, students and community members.

9. Ethical Considerations

Cornwall and Jewkes (1995:1672) note that in participatory research ‘the visibility of the researcher and the transparency of their intentions’ are significantly greater than in conventional research. They conclude (p.1674) that participatory research is ultimately about

'respecting and understanding the people with whom and for whom researchers work'. In this thesis, in all of the activities requiring participation or tangible contribution, all those involved were asked if they had any objections to their contribution being used for some further purpose, such as providing information for the University or serving as examples or illustrations in the pursuit of other activities and projects. (Incidentally, this included the extensive use of photographs, although none have been reproduced in this thesis). Respondents to questionnaires were fully informed of the nature and purpose of the information gathering exercise. Feedback has been made available on request. Anonymity has been maintained, except in those cases where the person has been willing to be identified. In the case of interviews, informed consent was obtained and anonymity, requested or appropriate, was maintained.

10. The Papers

This section offers a brief indication of the scope and intention of each of the papers, and the rationale behind the order in which they appear in the thesis. Cross references to papers not sequentially linked are made where appropriate to assist navigation through the thesis.

Paper 1.

Notions of 'community engagement' appropriate to a Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP) in a South African rural-based comprehensive university – Siyanibona!

Up until now, UNIZULU has worked with a largely tacit, intuitive and relatively unstructured understanding of 'community'. The aim of the first paper was to tease out contested understandings of the notions of 'identity', 'community' and 'engagement' through an analysis of university planning documents over the past twenty years, supplemented by interviews with university staff, students and community members. This process of clarification could then serve as a foundation from which to explore other elements of the university engaging with its various communities.

Paper 2.

From pillars to people: Reconceptualising the integration of teaching, research and community engagement in higher education

From defining terms (Paper 1) the aim of the second paper was to broaden the field of vision to address the struggle community engagement has faced in achieving par with higher education's other core activities of teaching-and-learning, and research. Consonant with Dervin's (1983) sense-making approach (as interpreted by Spurgin 2006), which focuses on what *people* do, how they do it, and why they do it that way, rather than on *the objects* that people do things with, the paper set out to explore the activities of teaching, research and

community engagement not as pillars or silos of activity, but from the perspective of the individual stakeholders (staff, students and community members) engaged in those activities.

Paper 3.

SMMEs and higher education: Possibilities for partnership?

Following on from discussion in Paper 1 on the overarching concepts of 'institutional identity', 'community' and 'engagement', and the discussion on 'engagement' in Paper 2, Paper 3 homes in on a particular community sector, Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs), to ascertain the extent to which the sector might be able to partner with the university to their mutual benefit. Universities such as UNIZULU, which are both 'comprehensive' and 'rural-based' with an urban footprint, have a compelling need to identify community partners for community interaction in general and service learning and WIL in particular. Traditionally, thinking about workplace experience opportunities for students focuses on 'big business', but with the SMME sector reportedly providing more than ninety per cent of the country's workforce, its potential as a site for WIL and service learning experience was considered worth exploring.

Paper 4.

ProAct: An integrated model of action research and project management for capacitating universities and their communities in the co-production of useful knowledge

In a practical extension of the stakeholder engagement delineated in Paper 2, the fourth paper addresses the issue of an appropriate research methodology for university staff and students and community members to jointly employ in the interests of collective, fair and reciprocal interaction. Based on observation and reflection the paper documents the genesis and development of a hybrid model of action research and project management (ProAct) which takes account of the need for research in the university–community context to be accomplished democratically, but within specific parameters of time and other resources by grafting selected project management tools onto the basic action research cycle.

Paper 5.

A comprehensive university and its local communities: Establishing a framework for engagement

The fact that the fifth and final paper carries almost the same title as the title of the whole thesis indicates that the purpose of this concluding piece of research was to reflect on the research undertaken, combined with consideration of the research undertaken by others, to address the overarching question of how to establish a framework for engagement between

a university and its communities. Using a construction metaphor the paper set out to identify the necessary building blocks and cement for establishing such a framework.

11. Significance of the Study

The concept of 'comprehensive', as applied to HEIs in South Africa, is still relatively a novel one. This is particularly true of UNIZULU, which is one of only two HEIs in the country to be reconfigured as 'comprehensive' without involving the merger of a traditional university and a technikon/university of technology. Any research which helps to clarify what it means to be a comprehensive institution will therefore be breaking new ground.

The creation of a broader framework for capturing the complex relationship of a university and its communities might also prove useful to others engaged in this pursuit. I would also hope that the thesis might encourage readers and fellow researchers to consider different interpretations of the notions of 'community' and 'engagement' and the activities and responsibilities of the various role players in relation to teaching and research, in the quest to include community engagement as a substantive, accepted and validated activity in higher education alongside the traditional roles of teaching and research. This would certainly not be before time. One of the pejorative metaphors applied to community engagement in relation to teaching and research is that it is 'the third leg of the stool', but as a colleague observed "how can a stool stand on only two legs"?

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A Comprehensive University at the Heart of its Communities: Establishing a Framework for Engagement

PAPER 1

Notions of 'community engagement' appropriate to a Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP) in a South African rural-based comprehensive university – *Siyanibona*²!

Abstract

The gradual foregrounding of issues of identity, community and engagement at the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) has been marked by three milestones. The first, a key document for all higher education institutions in South Africa, was the Higher Education White Paper's (1997) promotion of Community Engagement as a pillar of Higher Education equal in stature to Teaching-and-Learning and Research. The second was UNIZULU's re-designation in 2002 as a 'comprehensive' institution (RSA NWG 2002). The third, and the principal catalyst for this article, was UNIZULU's selection in 2010 as a site for a pilot project to create a Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP).

An analysis of University planning documents over the past twenty years, supplemented by interviews with University staff and students and community members, has highlighted the contested nature of understandings of notions of 'identity', 'community' and 'engagement'. This paper traces the course of deliberations around these issues and concludes with some definitions and delineations which will hopefully lead to the development of a mutually acceptable, coherent and sustainable partnership programme between the University and its communities.

² An isiZulu word meaning "we see you".

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1. Introduction

As noted in the University of Zululand's policy on Community Engagement (2013), since the release of the White Paper on Higher Education (1997) community engagement has increasingly been identified as an overarching strategy for the transformation of higher education through the broadening of democratic participation and access; greater responsiveness; and a renewed emphasis on cooperation and partnerships. Higher education institutions have been urged to demonstrate their social responsibility and commitment to the common good by integrating community engagement with teaching, learning and research as a core value and as a mechanism to infuse and enrich their teaching and research with a deeper sense of context and application. The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) gave further impetus for the integration of academically-based community engagement by identifying it as one of the three areas for quality assurance of higher education in its publication, *Criteria for Institutional Audits* (RSA HEQC, 2004).

At the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) this imperative had already been underlined in 2002 when it was re-designated as a 'comprehensive' institution "serving the needs of communities in northern KwaZulu-Natal" (UNIZULU 2010:125). In 2010 the University, along with other rural-based institutions in the country, became the recipient of pilot funding from the Department of Science and Technology (DST), via the National Research Foundation (NRF) for the establishment of a Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP), in the belief that rural-based universities can play a pivotal role in acting as change agents to help residents contribute information to decision-making and to better understand the issues, choices and concerns in the community (RSA DST/NRF, 2009). The national imperative emanating from the White Paper, coupled with the University's re-designation as a 'comprehensive' university, and the award of funding to establish a CUPP, has meant that the University has been obliged to explore notions of the key concepts of 'community', and 'engagement' more exhaustively than has hitherto been the case. The understanding of these concepts is also bound up with the institution's own evolving understanding of its identity as a comprehensive university.

This article alludes to the issues of identity facing a comprehensive institution, but principally addresses the other two issues, namely 'community' and 'engagement', on the premise that there needs to be a shared understanding of these terms if the university is to develop a coherent response to the higher education community engagement mandate.

2. Notions of 'Community'

For the purposes of this paper it will be useful to first explore the idea of community from a sociological perspective. Pandey (2005:409) observes that like 'identity' the notion of 'community' is profoundly unstable, and its uses multiple, disparate and often questionable and just as no-one belongs only to one community, no one community entirely encompasses all its members. She further contends that the regulations, practices and boundaries are not transparent, no community is unchanging, and new communities are forming all the time. Notwithstanding the slipperiness of the term, Bridger and Alter (2006:16) note that active communities tend to remain active over time, which suggests a degree of sustainability and stability even if, as Pandey says, communities are continually changing. Bridger and Alter (2006:14) contribute further delineation of the term by observing that most communities share the elements of a locality, a local society, collective actions and mutual identity.

Smith (2001) deepens the debate by contending that the notion of community can be approached both as a 'value', bringing together elements such as solidarity, commitment, mutuality (including shared values) and trust, and as 'a descriptive category' or set of variables comprising 'place' (locality or territorial community), 'interest' (elective or intentional community), and 'communion' (attachment to place, group or idea – 'a spirit of community').

Speaking of the overlap between community as 'place' and community as 'interest', Willmot (1989; cited in Smith 2001:2) adds an additional understanding of community as 'attachment' – observing that "communities of place or interest may not have a sense of shared identity" According to Lee and Newby (1983; cited in Smith 2001:3), "the fact that people live close to one another does not necessarily mean that they have much to do with each other". It is thus the nature of the relationships between people, the establishment of 'communities of meaning' (Cohen 1985:118; cited in Smith 2001:2), which really define 'community', summed up by Cohen's observation that "[p]eople construct community symbolically, making it a resource and repository of meaning, and a referent of their identity". These sentiments resonate with Pahl's (2008) contention that "community is not a place or simply a small-scale population aggregate, but a mode of relating". Smith (2001) concludes his article with a quotation from Bauman (2001:149) that despite the encroachments of centralisation and globalisation which tend to undermine the quality of local social systems, we need to work to "gain control over the conditions under which we struggle with the challenges of life – control which can be gained only *collectively*". Somewhat contrary to what might be considered as a logical link between community and collective action, Pahl (2008) makes an interesting assertion: "If we are truly to come to terms with the idea of community in contemporary society, where mobility, choice and aspiration are widely encouraged, we must build on the

reality of people's personal communities", which exist universally and are derived from individuals' constructions of their meaningful social worlds based on who is important to them and where those important people are located.

3. The University of Zululand's Conceptions of 'Community'

3.1 'Community' as geographical space

The UNIZULU policy on Community Engagement (2013) defines 'community' as "collective interest groups and like-minded people sharing common goals who are interested in collaborating with the University in search of sustainable development solutions". It goes on to say that although the policy recognises that engagement may also take place in communities further afield and that the notion 'community' may be conceptually defined, as in the above definition, the University's primary focus is on its 'local' community in geographical terms.

Pahl's observation (above) on "people's personal communities" concluded with the assertion from his own research, that these communities "are all to a greater or lesser extent geographically based". Pini and McKenzie (2006:27) further refine the practical notion of 'community' from a development perspective when they observe that "sustainability is typically viewed as being dependent upon community engagement at the local level". Further support for starting with a geographical understanding of 'community' is provided in the DST/NRF's concept documentation for the CUPP project (2009b:1) which identified rural-based institutions as forming "part of a matrix of key institutions generating or potentially able to generate ideas and policy options which can contribute to shaping social, economic, and scientific development in their respective rural communities". With specific regard to UNIZULU this assertion had already been made in 2003, when Dr Blade Nzimande in his guest-speaker address at graduation, declared that:

Our starting point should be to understand the geographical area in which the University is located... this institution should strive to specialise and excel in regional rural development studies, with a particular focus on poverty eradication and rural economic development in the northern KwaZulu-Natal region.

UNIZULU was established in 1960 on traditional (formerly known as 'tribal') land donated by the Mkhwanazi Clan. The community in question contains 26 000 people in 5 000 households spread across 15 villages. It is entirely rural in nature. In turn, the Mkhwanazi community is located within the municipality of uMhlathuze, which is a fairly even mixture of rural and urban communities, including the heavily industrialised port of Richards Bay, where the University now has a campus. Further afield, it is significant that the University is the only

residential higher education institution in an area stretching from just north of Durban in the south up to the Mozambique border in the north. The area, which comprises the three district municipalities of Uthungulu, uMkhanyakude and Zululand, is predominantly rural, is only marginally smaller in size than the Netherlands, and has a population of nearly two million. An analysis of the first-year student intake in 2012 reveals that more than 50% of them come from these three district municipalities. Moreover, a majority of those students (52%) comes from within a radius of 50 km.

Within UNIZULU itself, the definition of what constitutes the University's 'local' community in geographical terms is contested. For some, 'local' comprises the Mkhwanazi land on which the University is built. For others, the boundary is an imaginary arc drawn 50 km from the University, the rationale for which was probably influenced by the regulations of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) which stipulates that intern psychologists must offer community services within the radius of not more than 50 km, as they must be supervised on-site while training (Prof. Jabulani Thwala, HoD Psychology and Acting Dean of Arts and Humanities, personal communication). The definition of 'local community' recognised in the Community Engagement Policy, and in the criteria for Senate Committee on Community Engagement funding for Community Engagement Activities is the three district municipalities of Uthungulu, uMkhanyakude, and Zululand, and Endondakusuka Local Municipality in Ilembe District Municipality (with the Tugela River marking the southern boundary), although the policy recognises that "engagement may also take place in communities further afield".

As the previous discussion on the notion of community suggests, we should be wary of simplistic definitions and conferring of the appellation 'local'. Pahl (2008) usefully differentiates between communities of 'fate' and communities of 'choice'. One might think that a local rural community under the jurisdiction of a traditional authority would be a classic example of a community of fate, and a relatively stable entity. However, in an interview on 13 July 2012 with the Mkhwanazi Clan's liaison person with the University, Mr Blessing Mkhwanazi gave food for thought. He first observed that although the local population statistics quoted above represent the picture today, at the time the University was built 50 years ago, the community was significantly smaller, with far fewer people and fewer households. Staff members employed by the University bought property and built in the vicinity, and they were followed by family and friends. So, today, the 'local' community is much larger, and comprises people who were not originally from the area. The community is also subject to the fluctuations caused by migration to and from the area, with members moving in search of employment. Mkhwanazi also offered an interesting observation, pertinent to the University's construing of the notion 'local' in geographical terms, that

adjacent traditional authorities such as Dube and Khoza, although within relatively close proximity to the University, would not necessarily have the same feeling as the Mkhwanazi's about UNIZULU being 'their' university. If this is true of the University's adjacent communities, it is likely to be even more so for the other communities still labelled as 'local' but much further afield, particularly the district municipality of uMkhanyakude which stretches 350 km up to the Mozambique border in the north.

3.2 (R)evolving notions of the University's identity and its relationship to 'community'

The debate and contestation over 'community' is reflected in UNIZULU's changing mission statements over the last twenty five years. The notion of a university's 'community' is intrinsically linked to – indeed emanates from – that university's sense of 'identity'. It has been more than ten years since UNIZULU's re-designation as a 'comprehensive' institution – a type of institution new to South Africa at the time – but the University appears to be still in the process of defining itself. This is not so surprising given Gibbons' (2004) observations that the idea of introducing 'comprehensives' into higher education in South Africa did not emanate from the higher education sector itself; no research on 'comprehensives' was done prior to the National Working Group (NWG) recommendations; international understandings of 'comprehensive' do not match South Africa's; and all the South African Higher Education Comprehensives are different from each other, thus not permitting the formulation of a generic model. (See Section 3 above).

A survey done by Boughey (2004) of academic and administrative staff and students two years after reconfiguration, confirmed this lack of conceptual clarity, eliciting emotional responses like "What a monster!" and "Who invented it??".

When referring to matters of quality and quality assurance in community engagement, the HEQC's Criteria for Institutional Audit (2004) makes the valid point that they must be assessed in relation to an institution's mission specification. In 1987, UNIZULU's mission, which appeared for the first time³ in the University of Zululand Calendar made no mention of community:

The University of Zululand adopts as its fundamental mission the pursuit of academic excellence. This ideal will be pursued in research and the dissemination of its findings for the benefit of society through teaching-and-learning, and by developing the total person towards

³ The first appearance of a mission statement at UNIZULU at this time lends support to Bourner's (2011) contention that until the 1980s university mission statements were unnecessary since the purpose of a university was self-evidently the advancement of knowledge.

responsible leadership, creative thinking, sound interhuman relations, moral and ethical maturity, and an enterprising spirit ...

However, in 1993, UNIZULU underwent an externally facilitated major re-visioning exercise from which emerged a mission statement quite specific in its commitment to “provide education and to pursue knowledge, which serves the needs of the country in general and *those of the surrounding communities in particular*” (emphasis added). The role of research was equally unequivocally defined as being “*directed to the problems in the region*”, with the role of ‘community service’ being to facilitate “*the upliftment of the community through self-funding projects*”. What this ‘upliftment of the community’ meant in practical terms can be gleaned from the Institutional Self-Evaluation Report (1997)⁴.

Departments offer a wide variety of support to the surrounding community. A number of departments, for example, assist local schools with their management (including auditing of accounts); staff development and teacher support; advice on syllabus and set books; and provision of books and other materials. Staff members also serve in an advisory capacity on various professional boards and steering committees. Within the community itself, improved provision and quality of water supply, nutrition education and domestic resource management are busy areas of activity for staff. On-campus community support includes guidance and counselling, library facilities and the provision of sports venues.

The Community Engagement mandate was also made explicit in the NWG’s (2002) re-designation of UNIZULU as a ‘comprehensive’ institution, tasked with “serving communities in northern KwaZulu-Natal” by assisting in rural development (including teaching, nursing and agriculture) and with technical and technological competency training for local industry.

Following UNIZULU’s re-designation as a comprehensive institution, and at the initiation of Council in 2003, the University embarked upon another strategic planning exercise. Given the previous prominence bestowed upon engagement with community in the Mission, Roles, Goals and Objectives (MRGO) of 1993 (see above), its absence from the revised vision and mission is noteworthy. Gone are references to ‘the surrounding community’ and research being directed specifically to “problems in the region”, to be replaced by a more expansive vision of UNIZULU as “[t]he leading comprehensive institution for access to quality education, research and technological skills”, and a mission which spoke more generally of offering ‘relevant’ programmes “responsive to the development needs of society”. Specific reference to community appeared further on in the document, in the strategic framework and

⁴ In October 1997, UNIZULU became the first historically black institution (HBI) to undergo a Quality Audit exercise conducted by the South African University Vice-Chancellors’ Association (SAUVCA).

core ideology components, where the primary guiding principle of the re-configured university was stated as being to “meet the needs of industry as well as those of community development”, while its core ideology included the adoption of “an integrated approach in partnership with the community and other strategic partners”.

In the following year, 2004, after a workshop with staff members from the University of Venda (the only other 'comprehensive' university in South Africa not created through merger), and presumably influenced by that institution, UNIZULU's vision and mission statements were further revised to reintroduce the importance of being 'rural-based', and working 'in partnership' with the 'local' community. Significantly, the idea of working with the 'global' community also made an entrance. (Incidentally, when the refashioned vision and mission statements were circulated to faculty boards for their comment, three of the four faculties voted to accept the latest version, but the Faculty of Science and Agriculture requested removal of the epithet 'rural-based' as it was seen as too restricting. The Faculty's view prevailed at a meeting of the Overarching Reconfiguration Committee (the committee appointed by Council to oversee UNIZULU's transformation to 'comprehensive' status). However, at the Vice-Chancellor's insistence, the phrase 'rural-based' was retained).

A 2006 update on the 2003 planning exercise reinstated the commitment to the University's immediate geographical space with the following:

The most important goal of community service or involvement is to form a positive and supportive relationship between the University and its immediate surrounding communities. This approach ensures safety, prosperity and well-being for us all.

The University's Institutional Operating Plan (IOP) 2006-2009 was the most specific of all, in its statement: “The present intention is to concentrate initial outreach activities within the area inhabited by the Mkhwanazi community and then to extend operations regionally.”

A further iteration of the Strategic Plan (2008-2011) considerably shortened the vision statement and lowered UNIZULU's aspiration to be *the* leading rural-based institution to being merely a leading one. The mission of generating knowledge “in partnership with the local community” was retained, but the “global” community was replaced by the “international” community.

The latest version of the Strategic Plan (2010-2013) simply states the vision as being “[a] leading Comprehensive University providing quality education” – i.e. again dispensing with the notion of 'rural based'. (Nonetheless, an advertisement placed in the local newspaper, congratulating the matriculants of 2011, stated: “We pride ourselves in being the only rural comprehensive tertiary education institution in KwaZulu Natal.”)

4. ⁵Notions of 'Engagement'

Having established notions of 'community' the next logical step is to examine what is meant when we speak of the university 'engaging' with its communities. As with 'community', what constitutes 'engagement' is not clear-cut. When looking at the notion of engagement I have found it useful to borrow Furco's (1996) continuum (adapted by Naudé 2006) of student community engagement activities and convert it to graph form (as in Figure 1 below). While Furco's continuum was designed specifically with service learning⁶ in mind, his selection of the two variables of *prime goal* (service to the community or student learning) and *prime beneficiary* (student or community) are useful in plotting the various activities which universities regard as being broadly considered to be forms of community engagement. All of the activities included in Figure 1 below come under the umbrella of 'community engagement' as set out in UNIZULU's Policy on Community Engagement (2013). This figure is also reproduced in section 3.2 of Paper 5.

The upper left quadrant of figure 1 identifies those activities in which the main goal is the learning of the student (rather than providing a service to a particular community), and the main beneficiary is (therefore) the student herself and/or the University. Activities which fall into this category are those in which community engagement is integrated into academic programmes of students, such as service learning; community-based practical components of degree programmes required by legislation; fieldwork and community-based research in the curriculum; as well as clinical practice, professional training, and work-integrated learning (WIL).

⁵ Figures 1, 2 and 3 are what might be deemed in presentation-speak 'busy'. This is because they are actually taken from composite powerpoint slides which are built up step by step during presentation of the concepts and models being discussed.

⁶ UNIZULU's Community Engagement Policy notes that "Service Learning' (also referred to as academic or community service learning) is an educational approach that provides curriculum-based, credit-bearing, and assessed learning experiences for students".

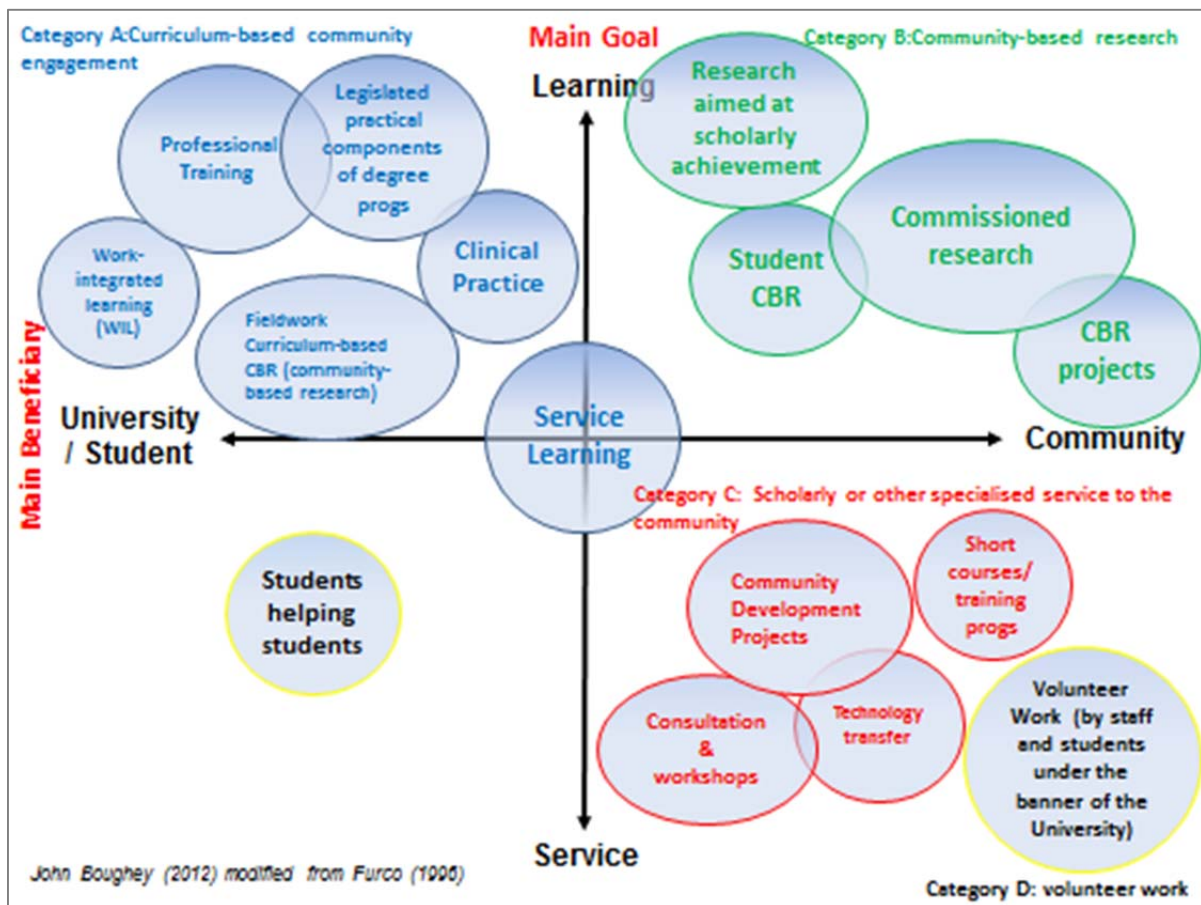


Figure 1: A classification of community engagement activities
(adapted from Furco 1996 and Naudé 2006)

The upper right quadrant signifies those activities which might be categorised as 'community-based research' in which the community, rather than the university is the main beneficiary in terms of new knowledge (which may or may not lead to implementation). This includes: research by staff members aimed at scholarly achievements, contributions and outputs (i.e. conference papers, academic publications, and academic qualifications); commissioned research and other community-based research projects; community-based research undertaken by students in partnership with community members.

The lower right quadrant accommodates those activities which are deemed to have as their main objective the provision of a service to the community. Examples of such activities are projects, workshops, consultations, short courses, and technology transfer. The quadrant also accommodates all forms of volunteer work that is undertaken under the banner of the University (e.g., traditional forms of community outreach) by staff and students.

The lower left quadrant (which the University's Community Engagement Policy does not cover, as activities are purely internal to the University), is where the University 'helps itself', as it were. The example given in the figure is that of ⁷students helping students.

Cherney, Bond and Clark (2009:696) aver that "a community is simply a group of people whose interactions impact upon each other whether or not they are aware of their impacts". Whilst this might literally be the case, particularly in the ecologically fragile context described by Cherney *et al.* (2009), for engagement to take place between a university and its communities there has to be some sort of relationship. Communities existing without knowledge of each other are communities *per se*, but it is not until a relationship is activated in some way that each becomes a community for the other. Even if communities are known to each other, but knowledge stays at that level of simply acknowledging existence, it cannot be said to be a relationship.

Relationships are activated through the need to accomplish a task, meet a challenge, or find a solution to a particular problem. However, a Community-University Partnership Programme, as suggested by its name, is based not just on relationships but on 'partnerships'. There are a number of models which assist in differentiating the two. Enos and Morton (2003, in Bringle, Clayton and Price 2009) portray relationships on a continuum ranging from those which are 'exploitive' through the 'transactional' to the 'transformational'. Bringle, Clayton and Price (2009:4) suggest that relationships are considered as partnerships by the extent to which they are characterised by their degree of closeness, equity and integrity. Wals and Jickling (2002) examine partnerships with communities by considering two variables when thinking of executing a project or meeting a challenge, the extent to which goals are negotiable between parties, and the degree of community input into the project.

Elements of each of these three models or continua can be seen in Pretty (1995), as quoted by Dazé, Ambrose and Ehrhart (2009:21), who characterises relationships in terms of the degree of community participation, moving from 'passive participation', in which people can be considered as participants only to the extent to which they have been told what has been decided or has already happened, through to 'self-mobilisation and connectedness', where people participate by taking initiatives independently to change systems, and by developing contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retaining control over how resources are used.

⁷ Over the years I have on a number of occasions been approached by groups of students, formal and informal, who have requested assistance in conducting initiatives (e.g. English language proficiency and leadership and management) aimed at capacity-building for fellow students.

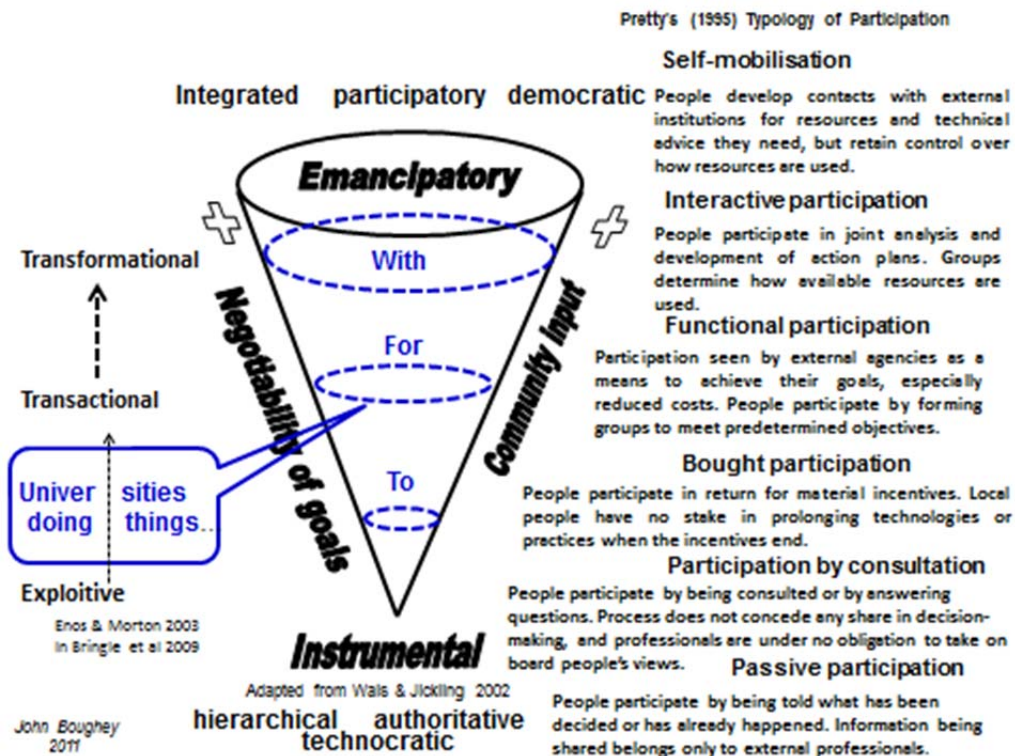


Figure 2: Typologies of 'being participatory'

The selected continua of 'participation' are compositely captured in the graphic in Figure 2 above. The central feature is a cone (reconceptualised from Wals and Jickling's (2002) original graph) depicting the continuum which exists between a narrow 'instrumental' (hierarchical, authoritative and technocratic) view of interaction at one end to a broad 'emancipatory' view at the other, characterised by being integrated, participatory and democratic at the other. The factors determining the degree of emancipation are the negotiability of the goals of the interaction and the level of input from the community involved. Mapped onto the cone at various points are also the conceptions of a university doing things 'to' its communities (a pervasive example being the commando raids mounted by students in the quest for data for their projects, dissertations and theses), doing things 'for' their communities (a traditional model of outreach and project execution with the university seen as being the owner and controller of knowledge and resources), and universities doing things 'with' their communities in a democratic partnership. To the left and right of the cone are similar continua relating to the continua of relationships. The one on the left is taken from Enos and Morton (2003) and compares an 'exploitive' relationship with an 'instrumental' approach and a 'transformational' relationship to Wals and Jickling's 'emancipatory' end of the cone. To the right of the cone, a slightly different, but complementary, perspective is included, namely Petty's (1995) typology of participation.

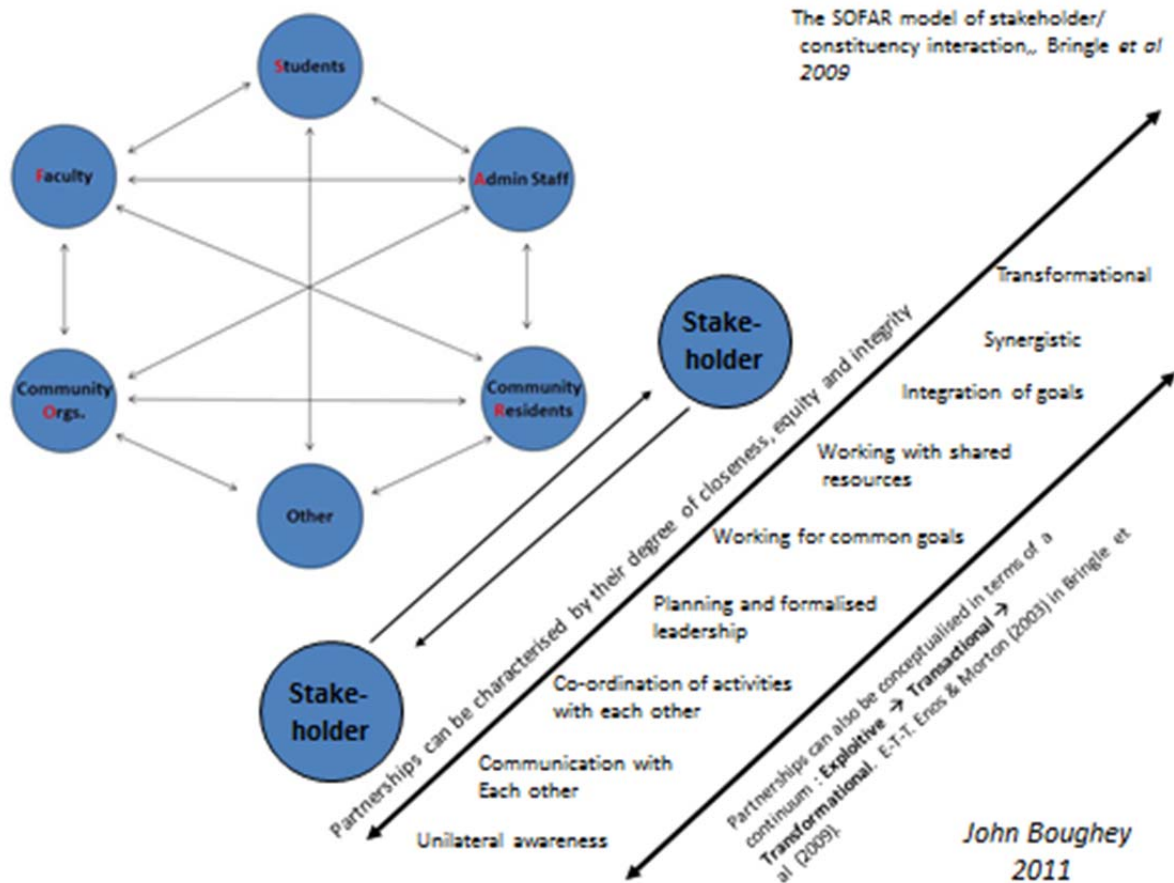


Figure 3: A composite model of relationships and partnerships

The related graphic in figure 3 above depicts Bringle *et al's* (2009) SOFAR model of university-community interaction (an acronym constructed from the key stakeholder groupings of **S**tudents, **O**ther, **F**aculty (meaning academic staff), **A**dministrative staff, and **C**ommunity **R**esidents). Diagonally to the right of the SOFAR model is what might be termed an 'exploded' view of the relationship/partnership between stakeholders, based on the extent to which they are close, equitable and have integrity. Finally, in the bottom right hand corner, the Bringle et al continuum is aligned with Enos and Morton's Exploitive/Transactional/Transformational continuum of relationships, translocated from figure 2.

In the discourse on community engagement one often hears the term 'sustainability' as a criterion for judging the worth of a project. However, the models depicted in the figures above show that this does not mean that the university has to stay involved forever.

As partnerships move towards the transformational or emancipatory end of the spectrum, it is to be hoped that communities will reach Pretty's (1995) self-mobilisation stage, where they have become empowered to independently take initiatives and identify sources of help and have recourse to them when necessary. The university might then be called in to do

something 'for' a community – something which we have hitherto spoken of as being something to be avoided – but in an empowered rather than impoverished way.

On a cautionary note, Reason (2001:185) reminds us that collaboration between persons cannot be produced by fiat; collaborative relationships emerge over time, and may require careful facilitation in order to emerge at all.

5. Notions of 'Engagement' at the University Of Zululand

Using the models described in the previous sections it is possible to plot changing conceptions of 'engagement' at UNIZULU. The MRGO exercise in 1993 conceptualised the relationship as one in which the university was seen as the prime agent, identifying and researching problems of the community and acting as facilitator in community projects by providing expert knowledge, guidance and information. The plan also mentioned the need for the knowledge and information gained from 'community service' projects to be disseminated to the spheres of teaching and research, with the latter being promoted as an inter-departmental exercise.

In the 2003 Strategic Plan created in the wake of UNIZULU's reconfiguration as a comprehensive institution, 'community outreach' was still characterised as the university assessing community needs and providing programmes that sought to address those needs, but now incorporated the idea of "involving community in matters affecting them". The plan further proposed the identification of those [degree] courses which could be re-designed to appropriately accommodate community outreach, which would have the additional benefit of improving volunteerism and increasing student exposure to practical situations.

The next iteration of the Strategic Plan (2008 to 2011) introduced the notion of partnerships with business, industry, government and civil society (in particular, non-governmental organisations) to design and deliver programmes, and to promote partnership-based, multidisciplinary, problem-orientated research aligned to national imperatives and societal needs (particularly with regard to technology and human development). An implicit distinction seems to have been drawn between these activities labelled as 'research', and the intention of "utilising the resources of UNIZULU in appropriate community development initiatives based on collaboration with relevant communities".

The latest iteration of the Strategic Plan (2010 to 2013), in a new section entitled 'stakeholder analysis', includes 'communities' as the next stakeholder after 'students', with the University's responsibility, through its academic staff, being to make a "contribution towards local development" by aligning research output to "practical problems in the community", including in partnership with business, civil society, other universities and research organisations.

5.1 Community engagement at UNIZULU: Staff and student voices

A perusal of annual Faculty reports over the past few years indicates that 'community engagement' continues to be an activity which is interpreted quite broadly, including doing work with and for local rural and business communities on an individual and departmental basis and assisting local schools. Despite the existence of an institutional policy to the contrary there are also some staff members who consider acting as external examiners, sitting on professional boards, and taking students on orientation visits to institutions and organisations as 'community engagement'. (The fact that provision for reporting on Community Engagement in the University's annual report for 2013 had not initially been made is perhaps also indicative of the less valued status that Community Engagement seems to have when compared with Teaching and with Research).

In addition to these reports I have periodically surveyed staff and student opinion on the topic. In preparation for a presentation at an international conference in 2006 I conducted a questionnaire with twelve staff members and six students on various aspects of University-Community Engagement. In 2009, as an assignment for a short learning programme in Service Learning Capacity Building, I interviewed four senior staff members, a lecturer and a student on their understanding of community engagement and its status at a university. In 2010, as part of an orientation programme in preparation for engaging in community projects thirty students were asked for their conceptions of 'community engagement'. In 2012 feedback on notions of 'community' and 'engagement', and issues surrounding these was elicited first at a workshop with a particular academic department and then in a campus-wide forum requested by the Vice-Chancellor.

As might be expected, responses are wide-ranging. On the notion of 'community', understandings range geographically from "the local people neighbouring the University", through "anywhere within a 50 kilometre radius", and "all the people, communities and businesses in the region", up to the broadest conceptualisation of "I would understand 'community' in the widest possible sense, i.e. local, national and international." Others take a view of 'community' which encompasses communities both internal and external to the community – in the words of one respondent: "Community cannot be separated from the students we work with; students and community are the same thing". (This last point would presumably be the justification for the respondent who, when asked whether they practised any form of community engagement replied "No! I already serve the community through the education of its components")

On conceptions of what constitutes 'community engagement', with the notable exception of the student who offered the opinion that "we should look at the community as a resource to

fulfil our curious mind in research”, opinions are evenly distributed between the traditional idea of doing things ‘for’ communities and working ‘with’ communities. Students in particular have quite pronounced ideas of how community stands in relation to the University, very much along the lines of the student who in a workshop I ran a number of years ago described his community engagement role as “bringing light to a dark hut”. Students in the 2010 orientation programme spoke variously of “helping people go forward in civilisation of the community”, “helping the community to become a better community”, “developing the community and empowering them and bringing awareness on issues”. However, other students have a more democratic view of how the University interacts with its communities, speaking of communities being “engaged as equal partners”, “taking part in whatever that is happening in their community”, and “working together as community members and researchers for mutual benefit”. This viewpoint is perhaps best summed up by the student comment: “I still maintain that for anyone to define community engagement, he or she should think of community members actively involved in the community project”. It was also interesting to note the admission by one student that they had conceptualised community engagement as “the involvement and participation of public members that are dedicated into projects of the localised area, to improve or develop the living environment”, but conceded that after the orientation session “my definition has changed because there is involvement of higher education institution which I did not have in mind”.

In summary, while there has definitely been an increase in community engagement activities over the past few years, these activities still tend to be individually rather than departmentally or institutionally generated, informal and *ad hoc*. A majority of staff members (admittedly a small number) surveyed felt that community issues should inform the university’s curriculum, but the actual extent to which this should be the case varies. At one end of the spectrum we have an unequivocal assertions that “the University’s long-term survival depends on it”, and “It’s very important because we are a rural-based institution, yet we don’t really make use of our rural community to shape and direct our agenda”, while at the other we have an emphatic “I don’t think the socio-economic needs of the community SHOULD shape integrated teaching”, supported by a more reflective comment that “There is not enough out there locally to inform the building blocks of our curriculum”.

5.2 Reversing the telescope: Communities engaging with their universities

Thus far, the notion of community engagement has been examined from the perspective of the university, how do communities perceive engagement with universities? First-hand experience and anecdotal evidence suggest that the following slightly tongue-in-cheek caricature (Bougey, 2012) of the university-community relationship has elements no doubt

familiar to many people, from university and community alike. From both sides the relationship is seen as essentially exploitative. Notice that the community is looking at the university through the other end of the telescope, through which it appears distant and inaccessible, the archetypal ivory tower on the hill (Figure 4).

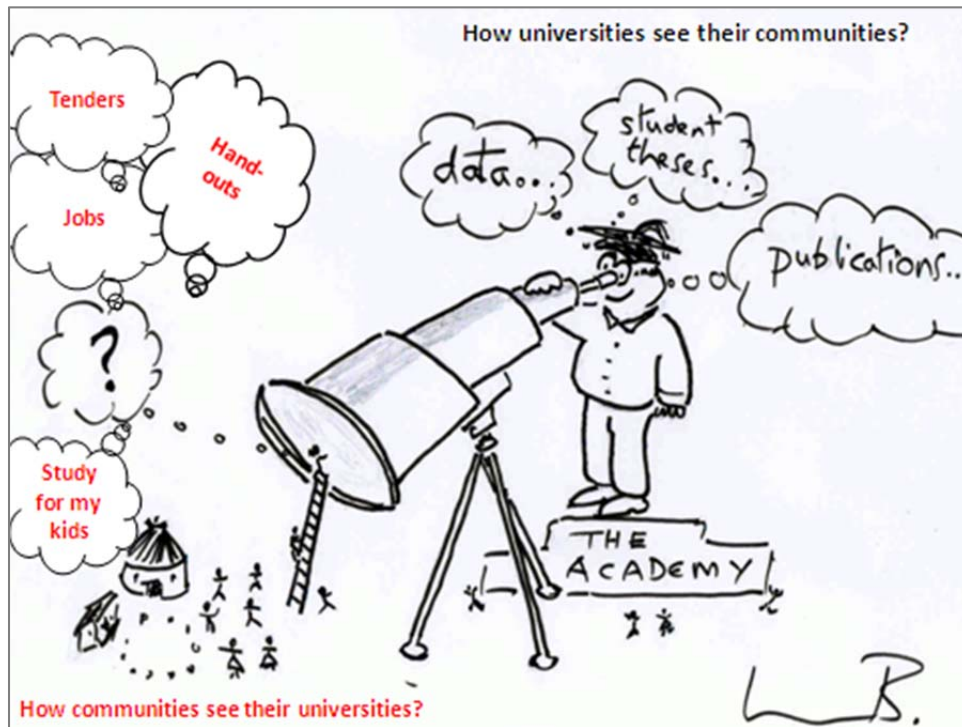


Figure 4: Reversing the telescope

From the standpoint of a CUPP it is particularly important to reverse the telescope and think in terms of communities engaging with their universities because a CUPP takes a people-centred approach to engagement, with communities making active choices about the resources (including the university) they want to use. As Dazé *et al.* (2009:21) note, relationships in a people-centred approach depend largely on, and celebrate local perceptions and creativity. Development actors are viewed as knowledgeable and capable of solving their own problems. Just as there are some university staff members and students who conceptualise community engagement as involving the 'knowing' university lending its expertise to support the 'unknowing' community, CUPP experience at UNIZULU and the research done by Netshandama (2010) at a sister rural-based institution, confirm that some community members hold a similar view. However, other community members see the university as a provider of resources and training to capacitate them to do things for themselves. Community partners described community development in terms of the ability of the community to do things for itself as a result of the interaction with the university. Indeed, Netshandama's research revealed that the need for education, training and empowerment

emerged as the key ingredient of a quality partnership between a university and a community. A smaller number of university and community members view the community's knowledge as equivalent in status to the academic knowledge generated by the university. The chairman of a local secondary cooperative in Zululand (personal communication) succinctly summed up the intention of people-centred development by observing that what is often perceived as a clash of indigenous knowledge in the community and 'academic' or scientific knowledge in the university, are in fact not oppositional but complementary. Dazé *et al.* (2009:21) also note that people-centred development is driven by the need for a common understanding with communities, requiring knowledge on what people do and why they do it. In Netshandama's research community participants referred to the role of educators and researchers in empowering the students to understand the needs of the community, to respect the knowledge that the community has and to appreciate the circumstances of the community: "I believe they [the students] do not know everything because they are students. I believe you are going to ensure that they respect what the family members are telling them" (Netshandama 2010:79).

Experience with UNIZULU communities and Netshandama's findings both confirm the frustration often felt by communities who are the frequent and repetitive target of uncoordinated engagement activities. "It is as if you [researchers] do not come from the same institution and it is tiring" (Netshandama 2010:80). Such practice can lead to the undesired outcome of unilateral 'community engagement' rather than reciprocal engagement.

On a final note, feedback from communities strongly suggests that universities need to be more physically and intellectually accessible, and more readily perceivable as a resource or partner. It is noticeable that in the Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) of two of the neighbouring district municipalities universities receive no mention, whilst in the third, UNIZULU's own district municipality of Uthungulu, a reference only occurs in the composition of the local SMME (Small Medium and Micro Enterprise) Forum. When the chairperson of a local cooperative, herself from UNIZULU, was asked if she had ever considered the University as a resource, she replied that she had never thought of it.

6. Some Tentative Recommendations

At UNIZULU's most recent campus-wide workshop on community engagement (4 June 2012) the observation was made that in higher education the concepts of teaching and research seem to be universally understood, but how community engagement is interpreted, depends on an individual university's history, location, and vision and mission, i.e. its identity. The Community-University Partnership Programme at the University of Brighton (the model on which the DST based its own CUPP pilot project) took root in a university which,

according to its Social Engagement Strategy (2009) 'emerged' from its local communities, with whom it has 'a powerful natural bond'. By contrast, UNIZULU was established by National Government decree and was met with mixed reaction by the community at the time, with many viewing its establishment as "just another apartheid-driven scheme to foist a 'bush college' upon the Black community in order to appease the demand for quality tertiary education and equal opportunities for all" (University of Zululand, 2010:12).

The insights drawn in this paper from plans, surveys, interviews and discussions, reveal a complex and shifting relationship between UNIZULU and its local, international and global communities, and a variety of interpretations as to what constitutes engagement between them, as the University seeks to adjust to being a rural-based comprehensive higher education institution with an additional urban footprint. It also needs to be noted that this complex and shifting relationship has been viewed almost exclusively from within the University. It would be most instructive to do a parallel study on community-based perceptions of the University over the past twenty years.

The notion of 'community engagement' in general will no doubt continue to be a big tent, but its albeit brief exploration in this paper offers some avenues of further debate and reflection on the conceptualisation of a specific Community-University *Partnership Programme*.

Firstly, notwithstanding the elasticity of the term 'community', it helps to have an unequivocal institutional commitment to 'community' in terms of geographical space, starting from the university's immediate locale and expanding outwards as resources and opportunities dictate. The University of Western Sydney, for example, has as its mission: "To be a university of international standing and outlook, achieving excellence through scholarship, teaching, learning, research and service to its regional, national and international communities, *beginning with the people of Greater Western Sydney*" [emphasis added]. At the 2003 Association of Commonwealth Universities' conference on "Universities Engaging with their Communities", Prof. Sir George Bain of Queen's University Belfast, asserted that "the best universities are rooted in their local community" (quoted by Saha 2003). That statement is of course open to interrogation, but it is interesting that an examination of the mission statements of all twenty three universities in South Africa reveals an emphasis on regional, national, African and global. Where 'local' features, it is usually unspecified. In fact, it is only the mission statements of Rhodes University and the Central University of Technology (CUT, Free State) which make any specific reference to any form of 'local' community. Rhodes University makes reference to "the development of the Eastern Cape", while CUT locates the focus of its activities as an 'engaged' university "primarily in the Central region of South Africa". Why is the University of Western Sydney happy to identify itself with a particular community? Perhaps it has something to do with its planning

philosophy of breaking things down into achievable chunks based on what is (a) relevant and (b) feasible.

Having said that, it should be clear to the reader that this article has only begun to scratch the surface in addressing the concept of 'community'. Even (especially?) when speaking about local traditional communities we must guard against idealised, archetypal, homogeneous and static conceptions of community along the lines of Ferdinand Tonnies' *gemeinschaft* (describing organically created communities with a strong sense of shared identity and tradition (Tonnies 1957), and characterised by close personal relationships – corresponding in part to Pahl's (2008) term 'communities of fate' and *gesellschaft* (describing associations or organisations in which individuals come together in pursuit of some instrumental goal or purpose, including Pahl's notion of 'communities of choice').

Observation and discussion at UNIZULU suggest that there exists an un-nuanced and largely uninterrogated *gemeinschaft* perception of our local rural communities and a similarly uninvestigated *gesellschaft* interpretation of the entity we lump together as 'the business community'. Regarding the former, as the observations above made by Blessing Mkhwanazi attest, the local community is not static in its composition, nor united in its view of the university. Regarding the latter, at best we differentiate between 'big' business and 'SMMEs' (small, medium and micro enterprises), but each of these two broad categories actually represents a continuum related to size, profile and purpose. The University's departments of Sociology and Anthropology could usefully be co-opted into the CUPP to provide opportunities for all stakeholders to get to grips with the sociology of 'community', including consideration of Pahl's (2008) notion of 'personal communities' referred to earlier in this paper, whose typology includes essentially locally-embedded 'family-enveloped personal communities' and generally non-local 'friend-like' and 'friend-enveloped personal communities'.

The second practical consideration for the development of a CUPP concerns the more precise delineation of the 'engagement' undertaken. As previously noted, there are many activities which broadly qualify as 'community engagement' (see Figure 1 above), and which satisfy the criteria of being undertaken in the name of the university rather than an individual staff or student member, and which make a contribution to society in one way or another. An analysis of the documents distributed by the NRF at the outset of the project (RSA DST/NRF, 2009) reveals an emphasis on a particular form of engagement which might be synthesised as one which must simultaneously facilitate and effect change in higher education institutions and their surrounding communities through collective and innovative efforts, arising out of equal, fair, democratic, reciprocal, interactive and sustainable partnerships between

stakeholders, based on the identification of shared goals – i.e. doing things *with* communities (Figure 3 above). Only if the community has an active hand in both shaping and achieving objectives will any of the numerous activities plotted on the graph in Figure 1 above be considered as legitimate projects with the CUPP. One of the major implications of adopting such a stance, consonant with a people-centred approach is that university and community should work together in partnerships that respect and promote local perceptions and creativity and in which community members are viewed as knowledgeable, and capable, with assistance where and when appropriate, of solving their own problems.

Working in this democratic and reciprocal manner will also mean that the university's research curriculum will have to accommodate alternative participatory research methodologies, such as Participatory Action Research (PAR), as problematic as that might be (Tripp, 2005). Moreover, capacity-building in these new methodologies will necessarily include community members.

7. Conclusion

In concluding this discussion of 'community' and 'engagement' in higher education I would like to extend Pahl's notions of communities of fate and choice to relationships and partnerships. This article, for practical reasons, has advocated an institutional commitment to local geographical space as the starting point for community engagement. However, as Pahl (2008) notes, geographical proximity does not in itself produce social cohesion or 'community'. Geographically, universities and their local communities in the first instance are in what might be termed 'relationships of fate'. But it is the 'partnerships of choice', wherein individuals, if only temporarily, admit each other to their personal communities to achieve common goals, and where they negotiate the necessary degrees of closeness, equity and integrity (Bingle *et al.*, 2009) which constitute the stuff of university-community 'engagement'. This suggests that all stakeholders in the community-university engagement endeavour need to know more about each other at a level deeper than simply the institutional or organisational.

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A Comprehensive University at the Heart of its Communities: Establishing a Framework for Engagement

PAPER 2

From pillars to people: Reconceptualising the integration of teaching, research and community engagement in higher education

Abstract

Although community engagement has supposedly been considered as a core activity of higher education in South Africa since the publication of the Education White Paper (RSA DOE 1997), it has always struggled to achieve par with the other core activities of teaching-and-learning, and research. Reasons for this include the questioning of its legitimacy as a higher education activity; lack of consensus on what constitutes 'community' and what qualifies as 'engagement'; the logistical problems of including it in the curriculum; and the fact that, unlike teaching and research, it is not an activity which attracts government subsidy.

This paper argues that for community engagement to be considered on a par with the other two core activities, there needs to be a shift away from thinking about the metaphor of the three pillars of higher education towards an emphasis on the people, or stakeholders, involved in a university's enactment of its teaching-and-learning, research and community engagement functions.

Conceptualising the integration of people rather than pillars perforce introduces the notion of 'relationships', but more particularly 'partnerships'. Exploration of the teaching-and-learning, research and community engagement nexus from this perspective requires an expanded understanding of the term 'engagement' and its enactment through partnerships of choice between stakeholders rather than the more customary relationships of fate, in learning communities – in particular the university as a learning organisation rather than an organisation about learning. Such a reconceptualisation, it is argued, will be necessary for community engagement to truly achieve parity with higher education's other two core activities.

The paper concludes with a caution that the sort of radical reform needed in higher education institutions to make these ideas an everyday reality may be more realistically

achieved by adopting the ‘theory of second best’ which, while not losing sight of ultimate objectives, recognises that we have to work within our resources and commitment limitations.

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1. Introduction

Bourner (2010:5) points out that higher education's tripartite mission of teaching, research, and community service/engagement was not in fact the invention of United States universities in the twentieth century (or even the United States land grant universities of the nineteenth century) but has a historical pedigree that goes back to the first stage in the development of the European university in the Middle Ages. Be that as it may, community engagement as a legitimate higher education activity in South African higher education only came to the fore with the publication of the Education White Paper in 1997. Since then, universities have sought to include community engagement in their activities with various levels of success.

However, as Steyn (2011:3) notes: "Despite numerous attempts by scholars to clarify 'community engagement', it remains a vague concept in South African higher education institutions. "Conceptual frameworks for community engagement are sorely lacking and there are no universally accepted standards against which to measure the impact of community engagement".

Vice-Chancellors at South African higher education institutions (HEIs) have been polemical, provoking debate by challenging their audiences with questions such as those asked by Fourie (2007:36): "Does Community Engagement belong at a university – and more specifically, does it belong at *this* university?", and the observation by Badat (2011) regarding the impossibility of imagining a university which did not teach or research, but the possibility of imagining one which did not do community engagement. Vice-Chancellors elsewhere, former and serving, have been unequivocal. At the 2003 Association of Commonwealth Universities' Conference Prof Sir George Bain of Queen's University Belfast was quoted by Saha (2003) as saying that "the best universities are rooted in their local community". At the Community-University Expo (2013) the Governor-General of Canada, David Johnston (himself a former Vice-Chancellor), asserted that "All institutions of higher education are closely related to local communities" and that "for higher education, community engagement is a major strategy for distinction". His answer to the question posed by Fourie above is that universities belong to their communities, and communities to their universities. Prof Julian Crampton (2013), Vice-Chancellor of the University of Brighton, avers that "Social and community engagement is at the heart of what we do as a university... We will continue to work with communities in producing and applying new knowledge. Building on our already substantial base, our teaching-and-learning will provide opportunities for all undergraduate students to have the opportunity to contribute to activities outside the university."

Feedback from academic staff gleaned by the author from a number of colleagues raises more pragmatic issues, such as what exactly community engagement is, and how is it possible to fit it into the workload formula, given the existing demands of teaching and research. The latter question confirms the common conceptualisation of community engagement as another pillar, or silo, to add to those of teaching and research, and its status as ‘the orphan child’, ‘the third leg of the stool’, or ‘the hind teat’ – all epithets of inferiority.

2. From Pillars to People

At the 2006 Cape Town Conference on Community Engagement in Higher Education, Prof Mala Singh (2007:17), then Interim Chief Executive Officer of the Council on Higher Education (SA), posed the question that “if community engagement is postulated as a key component of institutional identity, how can it become a design principle for reshaping the other two core functions, of teaching and of research?” As indicated in the previous section, in discussing community engagement *per se*, and its integration with teaching-and-learning and research, the three activities have traditionally been depicted as pillars, or silos, of various sizes in relation to each other (signifying their perceived relative importance), and indicating no synergy between them. Figure 1 below depicts the current workload formula at a particular South African university (University of Zululand – UNIZULU), in which approximately 60% to 70% of time is devoted to teaching, 20% to 30% to research, and 10% to “administration and community outreach”. (These ratios are unwritten norms. A policy is in the process of being written.)

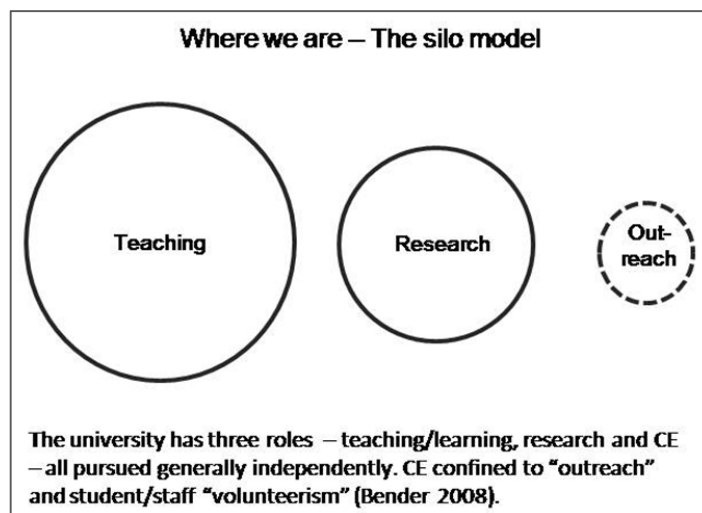


Figure 1: The three pillars of higher education

Models attempting greater integration signify relationships between the core activities, use interlocking or overlapping circles, as in the venn diagrams below taken from Bender (2008:89-90).

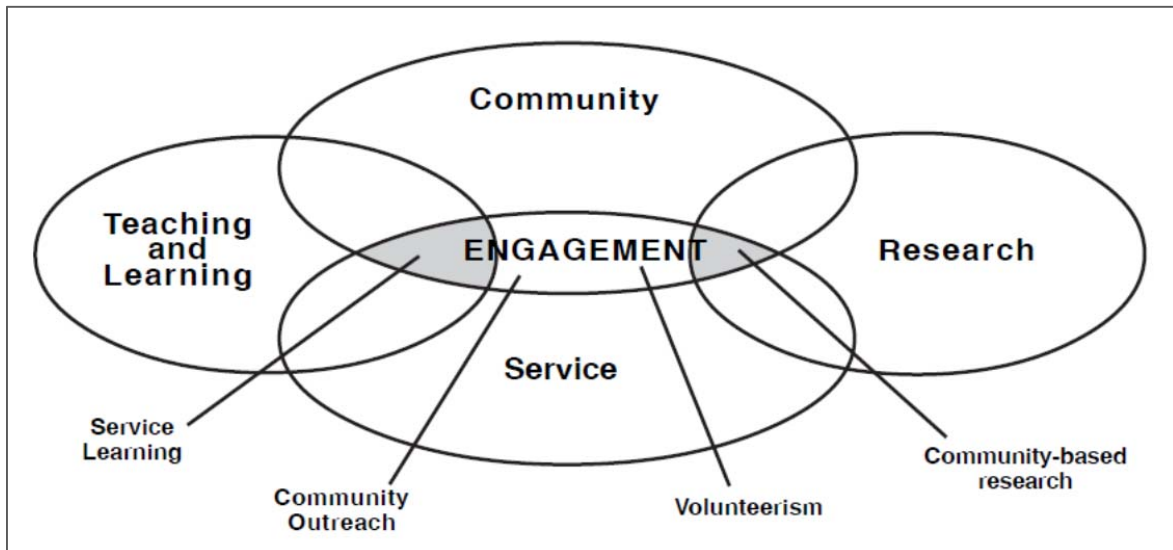


Figure 2: The intersecting model (adapted from Bringle, Games and Malloy 1999), in which there is acknowledgement of some intersection between the university's three roles of teaching-and-learning, research and community service

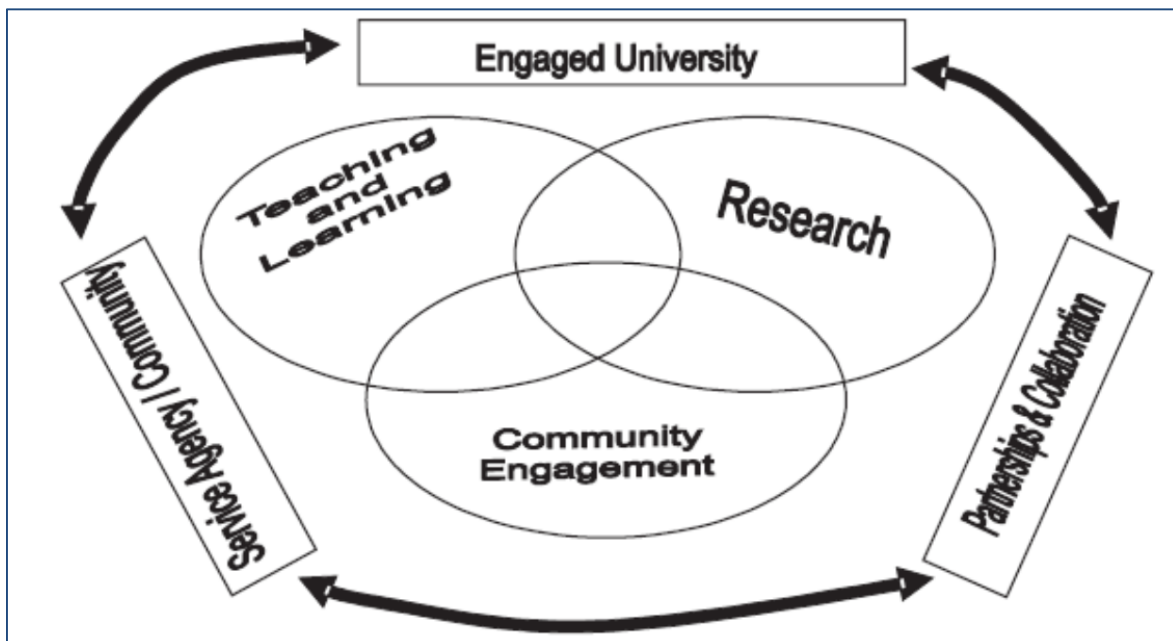


Figure 3: The infusion (cross-cutting) model of the 'community-engaged university' in which the university has two fundamental roles – teaching/learning and research

Community engagement is a fundamental idea and perspective which must inform and animate and be integrated with most of the university's teaching/learning and research activities (Bender 2008:90).

This paper argues that for community engagement to be considered on a par with the other two core activities, there first needs to be a shift in thinking about the metaphor of the three pillars or silos of higher education activity towards an emphasis on the people, or stakeholders, involved in a university's enactment of its teaching-and-learning, research and community engagement functions. Concentrating on the integration of *people* rather than on the responsibilities they undertake perforce introduces the notion of 'relationships', but more particularly 'partnerships'. For a more detailed discussion on the concepts of 'partnership' and 'engagement', see Boughey (2014, Paper 1, Section 4).

The structural framework of Bringle, Clayton and Price (2009:5) for analysing relationships between students, community organisations, faculty (academic staff), university administrators, and community residents (SOFAR) provides a useful starting point. Bringle *et al.* (2009:4) discuss the dynamics of the SOFAR model by using what they call the Relationships Continuum, which distinguishes true *partnerships* from simple *relationships* by their varying degrees of closeness, equity and integrity.

- **Closeness** is a function of three components: (a) frequency of interaction, (b) diversity of activities that are the basis of the interactions, and (c) strength of influence on the other person's behaviour, decisions, plans, and goals.
- The quality of **equity** is measured not by comparing inputs and outcomes *per se*, but by the degree to which outcomes are perceived as proportionate to inputs.
- Relationships with high levels of **integrity** *inter alia* share deeply-held internally coherent values, and suggest a vision of what a transformed world might look like.

Bringle *et al.*'s analytical tool is completed by Enos and Morton's (2003) (cited in Bringle *et al.* 2009:7):

E-T-T (exploitative → transactional → transformational) model of relationship outcomes.

The three models are captured in the composite graphic in Figure 4 below.

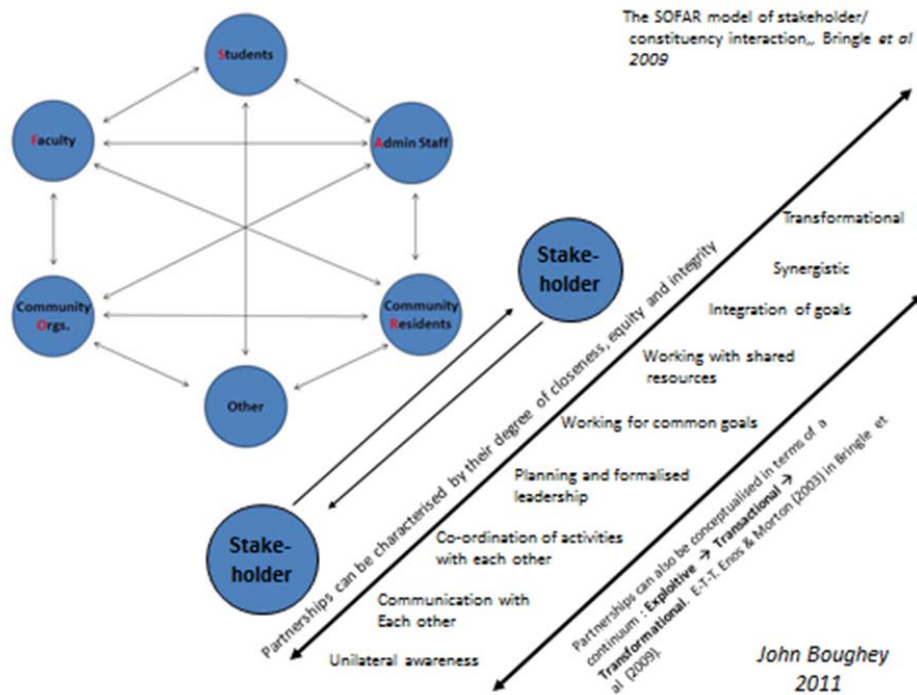


Figure 4: Composite graphic of stakeholder interaction (after Bringle et al. 2009)

To this Relationships Continuum by Bringle et al. (2009:4), we can add Wals and Jickling’s (2002) idea of the degree of ‘participation’ amongst stakeholders being assessed according to the two criteria of the negotiability of the goals set by participants in any endeavour and the levels of input available to participants. We can also translate Enos and Morton’s (2003) Exploitive → Transactional → Transformational continuum into the more basic idea of universities doing things ‘to’, ‘for’, or ‘with’ their stakeholders. These ways of ‘doing’ are applicable to each of the three main relationships/partnerships: staff–student; staff–community; student–community.

The amalgamation of these models is captured in Figure 5 below.

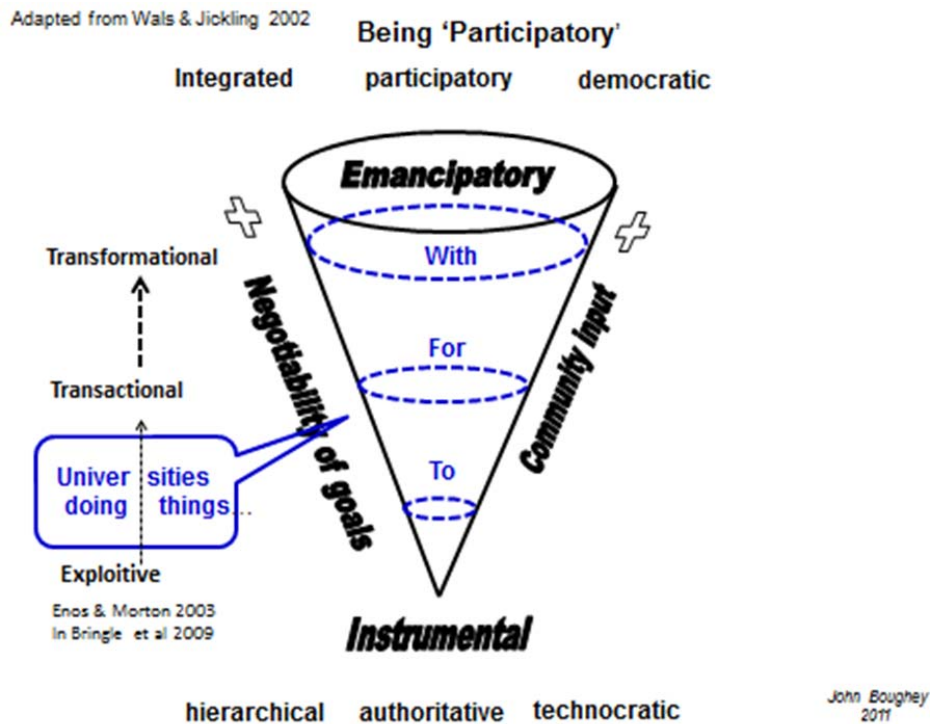


Figure 5: Amalgamation of continua of stakeholder participation

With two further observations by Pahl (2008) we now have a different lens through which to consider the ambit of 'engagement', namely his distinction between communities of fate (i.e. communities into which people are born or find themselves) and communities of choice, and his assertion that 'community' is neither simply a place or a small-scale population aggregate but 'a mode of relating'. The latter is supported by Mandelli and Vianello's (2009:423) acknowledgement of the essentially social nature of communities of practice. As they say: "Communities construct their life and social identity through dynamic processes, embedded in rich social contexts."

3. A Broader Conception of the 'Engaged' University

Notwithstanding the breadth of activity suggested in the statement that "an engaged campus is one that is consciously committed to reinvigorating the democratic spirit and community engagement in all aspects of its campus life: students, faculty, staff and the institution itself" (Hollander, Burack and Holland, 2001a:1), references to the 'engaged' university are customarily made with specific regard to the inclusion of (external) 'community' in a university's activities. But, for the purposes of strengthening the place of community engagement in higher education

and promoting its achievement of par with the traditional activities of teaching and research, we will need to expand the scope and application of our understanding of what it means to 'engage'. As Hollander *et al.* (2001b:6) observe:

Civic engagement is not conducted in isolation from teaching and research. Effective practice of engagement draws on institutional academic strengths, and depends on integration with the institution's goals for teaching, learning, and research. Engagement requires investments in infrastructure, faculty development, and organizational change.

The requirement for organisational change brings us on to the topic of 'learning organisations', and more specifically, the idea of universities as learning organisations.

4. Universities as Learning Organisations

The concept of the 'learning organisation' is accredited to Peter Senge, in his book *The Fifth Discipline* (1990). Mittleton-Kelly (undated) sums up a learning organisation as one that is able to change its behaviours and mindsets as a result of experience. To do this, though, crucially, organisations need to 'learn how to learn'. A synthesis from a number of sources (Bruining 2009; Centre for Applied Research 1997; Ngesu *et al.* 2008; Nobre 2009; The MEAB Group (undated)] suggest that the following features and dispositions are key to the concept of the learning organisation, comprising a mixture of strategies, structures and culture requiring leadership, human capacity development and knowledge management and mobilisation:

- Promotion of inquiry and dialogue through a risk-taking and action learning approach, and the creation of continuous learning opportunities, where learning is seen as a social act of sense-making, and is rewarded by the institution.
- The encouragement of experimentation, but striking a balance between exploratory learning (search, risk-taking, variation, experimentation, play, flexibility, discovery, and innovation) and exploitative learning (refinement, choice, production, efficiency, selection, implementation, and execution); encouragement and facilitation of learning from the members themselves (as opposed to trusting in outside expertise).
- Involved leadership and the empowerment of members towards a collective vision, requiring organisational structures that encourage openness and bottom-up as well as top-down flows of information and which encourage collaboration and team learning across traditional functional and other boundaries.

- Connection between the organisation and its environment, and learning from that environment.
- Recognition of the importance of practice, of communities, of dialogue, of questioning and of searching related to the embodied and socially embedded nature of all knowledge creation, learning and meaning-making.
- Willingness to risk speaking the truth to powerful people, and the ability to see the world as it is, without denial or distortions of unpleasant or threatening features, including (self) awareness of existing mindsets; open and honest communication of failure as well as success, including the ability to tolerate feelings of being ignorant, in the dark and 'one down' in the service of one's learning, and the capacity for members to feel accountable for a decision that has gone awry without feeling excessively shamed.
- Establishment of systems to capture and share learning.
- Exhibition of a sense of caring, but with the exercise of a 'proper selfishness' (meaning that the organisation is clear about its role, its goals, its future, and is determined to reach them).

That more than twenty years on the notion of the learning organisation still has currency is evident. Ngesu, Benjamin, Juda and Marcella (2008:289) speak of it as "a concept that is becoming an increasingly widespread philosophy in our contemporary society", although Belet (2009:120) calls for the development of a second-generation learning organisation in which the sometimes superficial or cosmetic changes of first-generation learning organisations give way to in-depth leadership practices. However, the question of whether or not universities can ever move away from being organisations *about* learning to *being* learning organisations continues to be the subject of speculation.

Universities tend to be hierarchical, and while organisations need "power structures, hierarchies and other sort of inequalities [typical of university structures], symmetric relations are also needed, at least for providing commitment and learning between people" (Puutio, Kykyri and Wahlstroem 2008:35). Astin and Astin (2000:44) also note how the 'excessive' autonomy exercised by academics can be antithetical to a sense of community, since it militates against feeling connected and inter-dependent. As Astin and Astin go on to say (p 44): "autonomy can thus serve as a barrier to collaborative work, since it makes it difficult for faculty to get to know and trust each other and prevents them from developing a shared purpose." They also note how academics' disciplinary allegiances or, as Tinto (1997:4) describes them, 'disciplinary fiefdoms',

are reflected in strong departmental structures which result in institutional fragmentation and division and competition for resources.

White and Weathersby (2005:297), in inquiring whether universities can become true learning organisations, note that university members will have to learn how to develop communities [of practice], by committing to increased collaboration and decreased competition, and minimising status differences – in short, “changing oneself to be part of a larger collective unit”. Tinto (1997:2) is forthright in his observation that “university organization seems to mirror other concerns. It seems to promote individual, isolated, passive learning and forms of discourse that are very much limited to the narrow boundaries of separate disciplines.”

In accord with the observations made by Puutio *et al.* and Astin and Astin above, White and Weathersby (2005:295) agree that our institutions of higher education, as learning organisations, need management’s traditional competencies (leadership, team development, cultural proficiency, knowledge management, strategic thinking and planning, and ethical decision-making, among others), but in order for there to be organisational change they additionally need to utilise two other competencies – learning how to learn, and development of community (in the sense of learning community, or community of practice).

The following sections will look at the traditional higher education activity-focused domains of ‘teaching’, ‘research’ and ‘community engagement’ from a relationships/partnerships people-focused perspective of academic staff–student engagement, staff–community engagement, ‘engaged’ students in relation to community, and university engagement from a community perspective.

4.1 Academic staff–student engagement

One of the features of a learning organisation listed above is the exhibiting of a sense of caring. Nowhere should this be more true than in the relationship between lecturer and student, where, to use Pahl’s observations on communities (2008) and Bringle *et al.*’s (2009) analysis of relationships, we should be looking to transform what is essentially a relationship of fate into a partnership of choice if genuine learning is to take place. If we do not view our students as partners, why would we bother even thinking about regarding external communities as partners, potential or otherwise?

Generating a student-academic staff partnership is a fundamental part of the concept of ‘student engagement’ (Trowler 2010a and 2010b; South African Survey of Student Engagement 2010).

Trowler (2010a:3) contrasts a 'market' model of student engagement with a 'developmental' model. The former is a model which locates students in higher education primarily as consumers, and is based on neoliberal thinking about the marketisation of education. The latter is one in which the primary concern is with the quality of learning and the personal, mutual and social benefits that can be derived from staff and students engaging in the co-production of knowledge as partners within a learning community of scholars where emphasis is laid on student growth and development.

Trowler (2010a:2) puts forward three key dimensions of the developmental model:

- *Individual student learning*, which concentrates on students' attention, interest, involvement and (active) participation in learning, and their involvement in the design, delivery and assessment of that learning.
- *Structure and Process*, which examines the extent to which students are involved in substantive (i.e. not just 'token' membership) representation at module, department, faculty and university level.
- *Identity*, which deals with how, and the extent to which students take on the identity of a 'student' 'belonging' to their particular university, and how students and university construct and engage with themselves and each other on issues such as race, gender and sexual orientation.

The third dimension above in particular expands the notion of student–lecturer partnership to include support staff, and accords with Speckman's (2014) holistic empowerment rather than imposition model of student support, which requires stakeholders to do things *with* each other rather than *for* each other.

White and Weathersby (2005:296), in their questioning whether or not universities can become true learning organisations, suggest that staff and students need to become partners in creating learning communities in our classrooms through action inquiry. This will necessitate staff changing their mindset and surrendering their position as 'sage on the stage' and instead seeing students as teachers, teaching themselves, each other, and their lecturers. This also fits in with the notion of research-led teaching, in which students to varying degrees become partners in the research endeavour - (see, for example, Edith Cowan University, Centre for Learning Development: 2012).

4.2 Staff–community engagement

Fourie's (2007:40) delineation of 'engagement in research' encompasses development-orientated research, community service research, and social transformation research, which in his opinion could and should involve social as well as natural sciences. He notes that it also involves "new methods and styles of research that involve community members in addressing the problems of communities". Community-based research (CBR) fits into this category. Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker and Donohue (2003:8) define CBR as a collaborative research enterprise between academic staff, students and community members which validates multiple sources of knowledge and promotes the use of multiple methods of discovery and dissemination of the knowledge produced, and which has as its goal social action and social change for the purpose of achieving social justice. Furthermore, the measure of the value of CBR, and the research questions which drive it, come from its potential to bring about social change and the advancement of social justice, rather than to build theory in a particular discipline. CBR is therefore regarded as being 'somewhat suspect' within traditional academic reward structures.

Recognition of the validity of multiple sources of knowledge can only come about through working and conducting research *with* people, (see Figure 5 above). This will require the traditional research paradigm of the academy to become flexible enough to accommodate action research, and more especially participatory action research in its panoply of accepted and supported research techniques.

Reason (2001:3), in noting that a primary value of action research strategies is to increase people's involvement in the creation and application of knowledge about them and about their worlds, eloquently makes the case for a more inclusive paradigm when he argues that "if one accepts that human persons are agents who act in the world on the basis of their own sense-making, and that human community involves mutual sense-making and collective action, it is no longer possible to do research on persons. It is only possible to do research with persons, including them both in the questioning and sense-making that informs the research, and in the action which is the focus of the research" [original emphasis retained].

Reason (2001:3) further lists five essential differences between so-called 'academic' research and action research, and in so doing confirms the belief stated above that acceptance of action research as a valid form of research in the academy will require a paradigm shift, which he highlights as follows:

- In terms of primary purpose, academic research seeks to contribute to a corpus of knowledge available to third persons, whereas the primary purpose of action research is to develop “practical knowing embodied moment-to-moment action” by the researcher/practitioner.
- Action research differs from academic research in that it has a collaborative intent, valuing research strategies which increase people’s involvement in the creation and application of knowledge about them and about their worlds.
- While most forms of academic research separate the knower from what it is to be known, and conduct their research from a distance (through surveys and questionnaires, for example), action research is rooted in each participant’s in-depth, critical and practical experience of the situation to be understood and acted in.
- For the action researcher, truth is not solely a property of formal propositions, but is a human activity that must be managed for human purposes. Thus, action research recognises “knowledge of our purposes as well of our ideas, knowledge that is based in intuition as well as the senses, knowledge expressed in aesthetic form such as story, poetry and visual arts as well as propositional language, and practical knowledge expressed in skill and competence”.
- Action research aims to develop theory which is not simply abstract and descriptive, but is a guide to inquiry and action in present time.

Tripp (2005:5) notes that because action research occurs in non-manipulated social settings, it does not follow the canons of controlled variables common to scientific research, so it can be termed more generally interventionist rather than more narrowly experimental. He further notes that “[a]ction research is a form of action inquiry that employs recognised research techniques to inform the action taken to improve practice”, and adds that the research techniques should meet the criteria common to other kinds of academic research, such as withstanding peer-review of procedures, significance, originality, and validity.

Linking back to a previous discussion in this paper about the changing relationship between lecturer and student, Brydon-Miller, Greenwood and Maquire (2003:19) observe how embracing an action research perspective requires changes in teaching practices. They quote a fellow academic:

Enacting participatory approaches requires me to take quite a different stance to my work. I now realize the necessity to thoughtfully engage in practices that involve changes

in relationship, positioning, authority, and knowledge production practices. As a teacher, researcher or professional practitioner, I am a changed person.

4.3 'Engaged' students in relation to community

Since the release of the Education White Paper (RSA DOE 1997) community engagement has increasingly been identified as an overarching strategy for the transformation of higher education through the broadening of democratic participation and access, greater responsiveness, and a renewed emphasis on cooperation and partnerships. Higher education institutions have been urged to demonstrate their social responsibility and commitment to the common good by integrating community engagement with teaching, learning and research as a core value and as a mechanism to infuse and enrich their teaching and research with a deeper sense of context and application. This requires a fundamental shift from seeing the university's role as *preparing students for* civic responsibility after they graduate (which does not necessarily mean getting practical experience during their degree studies) and believing that *through their educational experiences*, students experiment with and practise democracy through community-based educational experiences (Hartley, Saltmarsh and Clayton 2010:394).

As Merrifield (2002), quoted in Millican (2009:1), in research carried out on the concept of 'learning citizenship' concludes, "civic education framed in terms of knowledge and perhaps values but without an experiential component has little impact on behaviour". This sentiment was articulately echoed by a UNIZULU ⁸student who said: "Interaction with society adds value to your degree. Theory and academic discourse [alone] does not give you a wholesome or holistic education". A UNIZULU ⁹staff member also noted the mismatch between negotiating the classroom curriculum and the real-life curriculum of community engagement. My personal experience suggests that while a minority might hold the view expressed by one UNIZULU ¹⁰student that "We are not at university to engage with the community; we're just here to learn and go", many are keen to work with the community and, moreover, on a voluntary basis rather than being obliged to through the curriculum.

⁸ In response to the question "Do you think that Community Engagement should form part of the University curriculum?" as part of a written questionnaire in preparation for a conference paper, Nov. 2006.

⁹ In response to the question "Do you think that Community Engagement should form part of the University curriculum?" as part of a written questionnaire in preparation for a conference paper, Nov. 2006.

¹⁰ Verbal response (some time in 2012) from my undergraduate student assistant to an informal question on the importance or otherwise of community engagement in higher education. She gave her permission for me to reproduce the comment.

In a survey of Management of Commerce students at a particular higher education institution in South Africa conducted by Chimucheka (2012), more than 90% of respondents indicated that they undertook community engagement voluntarily; more than 80% of them indicated that they participated in community engagement projects so as to make a positive contribution in the community around them, and that they wanted to be part of change and to be proud of their efforts through seeing their results improving the lives of many people. However, in saying that, we must be aware of the disposition of “doing things *to* the community”, summed up by a UNIZULU ¹¹ student who said: “I think we should look at the community as a resource to fulfil our curious mind in research.”

We need also to guard against what Millican (2009:3) calls “the dangers of patronage” (the ‘doing things *for*’ disposition), where service to a local community runs the risk of adopting a welfare approach in which students see themselves as ‘haves’ giving to the disadvantaged and marginalised ‘have nots’. “If active engagement programmes are to benefit learners and those they are working alongside, they need to be based on a social justice rather than a social service approach to learning and action” (Millican, 2009:3). This, in turn, leads us back to one of the precepts of action research that academic knowledge is neither the only form of valid knowledge nor should be privileged over other local, indigenous or experiential types of knowledge.

Zepke and Leach (2010:174), in a wide-ranging synthesis of research on student engagement, recommend that conservative, student-centred conceptions of engagement need to move beyond a focus on operational matters (strategies, techniques and behaviours) to what they refer to as a ‘democratic-critical’ conception in which engagement is “participatory, dialogic and leads not only to academic achievement but to success as an active citizen”. This takes the notion of engagement to an ontological level of commitment “aligned to active citizenship in which teachers offer and students seize opportunities to extend the boundaries of the curriculum”, including learning to act constructively in the world by using ethical political processes. In the same vein, Trowler (2010b:40) speaks of the institution’s duty to provide an engaging environment as a moral as well as an instrumental one, which according to Kuh (2009:697) obliges staff to create opportunities for students to participate in what he refers to as ‘high impact’ practices such as learning communities, student–lecturer research, service

¹¹ A written comment elicited during a Service-Learning orientation session with a class of Consumer Science undergraduate students in 2009. This comment is also used in this thesis in section 5.1 of Paper 1 and section 5.2.2.3 of Paper 5. Permission was obtained to reproduce the comment.

learning, and internships. Astin and Astin (2000:29) introduce the dimension of leadership, and speculate on what a 'transformed' campus would look like if the core principles of leadership, including authenticity, commitment, and collaboration were to permeate student culture and influence the norms of student interaction with other campus and community constituencies.

Fourie (2007:41) is careful to distinguish between curriculum-based scholarship of community engagement, integrated into the academic core, and what he terms the supplemental or atypical tasks of the university, characterised by volunteerism, philanthropy and outreach; failure to make this distinction (even separation), can lead to severe distortion of the debate on community engagement and significant resistance from academic staff. But there is no doubt that volunteerism has its place, as most recently articulated in a newspaper article by Slammat (2013). For Slammat and his university, 'volunteerism' is not about the one-way dispensing of charity from benefactor to beneficiary, but a concept linked to notions of reciprocity, mutual benefit and sustained partnerships.

4.4 Communities and university engagement

Bender (2008:90) notes that although the three models of engagement she presents are all qualitatively different, they are nevertheless 'university-centric' models, i.e. they come from an inside-outward perspective. How do communities perceive engagement with universities? First-hand experience and anecdotal evidence suggest that the slightly tongue-in-cheek caricature of the university-community relationship (Boughey 2014, Paper 1, Figure 4) in which the university regards the community as a data-mine, and communities regard the university as a source of employment and resources, has elements no doubt familiar to university and community alike. From both sides the relationship is seen as essentially exploitative. Other community members might never consider the university on their doorstep as a source of support, reciprocal or otherwise, while yet others would like to know more about their local university but are discouraged by its physical and intellectual inaccessibility.

The 'reversing of the telescope', i.e. adopting an outside-inward perspective, is discussed in more detail in Boughey (2014 Paper 1, Section 5.2), but Fourie (2007:44) makes the interesting observation that surrounding communities' impressions of how the university might assist are often not based on the core competencies of the university. He cautions that if an understanding is not reached, and the university continues to be seen simply as a huge resource pool (principally as a source of funding), communities will either be frustrated and disappointed or the university will accede, and distort itself to the detriment of its core activities and to society.

Gibbons, in his consultative document for the Association of Commonwealth Universities (2001:40) on the topic of engagement as a core value for the university, regards “building a continuous engagement with communities not as a ‘third leg’, but as a core element in *all activities*” [original emphasis], but he notes that achieving this will involve developing new processes for decision-making and communications, and “*finding effective ways of listening to, and understanding, community needs and concerns before we plan many of our internal actions*” [emphasis added].

4.5 Integrating academic staff, students and community

Figure 6 below is a composite graphic depiction of how an institution of higher education might look if we moved our focus away from considering the core activities of teaching, research and community engagement towards an understanding of the interactions between the people involved in the creation and unfolding of those activities.

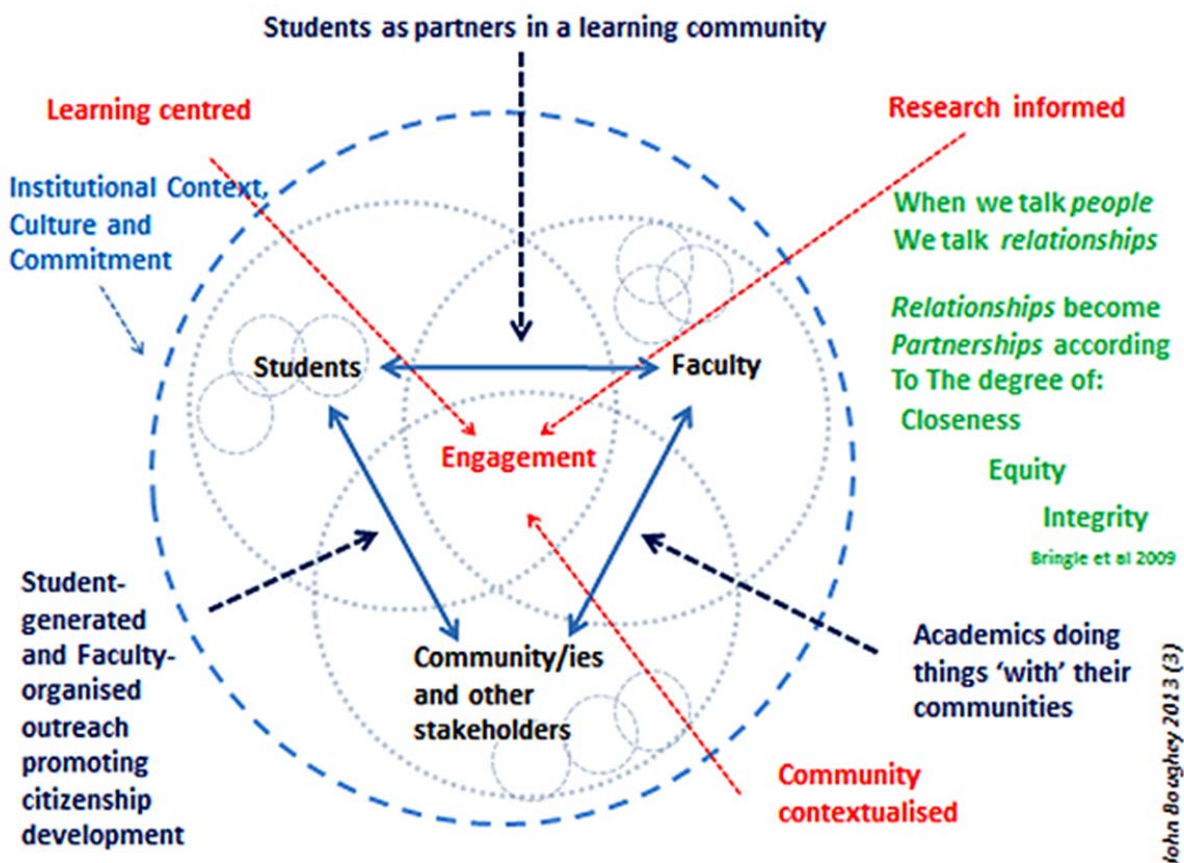


Figure 6: From pillars to people: From relationships of fate to partnerships of choice

The central feature of the graphic is the three circles representing the principal stakeholders, namely Students, Faculty (academic staff) and External Communities, (as opposed to the more familiar tripartite venn diagram of Teaching, Research, and Community Engagement). The dotted lines of the circles represent the desired porosity and openness to contact with other stakeholders, while the solid arrows represent the engagement between the principal stakeholders, where students are seen as partners with their lecturers and external community members in a learning community. Bounding the three circles (although open to external influence) is what I have termed the institution's context, culture and commitment. The text in green picks up on the theme first discussed in Paper 1, namely the distinction between relationships and partnerships and what distinguishes the two. Through the fluid interaction of these key stakeholders as partners in a genuine learning organisation the notion of 'engagement' is extended to comprise a dynamic and interactive endeavour which is *learning* (not simply 'learner') centred, research *informed* (not rigidly research based), and community contextualised (signifying that learning and teaching cannot be considered in a vacuum).

Development of this conception started for me with Bringle *et al.*'s (2009) SOFAR model which identifies stakeholders and enables description and analysis of the relationships between them with specific regard to community engagement. This paper then sought to take the description a step further by focussing in on the key stakeholders involved in a university's key performance areas of teaching, research and community engagement, namely students, academic and other staff and external communities. The paper argues that by concentrating on the core *actors* rather than the core activities, developing an expanded and more inclusive notion of what it means for higher education to 'engage', and by transforming those actors' relationships of fate into partnerships of choice, the status of community engagement is more likely to become part of the DNA of the institution, not simply an afterthought. In seeking to provide not just a description of what a partnership (as opposed to a relationship) looks like, but an understanding of how stakeholders become empowered or capacitated to make an equal and reciprocal contribution to those partnerships the paper suggests that we should revisit the notion of a university as a learning organisation rather than simply an organisation about learning. In so doing, the aim would be to create an institution in which porous boundaries between individuals, departments and faculties foster partnerships which contribute to an all-encompassing, integrated and dynamic notion of 'engagement' which is learning-centred, research-informed and community-contextualised.

In her exploration of conceptual models of community engagement, Bender (2008:91) concludes that if we are to have a more innovative and more responsive model, the development of “partnerships and collaborative approaches to exchanging knowledge and sharing resources with a mutually beneficial outcome” should be the basis. Citing Brukardt, Holland, Percy and Zimpher (2004:9), she describes partnerships as “the currency of engagement – the medium of exchange between university and community and the measurement of an institution's level of commitment to working collaboratively”. The model adumbrated in this paper takes this crucial notion of ‘partnership’ and applies it to all major interactions between the institution and its stakeholders, not just to engagement with community. In so doing, community engagement is not singled out as a special case, or attracting any of the negative epithets listed in the introduction, but takes its place alongside teaching and research as a ‘normal’ activity. However, as Reason (2001:185) points out, collaboration between persons is not something which can be produced by fiat. Collaborative relationships [or partnerships, as we have been promoting here] emerge over time, and may require careful facilitation for them to emerge at all.

5. Conclusion – A Word on Getting Where We Want To Be

A UNIZULU staff member, when asked about the importance of community engagement, observed that we are a rural-based institution, but we do not really make use of our rural community to shape and direct our agenda, meaning that ‘rural-based’ does not translate into the curriculum. Other universities, with different profiles and contexts, will no doubt have similar frustrations about lack of progress in making themselves more engaged and relevant. What will it take to get there, or as one workshop participant put it: “How will we align the planets?” Some of our colleagues are more optimistic than others.

Hollister (undated), in an essay on the (community) engaged university takes inspiration from the Talloires Declaration (2005):

Our institutions recognize that we do not exist in isolation from society, nor from the community in which we are located. Instead, we carry a unique obligation to listen, understand, and contribute to social transformation and development.

Hollister goes on to acknowledge the barriers to the ‘full flowering’ of this movement, but is optimistic that “brick by brick around the world, the engaged university is supplanting the ivory tower”. Brydon-Miller *et al.* (2003:23) are concerned about “our collective near silence on

universities as institutions and why action research has a hard time prospering in them". They are of the opinion:

We should take up the challenge to develop and articulate an analysis of the dynamics that make universities as institutions behave as they do. Only then can we develop practical strategies and mechanisms for transforming universities into real learning institutions at the service of the communities in which they are situated. If we really believe what we say about action research, then we have to bend our efforts to the comprehensive reform of universities because they are institutions with so much power and so many resources that ignoring them means that we are likely to live out [our] fear of being right and defeated again.

But history suggests that we should perhaps be a little more modest than to attempt 'comprehensive reform'.

Cotton, Baily, Warren and Bissell (2009:730), in advancing the theory of 'second-best', note that achieving the most desirable form of something depends on the amenability of underlying variables, such as sufficient resources (time, space, money) and the commitment of key stakeholders. So, if the 'first-best' solution is unattainable, it may be more productive to adopt next-best alternatives rather than striving to maintain the conditions relevant to the first-best. They conclude that "perhaps a greater engagement with the constrained situations which are the reality of mass higher education in the twenty-first century might be more constructive than the perpetual advocacy of 'first-best' solutions which institutions continually fail to achieve ... without losing sight of the long-term objectives" (Cotton *et al.* 2009:732). White and Weathersby (2005:295) validate the worth of so-called second-best, and maybe offer a brick-by-brick (to use Hollister's phrase) solution more elegant and appropriate to the concepts of 'engagement', 'partnerships' and the 'learning organisation' than the wrecking ball of instant demolition of the ivory tower, when they suggest:

Regardless of institutional conflicts and constraints, we can be role models for learning organisation behaviors. Throughout our daily interpersonal and group interactions, whether informal exchanges or committee meetings, as active and knowledgeable community members we can incrementally move to developing our educational institutions toward being learning organisations. We can do this by listening with care, creating opportunities for dialogue, including under-represented voices, asking difficult questions, and encouraging dissent. We can model balancing advocacy with inquiry and listening with a fresh and open 'beginner's mind.' Or we can experiment with listening

with our hearts and our minds, not just observing but also seeing what is going on under the surface.

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A Comprehensive University at the Heart of its Communities: Establishing a Framework for Engagement

PAPER 3

SMMEs and higher education: Possibilities for partnership?

Abstract

Consonant with a global trend in higher education, South African higher education institutions over the past ten years have to greater or lesser degrees begun to address the issue of recognising engagement with their local communities as a legitimate concern, alongside the traditional roles of teaching and research. More specifically, the University of Zululand is a predominantly rural-based institution which has been designated as a comprehensive university. As the former, UNIZULU is seen as a potentially key stakeholder in shaping local economic development by forming university-community partnerships. As the latter, it is expected to develop vocationally oriented programmes in addition to traditional degree programme. The confluence of these two identities, together with the national impetus for greater interaction with local communities led to the idea of exploring the local SMME (Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises) sector as a potential partner for service learning (SL) and work-integrated learning (WIL), on the basis that this sector provides more than ninety per cent of the country's workforce. The article documents an initial attempt to gauge the potential of the local small enterprise sector to partner with the University of Zululand. Despite the limitation of only sampling a fraction of the sector feedback suggests that while opportunities for service learning and work-integrated learning are limited the University, in view of its potentially key role in local development, could be doing far more to assist these enterprises in building their capacity to make a success of their business. In this regard, seeking to draw small enterprises into the community–

university partnership programme, rather than adding them to a database of student work experience sites, would seem to be a more productive route to follow.

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1. Introduction

Consonant with a global trend in higher education (see, for example, Arredondo and De la Garza 2006; Hall 2009; Kaburise 2006; Percy, Zimpher and Brukardt 2006; Shah 2007; Temple, Story and Delaforce 2005), South African higher education institutions (HEIs) over the past ten years have to greater or lesser degrees begun to address the issue of recognising engagement with their local communities as a legitimate concern, alongside the traditional roles of teaching and research. The foundations were laid in the Department of Education's *White Paper 3* (RSA DoE 1997); reiterated in the Ministry of Education's *National Plan for Higher Education* (RSA 2001) and in the founding document of the Higher Education Quality Committee (RSA HEQC 2001) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE); and cemented in the HEQC's *Criteria for Programme Accreditation* (RSA HEQC 2004a) and its *Criteria for Institutional Audits* (RSA HEQC 2004b). Further impetus was given by the HEQC through its co-hosting with the Community – Higher Education – Service Partnerships initiative of the Joint Education Trust's Education Services of an international conference in 2006 on the theme of *Community engagement in higher education*. Momentum has been maintained through the Council on Higher Education's *Symposium on Community Engagement* (RSA CHE 2009), and by the establishment of the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum (SAHECEF) which held its first annual conference in November 2011 on the theme of *Community engagement: The changing role of South African universities in development*.

At an institutional level in South Africa, following the re-organisation of higher education in 2002 (RSA NWG 2002), universities which were re-designated as 'comprehensive' (adding a range of selected sub-degree vocational programmes to their traditional university programmes, to specifically service the education and training needs of local industrial and rural communities) were given even greater motivation to interact with their local communities, including the need to identify community partners for service learning and work-integrated learning (WIL) – both of which are classified by UNIZULU (see paper 5) as ¹²"curriculum-based community engagement".

Those South African HEIs which are also identified as 'rural-based' (i.e. Fort Hare, Limpopo, Venda, Walter Sisulu and Zululand) have been given a further community engagement fillip by being given specific pilot project funding from the Department of Science and Technology (DST) to set up Community–University Partnership Programmes (CUPPs), which are regarded as 'key vehicles' for addressing the fifth 'grand challenge' (2010), namely *Human*

¹² It should be noted (as described in paper 5) that activities designated as 'curriculum-based community engagement' although being concerned with 'community' are in fact included under the umbrella of the Academic Development Unit not the Community-University Partnership Programme.

and Social Dynamics in Development, set out in the DST's 10-year plan for Science and Technology (2008). In meeting this challenge, rural-based HEIs are seen as "part of a matrix of key institutions generating or potentially able to generate ideas and policy options which can contribute to shaping social, economic, and scientific development in their respective rural communities" (DST & NRF 2009b:1).

2. The Comprehensive University of Zululand with Particular Reference to Community Engagement

The University of Zululand, established in 1960, is one of the South African higher education establishments formerly labelled as historically black institutions (HBIs). It currently has approximately 16 500 students, making it one of South Africa's smaller universities. In 2002, following the deliberations of the National Working Group (2002), UNIZULU was re-designated as a 'comprehensive' university, tasked with adding a range of selected vocational programmes to its traditional university programmes, to specifically service the education and training needs of its local industrial and rural communities. It was recognised that this would require the transformation and integration of the university's teaching-and-learning, research, and community service roles to enable it to actively and strategically mesh with the community's perceived needs and aspirations in a more formal and focused way than had been the case up to then.

Since 2003 the university has encouraged staff (academic and administrative) and students to undertake community engagement activities through project funding offered by the Community Engagement Working Group (CEWG). In 2010 CEWG became the operating arm of the newly established Senate Committee on Community Engagement.

The DST-funded, NRF-administered CUPP has been described in general above and will be described in more detail below in the section on 'partnerships', but it should be noted that the 'rural-based' nature of UNIZULU has always been fundamental to the operation of a number of university departments including Agriculture, Consumer Science, Nursing Science, Social Work, (Community) Psychology, Development Studies, Geography and Hydrology, whose students use local communities, relevant government structures and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) as sites for community engagement activities ranging from formal internships, through cooperative education and community outreach, to volunteerism.

Since 2008, in partnership with Wageningen University in the Netherlands, UNIZULU has operated the *Intuthuko* (a Zulu word meaning 'progress/development') Project. Adapted from Wageningen's 'Science Shops' model (Straver 2006), honours students engage in extra-curricular community-focused, short-term, small-scale research projects, closely supported by UNIZULU staff members, who offer capacity-building in action research, project

management and communication, and mentor students through the design and implementation phases of these projects. In 2010, five of these projects were incorporated into five of the six task teams in the CUPP.

3. The University of Zululand's Local Communities

The “northern part of KwaZulu-Natal” referred to in the National Working Group recommendations constitutes an area north of the city of Durban, lying to the north of the uTugela River, extending to Mozambique, and comprising the three district municipalities of Uthungulu, Zululand and uMkhanyakude. This combined area, in which the University of Zululand is the only residential HEI, covers an area of 36 000 square kilometres and has a population of more than two million people. These three district municipalities share the following characteristics:

- Predominantly rural communities.
- A large ratio of young to old people in the population.
- Low levels of education.
- High unemployment.
- Poverty.
- A pronounced disparity in levels of infrastructure and opportunities for economic advancement between urban and rural.
- Disease and sickness, particularly HIV and Aids.
- Major activities being agriculture (particularly sugarcane and timber) and tourism.

Within the district municipality of Uthungulu, the university lies in the municipality of uMhlathuze, an area of just under 800 square kilometres with a population approaching 200 000 people, 53% of whom are located in urban areas and 47% in rural areas. From a community engagement perspective this area is intriguing in that, while it is extensively rural, it also contains the port of Richards Bay, with its intensive concentration of heavy industry and the handling of bulk commodities extracted in the region. In 2008, Richards Bay handled the highest tonnage (82.7 m) of any port in South Africa (Transnet National Ports Authority 2010). The University of Zululand has been operating a city campus in Richards Bay since 2008.

Within the Municipality of uMhlathuze the main campus of the university lies in the heart of the Mkhwanazi traditional authority on land donated by the Mkhwanazis. This most local of UNIZULU's 'local' communities is a rural area comprising approximately 26 000 people (13% of the population of uMhlathuze) distributed in approximately 5 000 households.

4. The Notion of ‘Partnerships’

Bringle, Clayton and Price (2009:1) observed that one of the defining characteristics of contemporary models of civic engagement (between universities and their communities) is mutually-beneficial collaboration in which all persons contribute knowledge, skills and experience in determining:

- the issues to be addressed;
- the questions to be asked;
- the problems to be resolved;
- the strategies to be used;
- the outcomes that are considered desirable; and
- the indicators of success.

We might characterise this type of relationship as a university doing things *with* its communities (which Bringle *et al.* would call a ‘transformational’ relationship), as opposed to the more traditional ‘community outreach’ notion of doing things *for* communities (which Bringle *et al.* label as ‘transactional’), and the more insidious practice of doing things *to* communities (exploitive). A widespread example of the last is the practice of students being sent into the community to do their research surveys and those communities never seeing or hearing from them again.

The DST’s view of CUPPs is clearly intended to be ‘transformational’. The CUPP concept documents (NRF DST 2009a, 2009b) state the DST position as follows:

- The complex social and development challenges that the country faces can best be addressed through collective and innovative efforts of multiple stakeholders that include: government, business, HEIs and civil society.
- Equal and fair partnership between HEIs and communities, i.e. *community–university partnerships*, is an effective vehicle for solving problems, facilitating development, sharing lessons, generating knowledge and adopting new techniques and innovations.

This notion of what it means for an HEI to ‘partner’ with its communities has been explored to various degrees in UNIZULU’s CUPP through the work of six task teams, engaged respectively in setting up or creating:

- a community helpdesk on the main campus, to act as a first port of call for community members wishing to find out more about the university and *vice versa*;

- partnership projects of any description, with the first one being an agricultural project with a section of the local community, growing mealies and butternut and establishing an indigenous poultry production unit;
- information-giving and capacity-building workshops on topics arising out of perceived and expressed community needs, with the pilot project being access to social justice;
- greater community involvement in the content of service learning modules in university curricula;
- credit-bearing short course programmes for community members;
- a joint university–community wellness programme, where departments offer advice, information and testing (e.g. blood pressure), sometimes in partnership with service providers (e.g. opticians); this also involves resuscitation of the University's own mobile clinic service to local communities.

These projects involve staff, students, community non-governmental organisations, and community members, including representatives of the traditional (formerly referred to as 'tribal') authorities.

Within the 'geographical' understanding of 'community' outlined above, the university's communities are also conceptualised in terms of structures and groupings, including the following:

- Any grouping of people, urban or rural, with a common concern (and who want to partner or have contact with the university).
- Traditional authorities.
- Non-governmental, non-profit, community-based, and faith-based organisations (NGOs, NPOs, CBOs and FBOs).
- Schools.
- Small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs), as well as 'big businesses'.

When one thinks of 'work experience' for students, the tendency is to think in terms of 'business' and 'industry', particularly in a setting like Richards Bay which is home to a number of heavy industries. However, by far the largest sector of membership of the Zululand Chamber of Commerce and Industry is the SMME sector. Moreover, with the area being predominantly rural there are numerous small and very small enterprises. Local research (Urban-Econ 2010:28) calculates that only 12% of registered businesses in the district of Uthungulu are classified as medium (<100 employees) and large businesses, while 80% are considered small (<50 employees) or very small businesses (<10 employees). The percentage in the two other district municipalities of Zululand and uMkhanyakude, in that they have smaller urban populations and few industries, is even greater. An obvious question then is what might be the potential of this sector to partner with a university in WIL and in other community engagement activities?

4.1 The idea of exploring the potential of the local SMME sector for ‘partnering’ with the university

The initial impetus for considering the SMME sector as a site of work experience for students, and more generally as a site for community engagement, came about through reading the Lambert Review of Business–University Collaboration (2003) in the United Kingdom. The review noted that a large proportion of the skills and knowledge required in the workplace are best acquired on the job, making it important to increase the opportunities for students to gain experience of working in businesses. The review went on to note that as many large companies already seem to be aware of the benefits to themselves of offering internship programmes and the like, universities might usefully target SMEs (small and medium-sized enterprises), on the grounds that while they may have fewer resources to devote to such activities and they may not recognise the value of offering work placement, there are potentially “substantial benefits” to both students and employers. For their part, Lambert suggested, students might expect to be entrusted with more responsibility than that afforded in a larger company, while the enterprise could bring in “fresh, highly motivated minds” to address their business problems at low cost.

With the growing concern in South African higher education with broader engagement between university and community, initial narrow thinking about workplace experience opportunities for students expanded into reflecting on the potential of the SMME sector as a partner for higher education institutions.

4.2 The importance of SMMEs in South Africa

The Department of Trade and Industry’s *Integrated strategy on the promotion of entrepreneurship and small enterprises* (RSA DTI 2005) notes that the term ‘SMME’ (small, medium and micro enterprises), and equivalent terms such as ‘small enterprise’, and ‘small business’, covers all business enterprises other than ‘large enterprises’ or ‘corporations’ and includes the categories of micro-enterprises, survivalist enterprises, and informal sector enterprises. The importance of this sector to national economies was highlighted in the White Paper on the *National strategy for the development and promotion of small business in South Africa* (1995):

Small, medium and micro-enterprises (SMMEs) represent an important vehicle to address the challenges of job creation, economic growth and equity in our country. Throughout the world, one finds that SMMEs are playing a critical role in absorbing labour, penetrating new markets and generally expanding economies in creative and innovative ways.

Given the nature of SMMEs (e.g. variation in size of operation, type of business, high failure rate of small start-up enterprises), it is not possible to state the exact number of SMMEs in South Africa, but it is estimated that the sector provides more than 90% of South Africa's workforce (Africagrowth Institute, 2010) – in spite of the sector still being under-developed in South Africa given the dominance of big business (Urban-Econ 2010:27). A large portion of this 90% consists of what might be termed 'informal' and 'survivalist' enterprises which, as Urban-Econ (2010:27) points out, play an important part in meeting people's basic needs, and allow significant numbers of the unemployed and marginalised groups like female-headed households and disabled persons to survive.

4.3 The SMME sector in the University of Zululand's local community

The Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) of the three district municipalities of Uthungulu (Urban-Econ 2002), uMkhanyakude District Municipality (2002) and Zululand District Municipality (2008), all make reference to the importance of what the Mfolozi Municipality IDP (2010) refers to as the SMME 'sleeping giant' which "contributes to the livelihood of many households" (Urban-Econ 2002).

Statistics from the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA) suggest that 80% of businesses in the municipality might be classed as 'small' or 'very small', with the highest number being located in uMhlathuze, UNIZULU's 'home' municipality, and the majority of businesses (512 out of a total of 1 353) operating in the services, retail, construction, tourism and 'other' (unspecified) sectors (Urban-Econ 2010:27).

The University's District Municipality, Uthungulu, does not have its own SMME database, but for information, it is useful to note that the database of the Zululand Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ZCCI) membership contains a total of 480 businesses, more than half of which (52%) designate themselves as 'small business' (2 to 20 employees). 'Very small' (1 to 5 employees) and 'micro' businesses (1 to 2 employees) make up a quarter (25%) of the database. Of the 'very small' and 'micro' enterprises, a third (33%) are in building and construction, and nearly a quarter engaged in 'other services' (i.e. other than the database's designated sectors of building and construction, chemicals, clothing, communications, electrical, engineering, entertainment, financial services, food, manufacturing, printing, property, retail and tourism). Interestingly, all of the 'very small' enterprises on the database are located in Richards Bay, and nearly all (98%) of the 'micro' enterprises are located in Empangeni.

4.4 Accessing the local SMME sector

Trying to gauge the extent of interaction between the University and its local SMME community is difficult, despite attempts by the university's CEWG to create an electronic database of university–external community projects, and faculties now being required to give details of their community engagement activities (along with teaching-and-learning, and research) in their annual reports, as there is no real obligation or incentive to report.

The university's Centre for Cooperative Education and Experiential Learning, (which was disbanded in 2012) used to maintain relatively small and informal databases (held by individual staff members of the department) of a range of large (e.g. local banks, and 'big' business located in the Richards Bay area), small, medium and micro enterprises, where students from specific departments, such as Communication Science and Recreation and Tourism, could be accommodated for internship or work experience.

In response to an idea suggested by the Lambert Report (as indicated above), and to seek to gain some insight, however small, into the potential of the SMME sector to partner with the university, it was decided to approach the sector via the Chair of the ZCCI's SMME Forum, who suggested taking the opportunity between sessions at workshops organised by the forum to inform delegates about the presence of their 'local' university and to access the required information. It was decided to use a semi-structured, written questionnaire to be completed by respondents during the workshop, with or without the direct facilitation of the researcher. (The adage that 'time is money' is nowhere more apposite than in the world of the self-employed.)

The questionnaire was also posted on the website of the ZCCI, which has branches in Richards Bay, Empangeni and Eshowe, but no responses were received.

The questions were influenced by some of the observations and findings in the Lambert Review.

The first batch of responses was collected at a Franchise Information Workshop, held on 3 March 2010 at the Empangeni Civic Centre, sponsored by the ZCCI, SEDA and a private company. During a break in the proceedings, and with the permission of the organisers, the researcher gave a brief verbal introduction to the research and then distributed the questionnaire. Those attending the workshop were predominantly black small-scale male and female entrepreneurs, operating with fewer than ten employees, and from a variety of sectors including construction, retail, catering and training. (In describing the profile of delegates, it should be noted that respondents to the questionnaire seemed to operate on a principle of 'pick and choose', thereby rendering the data incomplete. For example, of the

fifty-three respondents nearly half (45%) gave no details on the number of employees. Of those who did disclose numbers, nearly half (45%) did not answer the question on the sector in which their business was located. Nearly three quarters (74%) of respondents declined to answer the question on whether or not they held post-secondary qualifications. It was therefore decided to drop this question in the next version of the questionnaire).

The questionnaire was distributed for a second time at a workshop held at the Mhlathuze Municipality's Auditorium on 22 April 2010, on the topic of Risk Assessment for Growth-Oriented Women Entrepreneurs (GOWEs). As might be expected from the theme of the workshop all of the participants were women, and all were black. Of the twenty-five participants who responded to the questionnaire, two-thirds were working in the arts and crafts sector (e.g. pottery and traditional beadwork). Of the twenty-one participants who responded to the question, the majority (71%) employed ten people or fewer.

The questionnaire was distributed for a third and final time at a ZCCI-sponsored Networking Breakfast at a community hall in Richards Bay at which one of the large national banks gave details of the KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) SMME Fund – a joint initiative of ABSA Bank and the KZN Department of Economic Development. This gathering was the smallest of the three, with a total of fifteen participants responding to the questionnaire. Of these, a number were from banks and large well-known companies. Of those who could be categorised as SMME, three were recruitment consultants. Other sectors included property and rentals, and a motivational speaker (a UNIZULU graduate, incidentally).

5. Findings

Aside from the questions concerning the profile of respondents (described in the previous section) the first question in the questionnaire asked whether respondents had had any previous contact with the university. This question was prompted by observations in the Lambert Review on various aspects of the interface between universities and business. In total, approximately one-third of respondents (31%) had had some form of contact with the University. As might have been expected, responses to this question were not uniform. Of those in the third group (the ZCCI Networking Breakfast) more than half (53%) had had contact with the University, mainly as service providers. Just under a third (32%) of the first group (those attending the franchising workshop) had had contact, mainly either as students themselves or by sponsoring employees to study at the University. Only two respondents (8%) from the GOWE group had had any contact – one as a Bachelor of Commerce student and the other through having University staff members as customers. However, 42% of the total number of respondents who answered the question admitted to having given some thought to contacting the University, but had not acted on it.

A total of 86% of respondents, spread uniformly across the three groups, expressed the opinion that the University could be of assistance to them. However, 60% of these respondents gave no indication of how such assistance might be rendered. Of those respondents who substantiated their answers, a majority listed skills development (e.g. short courses or seminars on various aspects of business management), followed by opportunities for service provision. Other individual responses mentioned the University as a provider of facilities, a source of information and a source of funding, and as a supporter of community projects. A respondent from the third group suggested that his business and the University “together can upskill start-up businesses”. Another suggested that he could assist the University with research. A respondent from the first group succinctly stated the potential of the University as a provider of “knowledge, students and fresh ideas”.

In response to the question as to whether or not the respondent would be able to offer work placement opportunities, somewhat fewer than half (43%) indicated that they could do so. Of these only 35% ventured any specific information. Answers ranged from taking on one student per year, to the significant figure of twenty-five per year. However, the fact that the business which could take so many students was a grass-cutting company, raises an issue about the relevance of the work experience available to students. Of those respondents who indicated that they would be able to offer work experience, only eight expressed an unqualified commitment. Five of these indicated that they would be willing to provide food. The cautious responses to this question are well captured in the response and its unspoken implication “I’m an SMME!!!”.

The invitation in the questionnaire for respondents to ask questions or raise issues, largely revealed information which had been raised in the questionnaire in response to the question of how the University could be of assistance, for example, the degree and short-course programmes on offer at UNIZULU, and requests for specific training (e.g. in business management and information technology). These questions suggest that the University could do a better job of informing the local community of who it is and what it does.

While it is commendable that the University over the years has produced a number of graduates who have gone on to achieve high office in the land, it is fair to say that it has not always enjoyed the respect and confidence of the local community, particularly big businesses. Its perceived unwillingness to open an engineering faculty, the so-called degree scam of a few years ago through which some students falsely obtained degree certificates, often violent student unrest, and under-performance by graduates at interview and in the workplace, have all conspired to raise a question mark over the quality of the institution. For some of the rural population the university is a symbol of great pride, but for others, particularly in the community on whose land the university is built, there is a feeling that the

University has not done enough for them. This ambivalent attitude to the University is encapsulated in the following three comments made by respondents to the questionnaire:

“Keep up the good work Zululand, of educating our future leaders.”

“[You] need an Engineering Faculty and [I] would like to see KwaDlangezwa campus [main campus] improved in terms of infrastructure.”

“Using the University of Zululand? I’d have to think about that, given the history...”

In concluding this section on the information revealed in the questionnaire the following invitation from a respondent is both a rallying call and a challenge to the University:

“If you can come to the people to help us then we will help students.”

6. Discussion and Recommendations

In discussing the issues which emerge from the data above, I find it useful to consider them in the light of the conclusions drawn in the Lambert Review. The issues raised in the Review are pertinent to the small enterprises which took part in this pilot survey, and also resonate with some of the experiences gained so far in the process of trying to establish a Community-University Partnership Programme.

Relevant extracts from the Lambert Review are synthesised below.

1. *Companies and universities are not natural partners: their cultures and their missions are different ... There are benefits to be gained for business, the universities, and the economy as a whole by improving communications and developing a more trusting approach by all those involved. [‘Culture’ is understood as meaning ‘organisational culture’.]*
2. *The biggest single challenge when it comes to encouraging the growth of successful business–university collaboration lies in boosting the demand from business, rather than in increasing the supply of products and services from universities ... The difficulty lies in raising awareness in businesses of the expertise that exists in ... universities. [By the same token, it is absolutely necessary for universities to raise their awareness of the capacity and expertise of business and other community sectors].*
3. *Forums that bring academics and business people together are likely to increase the chance that people with common interests and goals will find innovative ways to develop partnerships ... Universities are complicated institutions, and businesses can find it very difficult to find their way around. SMEs in particular can be put off if there is no obvious point of entry to the university’s resources. Businesses generally welcome clear first ports of call on the campus.*

The above points might be concentrated into two major issues: differences in organisational culture between university and communities, and communication.

On the question of different organisational cultures it is important to impress upon university stakeholders, particularly students, that the community does not have the luxury of extended periods of time away from the workplace as holidays, recess, or sabbaticals. Life goes on in the world outside of the university, seeds have to be sown, and livestock have to be fed. We, as university staff and students, need to be aware of our responsibilities and commitments – as indeed do community stakeholders. A recent trip to a local community by staff and students from a number of departments as part of a weekly programme to do with ‘wellness’, was thrown into disarray when the majority of community members involved were suddenly unavailable due to their having responded to a last minute call from community leaders to register for voting in local elections.

The University could be doing more to ‘reach out’ to its communities by making them aware of who the University is, what it can offer, how it can assist, and perhaps most importantly, how it can be accessed. This was one of the main reasons for launching the CUPP via an *imbizo* to which a significant number of community stakeholders were invited. It was also a prime reason for prioritising the establishment of a community helpdesk on campus. Unfortunately, since the *imbizo* a number of those stakeholders have fallen by the wayside. One of the major considerations is what role the community expects the University to play. Whilst we are promoting a model of university–community collaboration which is trying to move away from the idea of the university simply giving ‘handouts’ to the community (doing things *for* the community) towards partnerships (doing things *with* the community), it has to be acknowledged that many community ideas and projects are based on sound ideas and could be competently run by the people concerned if funding were available and without the University. As one active community member said: “We have knowledge and hands, but no money to start businesses.”

The issue of ‘raising awareness’ applies to all stakeholders. University staff need to develop a more informed understanding of who their local communities are. Contributions to developing this understanding include: the addition of a bus tour of the local community as part of the orientation programme for new staff members; the introduction of a Distinguished Community Engagement Practitioners Award; and orientation sessions for academic staff members on the potential of integrating their teaching-and-learning, research and community engagement. However, it should be borne in mind that the so-called ‘local community’ is a multi-faceted and heterogeneous entity, in which stakeholder groupings previously unknown to the University, continuously appear. For example, a recent capacity-building workshop requested by a local municipality was attended by forty emergent or recently-established

micro enterprises variously engaged in arts and crafts, care of orphans, home-based care, and crèches) and variously wanting information on how to start a business, run a business, find funding, and information on how the University might assist them. With known community stakeholders representing only ‘the tip of the iceberg’, so to speak, the creation of fora such as open days, *imbizos* and *indabas*, points of access (e.g., a helpdesk), and ongoing maintenance of a database of stakeholders and projects, are all important ways of fostering university–community partnerships.

Lambert’s (2003) exhortation to develop a more trusting approach is affected to some extent by the history of UNIZULU. The establishment of the University on traditional authority land in 1960 meant the forced relocation of a number of community members. One local community member in an interview spoke of people being ‘chased’ from the area when the University was built. But the establishment of the University also set up certain expectations. The same community member quoted above who said he only needed money to start his business, was emphatic that his community were proud of the University but held the expectation that the University will ‘start at home’ and develop the area. The interviewee who spoke of residents being chased away asked the question: “When is the University going to say thank you to us as a community?” and then made the comment: “The University is not paying a cent but is failing to do services for the community.”

7. Conclusion

The initial aim of the exercise, spurred by reading the Lambert report, was to do a pilot study to test out the possibilities and win-win benefits of a university collaborating with its local SMME sector in offering opportunities for student experience, ranging from work experience to service learning, benefiting both community and students. The SMME sector was chosen on the grounds that it is where most people in the South African economy are employed.

Major limitations of the survey were that it sampled only a very small percentage of the SMMEs in the area, and that not all respondents answered all questions, thereby rendering the data incomplete. Nevertheless, feedback received confirms both ‘hunches’ (Wadsworth 1998) and conclusions drawn from other sources and activities. These are discussed below.

The SMME sector as a whole, by virtue of its being such a large component of the South African economy, must be explored for its potential to interact with higher education. However, the opportunities for work experience for students – certainly in micro- and survivalist enterprises – are limited. One would not reasonably expect an enterprise which is barely supporting its owner and staff to have the capacity to assist a student in gaining work experience. But the University could be doing far more to assist these enterprises in building

their capacity to make a success of their business. In this regard, seeking to draw small enterprises into a community–university partnership programme rather than adding them to a database of student work experience sites would seem to be a more productive route to follow.

Annexure 1

Questionnaire for SMMEs

Background

This questionnaire is part of a research project aimed at promoting greater interaction between the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) and the local SMME sector and to investigate ways in which the University and the SMME sector might be of use to each other. You are kindly requested to supply contact details if you would like to continue to be part of the research project. Any information you provide in this questionnaire which is used in subsequent research reports will appear anonymously. (Please write on the back of this page if necessary.)

Statistical information

SMME Sector (construction, retail, automotive etc.):

Total number of employees, including yourself:

Brief details of what your company does:

.....
.....

Please provide contact details if you would like more information and/or want to be involved in the project:

.....
.....

Questionnaire

1. With reference to your business, have you ever had any contact with Unizulu? (if yes, please give details)

.....
.....
.....
.....

2. Have you ever thought about contacting Unizulu for assistance or collaboration?

.....

3. Are there any ways in which you think the University might be of assistance to your business? Please give details.

.....
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.....
.....
.....

4. Would you be able to offer UNIZULU students work experience? If so, how many students per year and for how long? If 'yes', Is there anything in particular that you think the student(s) could assist you with?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

5. If you were to take students would you be able to assist financially in any way (e.g. transport, food, stipend)?

.....
.....
.....
.....

6. Do you have any questions, suggestions or comments?

.....
.....
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.....
.....
.....
.....

Thanks for your time!

Dr John Boughey
Director Academic Development & Chair of the Community Engagement Working Group
University of Zululand
jboughey@pan.uzulu.ac.za
084 6606174

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A Comprehensive University at the Heart of its Communities: Establishing a Framework for Engagement

PAPER 4

ProAct: An integrated model of action research and project management for capacitating universities and their communities in the co-production of useful knowledge

Abstract

In the context of a Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP) which seeks to facilitate change in higher education institutions and their surrounding communities through collective, fair and reciprocal interaction, this paper describes the genesis and development of a hybrid model of action research and project management (ProAct) which takes account of the need for research in the university-community context to be accomplished democratically, but within specific parameters of time and other resources. The paper commences with a brief discussion on the relevance of 'community' to higher education before giving a more detailed account of the interactions between a particular South African university and its local communities which revealed the need for such a model of university-community interaction. The paper identifies the conceptual roots put down by other authors before going on to describe the model in practical detail. In so doing, it gives an account of the traditional action research cycle and the incorporation of selected project management tools/templates. The paper then discusses feedback from university and community stakeholders who have been introduced to the model. It concludes with the observation that the model gives practical application to previous conceptualisations of the link between action research and project management, and in so doing supports the contention that linking familiarity with the action research cycle to the exercise of project management control mechanisms can help to maximise the usefulness of Action Research.

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1. Introduction

“What is the purpose of higher education... if not to reach out so as to provide something useful to society, starting with the communities that surround them?”

Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker and Donohue (2003:2).

In 2009 South Africa’s Department of Science and Technology (DST) in collaboration with the National Research Foundation (NRF) offered significant funding to the country’s five ‘rural-based’ institutions (including the University of Zululand) to each research and develop a Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP). In summary, the DST and NRF envisioned such CUPPs as simultaneously facilitating and effecting change in higher education institutions and their surrounding communities through collective and innovative efforts, arising out of equal, fair, democratic, reciprocal, interactive and sustainable partnerships between stakeholders, which promote the identification of shared goals. An assumption is that the establishment of community-university partnership programmes is being promoted and led by higher education, and that the process is driven by ‘research’ as conceptualised by higher education. From this it follows that those students at the university, and partners in the community who do not have a higher education background, will need to be capacitated in research methodologies if they are to contribute interactively, equally and reciprocally. In a situation where university staff and students are working across disciplines with external communities, and engaged in activities which are both process- and product-driven, there is a need for all stakeholders to be equipped with a set of conceptual and practical tools to enable them to work together on an equal footing. The use of the term “co-production of knowledge” is meant to signify firstly that so-called academic knowledge should not be privileged over lay or indigenous knowledge (which often happens when the university forms a relationship with a community) and secondly that, rather like trans-disciplinary knowledge, the coming together of university and community will result in the joint creation of new knowledge, not simply in the amalgamation of existing ‘academic’ and lay knowledge.

The choice of Action Research as an appropriate methodology in this context has already been articulated in section 6 (Theoretical Framework) and section 8 (Methodology) of this thesis. This paper takes the model a step further. It describes the genesis and development of a hybrid model of action research and project management which takes account of the need for research in the university-community context to be accomplished democratically, but within specific parameters of time and other resources. Called ProAct, it provides the meta-language and meta-theoretical framework to enable partners with different backgrounds and mindsets to move forward and talk to each other in an empowered, equal

and reciprocal manner in the design and execution of projects aimed at making improvements in the community.

2. Background

The importance of South African higher education institutions forging links with their communities has been on the higher education agenda for some years now. It is of particular relevance to a 'comprehensive' university like Zululand which has a well-established rural campus and a fledgling urban footprint.

2.1 The relevance of 'community' to higher education

The foundations for higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa interacting more closely with their local communities were laid in *Education White Paper 3: A programme for the transformation of higher education* (RSA DoE 1997), reiterated in the National Plan for Higher Education (RSA 2001) and in the founding document of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (RSA CHE 2001) and cemented in the *Criteria for Programme Accreditation* (HEQC 2004a) and the *Criteria for Institutional Audits* (HEQC 2004b). The landscape of higher education in South Africa underwent a significant change in 2002, with a number of institutional mergers and the creation of so-called 'comprehensive' institutions offering a range of sub-degree vocational programmes in addition to degree programmes (RSA NWG 2002). The re-designated 'comprehensive' University of Zululand (UNIZULU) was tasked with 'serving communities in northern KwaZulu-Natal' by assisting in rural development (including teaching, nursing and agriculture) and with technical and technological competency training for local industry (RSA NWG 2002).

2.2 UNIZULU's interactions with its communities

UNIZULU has always had links of varying degrees of formality with its surrounding communities, but two in particular have provided both the context and the spur for the development of the research model described in this paper.

2.2.1 The Intuthuko Project

Two specific interactions between UNIZULU and its local communities were responsible for the initial shaping of the research methodology described in this paper. The first, in 2008, was the University's adoption and adaptation to local conditions of the Wageningen University's 'Science Shop' concept (Straver 2006). In brief, "the Science Shop at Wageningen [university] serves as a link between civil society and the research expertise of

Wageningen [university]. Any organisation, action group, society or stakeholder group can contact the Science Shop to help them to answer a research question. The requirement for this is that the group do not have the financial means to pay for the research by themselves” (Unleash Potential 2008:10). It was agreed that the UNIZULU model, which would be given the name of *Intuthuko* (an isiZulu word meaning ‘progress’ or ‘development’), would be targeted at Honours level students; be of a short-term and fairly circumscribed nature (given the relative inexperience and lack of available time of the students); be closely supervised by UNIZULU staff members (while requiring students to play an active role in problem identification and solution). This notion of including small-scale research focused on real-life problems was seen as a way of enhancing the student learning experience and making it more relevant.

By way of capacity-building, it was also decided that students should take a core module prior to undertaking any research project. At the *Intuthuko* coach training workshops, where the module began to take shape, it became apparent that when staff members were talking about the methodology to be followed they were interchangeably using the terms ‘action research’ and ‘project management’ as skills which students would need to develop. At the time, I pointed out the indiscriminate usage of the two terms and suggested that action research and project management reflected very different paradigms and were thus not compatible. In my experience, action research has often been associated with radical left-wing anti-hegemonic thinking and, in its purest form, seemingly more concerned with process rather than product, and not amenable to any deviations from the set paradigm. Project management, on the other hand, would be regarded by ardent action researchers as a technician mechanism for getting quick results, seemingly unfettered by concerns about democracy and emancipation. The two would thus seem to be inimical to each other.

However, after further reflection, I came to the conclusion that there could in fact be a useful synergy between the two. Could we not take the tools of project management used for the phases of *planning, scheduling, monitoring, evaluating* and *reporting* and use them to facilitate the enactment and documentation of the four ‘moments’ of action research, namely *planning, acting, observing, and reflecting*? Doing so would accommodate both the need for an ‘academic’ research orientation to the project and a ‘business’ one, regarding the practicalities of keeping aims and objectives realistic and accomplishing them on time and to budget.

2.2.2 Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP)

While these ideas were taking shape, a second interaction helped to crystallise them further when the country’s so-called ‘rural’ universities (including UNIZULU), were identified by the

Department of Science and Technology (DST) and National Research Foundation (NRF) as forming “part of a matrix of key institutions generating or potentially able to generate ideas and policy options which can contribute to shaping social, economic, and scientific development in their respective rural communities” (RSA DST/NRF 2009b:1). Furthermore, according to the DST, the rural-based universities were deemed capable of playing “a pivotal role in acting as change agents to help residents contribute information to decision-making and to better understand the issues, choices and concerns in the community” (RSA DST/NRF 2009b:1). Consequently, the DST, with the administrative assistance of the NRF made pilot funding available for the rural-based universities to establish CUPPs tasked with simultaneously facilitating and effecting change in HEIs and their surrounding communities through collective and innovative efforts, arising out of equal, fair, democratic, reciprocal, interactive and sustainable partnerships between stakeholders, which promote the identification of shared goals. It was anticipated by the DST that CUPPs would be effective vehicles for solving problems; facilitating development; sharing lessons; generating knowledge; adopting new techniques and innovations. As indicated in their CUPP framework document (RSA DST/NRF 2009a) the DST envisaged a partnership/engagement platform for higher education institutions, through their academics, researchers and students, and community partners to facilitate the collective and collaborative identification of issues and problems; and the search for, and selection and implementing of solutions. Moreover, each participant in the partnership would be considered an important source for stimulating problem statements or questions, generating or gathering information, and selecting and applying appropriate solutions.

This quest for a collaborative and democratic research-based relationship between university and community with the aim of improving social conditions accords with the fundamental principles and core tenets of community-based research as adumbrated by Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker and Donohue (2003:8), namely: being a collaborative enterprise between academic researchers (academic staff and students) and community members, which has as its goal social action and social change for the purpose of achieving social justice, and which validates multiple sources of knowledge (including local knowledge, wisdom and skills) and promotes the use of multiple methods of discovery and dissemination of the knowledge produced. Reflecting on the two ‘triggers’ described above (*Intuthuko* and the CUPP), it seemed to me that a participatory action research paradigm, sharpened by the addition of certain project management tools and templates, made available to community co-researchers as well as to university staff and student co-researchers would be a logical and fruitful route to follow.

3. Literature Review

In starting to explore possibilities of combining action research with project management I was a little hesitant at first, wondering whether I was completely off-track. However, after reading some articles and having a couple of conversations I could see that the idea is not new.

The first article I read was Coughlan and Coughlan's "Action research for operations management" (2002), which talked of action research projects having steering committees for planning, implementing and evaluating, and the economic and technical, as well as the political and social forces driving the need for action. This seemed to suggest at least some sort of project management orientation. The following extract from Mitchell and Rautenbach (2005:106) also caught my attention:

Project management literature provides a useful perspective for understanding 'partnerships' as a specific kind of project, namely as a community development project. The perspective of community development projects differs from other projects in terms of their desired outputs (namely developmental change) and the methods employed to establish the project.

An article by a colleague at the University of Cape Town, Janice McMillan (2009:56), conceptualising service learning as 'boundary work' revealed some interesting and pertinent observations by a 'site facilitator':

... the need to be up-dated [sic] with the debates in how you need to understand what [...] research requires of the student. You need to be able to speak in the [university] environment and the community environment. You need to understand project planning and how to guide students through the project planning. You need to be able to function and interpret information across different learning approaches. Before you secure the project you need to speak about sample size, people accessing it and numbers and all of those things. You need to know what it means for the project if you do or don't secure certain things, and you won't unless you have a little bit of an understanding of research methodology.

Further support for injecting Project Management into Action Research came in a document sent to me by Kate McHendry of the Scottish Community Development Centre. In the section on 'the Research Process' in the Evaluation of the Scottish Community Action Research Fund there is the following observation: "Inevitably there is some trade-off between the depth and scope of research possible within a limited research budget. In some cases groups have underestimated the costs of project management, community engagement, and dissemination" (Ekos, 2006:vii).

I later discovered that Wilkinson, Elander and Woolaway (1997), cited in Whitehead (2005:528), had made the connection a number of years ago when they wrote:

Working within a formal project-management framework is important in implementing the action research intervention... In general, greater familiarity and awareness by commissioning authorities of how action research works in practice, together with strict project management and control should ensure such research has maximum usefulness.

4. Proact: An Integrated Model of Action Research and Project Management

Whitehead (2005:519) maintains that (at least with regard to organisational management studies) a combination of action research and project management represents “an appropriate and representative way forward”. However, he does not offer a personal preference for a model which incorporates action research principles into project management approaches, or *vice versa*, or marrying them both to form a ‘hybrid’ research strategy. The ProAct model described in this paper opts for action research being the base onto which various selected project management tools or templates are grafted, on the grounds that, as Whitehead (2005:526) observes, “action research frameworks are wide, varied and flexible enough to adopt a number of paradigmatic positions”. This broad flexibility is also acknowledged by Aimers (1999:2) in describing action research as “a family of research methodologies”, and by Burns (2007:11) who notes that it is not a methodology, per se, but rather than “an approach to inquiry that supports many methods in the service of sense-making through experimental action”. The choice of action research as the base for a CUPP is further supported by additional observations by Burns (2007:12) that action research is a process of intellectual and analytical inquiry combined with action (‘experiential knowing’) which stimulates, supports and assesses the impact of change; it is context-bound and addresses real-life problems, and participants and researchers contribute to knowledge through collaborative communication processes in which all participants’ contributions are taken seriously. The essence of action research is succinctly summed up by Simonsen (2009:113) as “being characterised as uniting three goals: To understand, to support, and to improve”.

There are numerous schematic illustrations available of the Action Research Cycle, but I have found Wadsworth’s (1998) model very useful in engaging workshop participants. A synthesised model of Wadsworth’s version of the Action Research Cycle is reproduced in Figure 1.

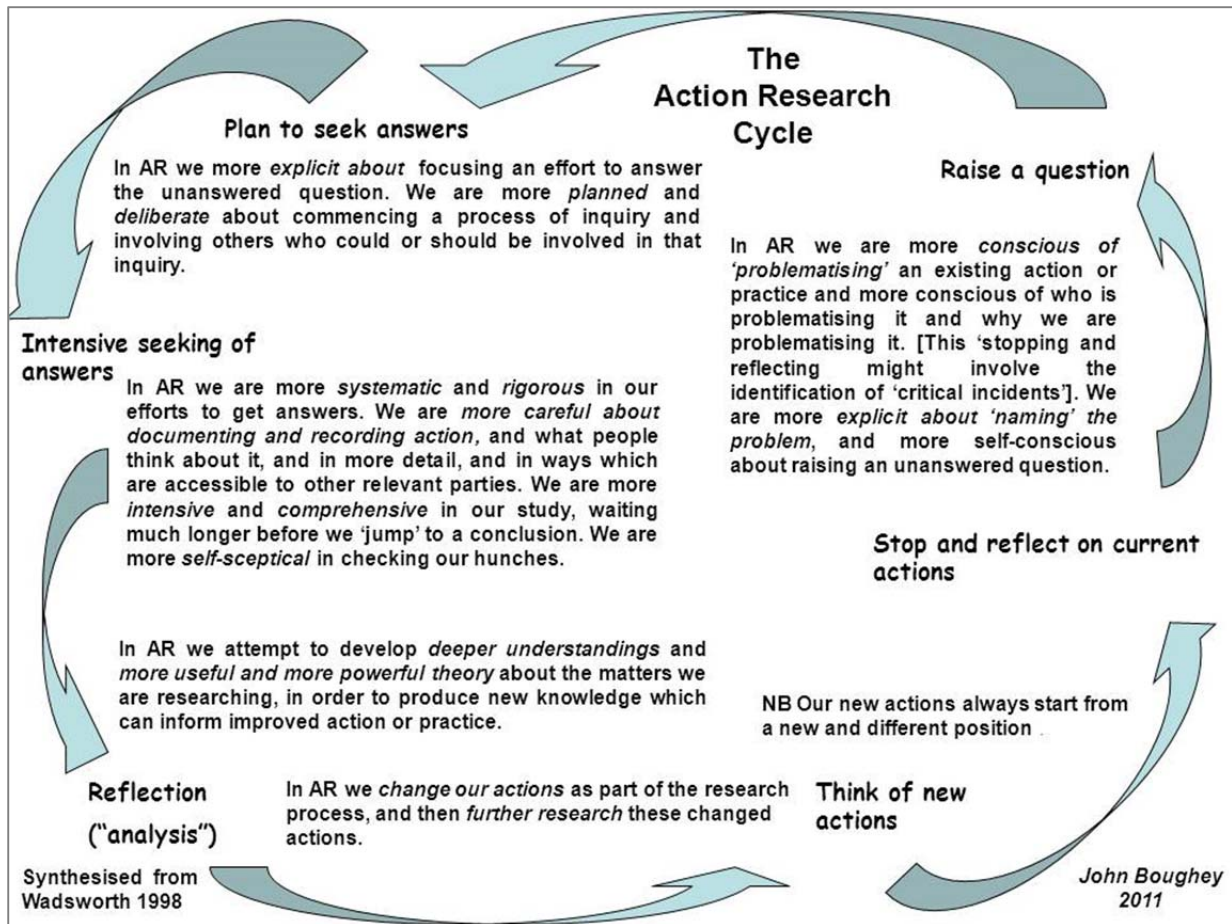


Figure 1: The Action Research Cycle (synthesised from Wadsworth 1998)

As Wadsworth (2013) observes, there are important distinctions, in degree rather than in kind, between the “simple research process we use all the time” and participatory action research. *Inter alia*, in action research, as she notes: “We are more *planned* and *deliberate* about commencing a process of inquiry and involving others who could or should be involved in that inquiry. We are *more careful about documenting and recording action*, and what people think about it, and in more detail, and in ways which are accessible to other relevant parties” [emphasis added]. Herein lies the logical link to project management, whereby the project management perspective can be used for “reducing uncertainty and risk” (Whitehead 2005:523) of the research process.

As previously noted, the relationship between action research and project management might at first appear to be questionable, not least because, as observed by Whitehead (2005:524), action research is rooted within a social sciences process-driven framework while project management is located within a positivist management science outcome-driven paradigm. Whitehead (2005:524) goes on to suggest that despite these seeming differences, there are distinct similarities. This is shown in Figure 2 below, where Kemmis and

McTaggart's (1988) basic model of action research is seen as essentially no different to the typical Identify – Design – Implement – Evaluate model of Project Management.

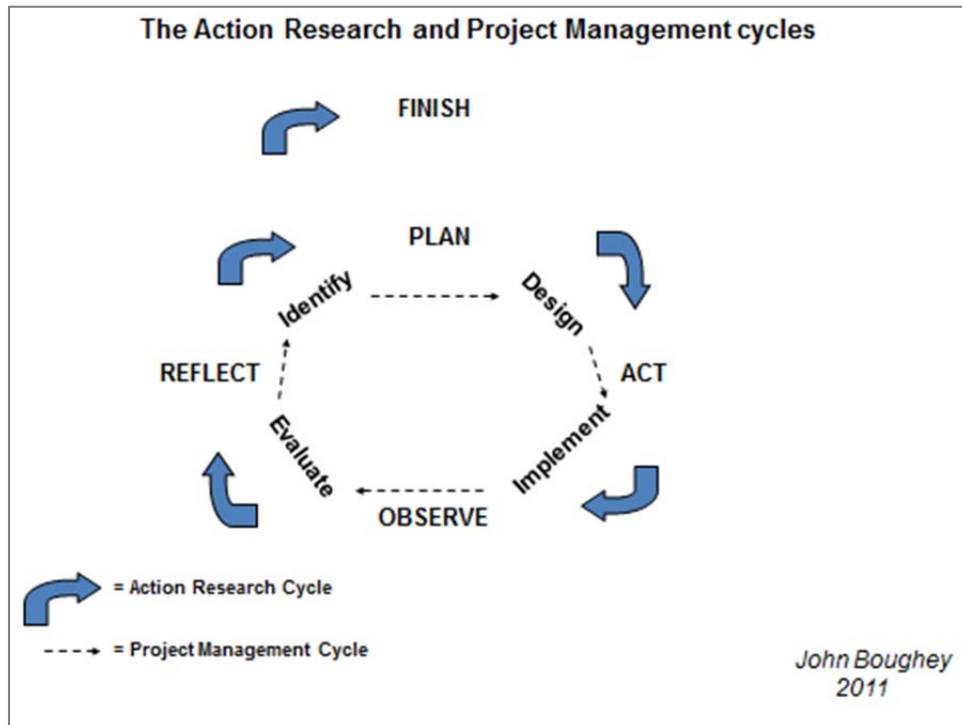


Figure 2: The cycles of action research and project management

The Project Connections website (www.projectconnections.com) lists over two hundred project management templates, checklists and guidelines, so a decision had to be taken on which of these tools will best serve the purpose of supporting an action research project in being planned, deliberate and careful.

Figure 3 below shows the six project management tools I have selected through ongoing experience as being the most useful.

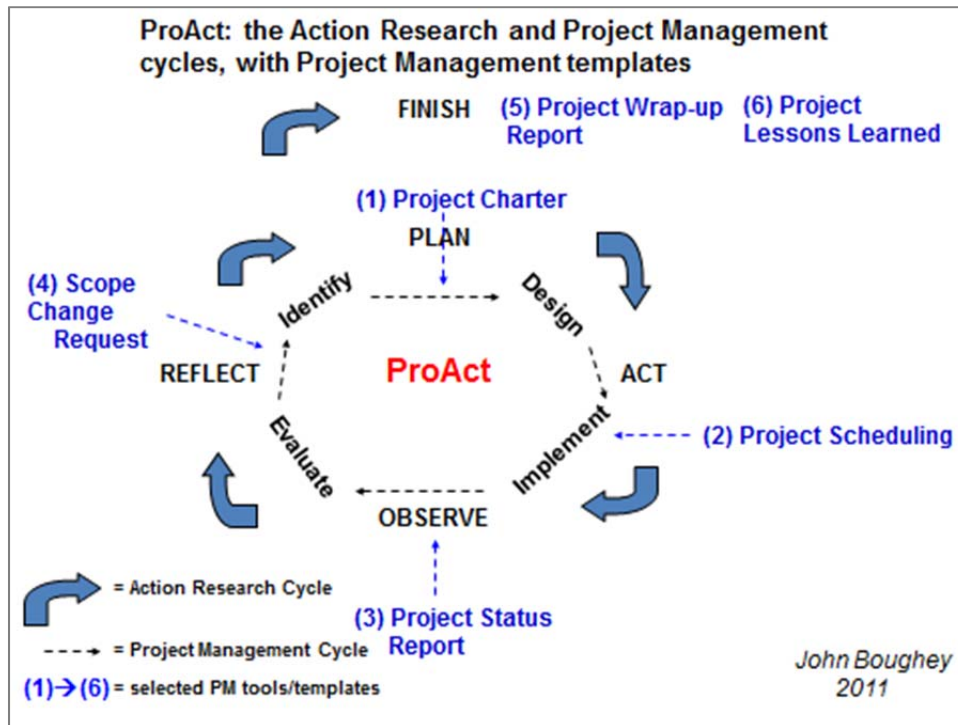


Figure 3: The action research and project management cycles with selected project management tools

(1) **The Project Charter/Initiation document**, in project management terms, might be regarded as ‘the absolute master document’ (www.kayoprojectmanagement.com) for the project and as such is the single point of reference on the project for goals and objectives, scope, organisation, estimates, deliverables, and budget. *Inter alia*, the Project Charter asks:

- Why are we doing this and what is the overall goal?
- What are the assumptions and constraints?
- When do we need to be finished?
- What deliverables must be made to get there?
- When do the deliverables need to be completed and in what order?
- Who is going to actually do the tasks and where?
- What resources and money (budget) is needed?
- What risks are there likely to be along the way?
- How to keep things on target and monitor progress?

Herein lies a tension. Essentially, the action research framework described in this paper is about what Dazé, Ambrose and Ehrhart (2009:21) describe as ‘people-centred development’, namely, the building of “relationships with individuals and communities as a foundation for creative collaboration around an emergent agenda”. In people-centred development, as in action research, all stakeholders are regarded as knowledgeable in their own domains and capable of contributing to the solving of their own problems, with local perceptions and

creativity being celebrated. Dazé *et al.* (2009:21) contend that if this is the case it “necessitates a more iterative and open-ended process where it is impossible to predict thematic details or timelines”. However, they note the need for careful observation of how and when such themes emerge. Acknowledgement of the need for an overall ‘master document’ to shape the project therefore needs to be tempered by the fact that an action research project cannot be so rigidly constrained in terms of totally pre-ordaining who does what, by when and at what cost. Nevertheless, it is useful for the researchers involved to give consideration to the questions asked in the list above – no matter how tentatively at first – in order to keep the project focused.

Dazé *et al.*'s (2009:21) notion of development as “creative collaboration around an emergent agenda” built on a foundation of “relationships with individuals and communities” introduces the important dimension of ‘partnerships’. The template for the Project Charter/initiation document suggested in this paper takes this into consideration by using Bringle, Clayton and Price's (2009) SOFAR model of partnerships, together with Pretty's (1995) Typology of Participation and invites all research project stakeholders to define the project-participatory relationship which pertains between them (Annexure 1). Recognising that these relationships do not remain static, the schematic illustration is also included in the Project Status Report template (Annexure 3). As previously indicated in Boughey (2014, Paper 1, Section 4), Bringle *et al.* (2009:4) usefully differentiate between ‘relationship’ (“a general and broad term to refer to all types of interactions between persons”), and ‘partnership’ to refer to relationships in which the interactions possess three particular qualities: closeness, equity and integrity. Bringle *et al.* (2009:4) posit that relationships become partnerships as their interactions develop **closeness**, determined by (a) frequency of interaction, (b) diversity of activities that are the basis of the interactions, and (c) strength of influence on the other person's behaviour, decisions, plans and goals. Relationships are deemed **equitable** as long as outcomes are proportionate to inputs. Relationships demonstrate **integrity** when participants share values, visions and ways of defining problems and solutions.

(2) **Project scheduling** is ‘where the rubber meets the road’ in project management (www.kayoprojectmanagement.com), “the one fundamental planning tool you must have”. Such a schedule documents what needs to be done, when it needs to be done by, and who is going to do it. “What needs to be done” can be as much about an unfolding process as about delivery of a product, but using a project scheduling tool like a Gantt chart not only helps to crystallise the nature and sequence of activities, but also introduces an element of accountability in that the chart identifies those persons responsible for particular actions. An example of a Gantt chart is included as Annexure 2.

(3) **Project status reports**, delivered on a regular basis, are necessary for providing real-time information on progress, for all participants, but especially for the overall project leader, who may have to decide whether different strategies and interventions might be needed (www.projectconnections.com/templates/index.html). Frequent reporting also helps with the management of risk. An example of a template is included as Annexure 3.

(4) **Project scope change request**. Even within the most exact project specifications it is likely that changes of direction will occur. This is even more likely in an action research project. What project management might call 'project creep' could simply be, in action research terms, a logical and admissible change of direction, and might enhance the project rather than be its downfall. Whatever the case, it is still important to justify and track changes. The need for a formal mechanism for requesting a project scope change had been under consideration for some time, but its practical usefulness was confirmed when the coordinator of a particular community project requested to be allowed to purchase a sound system rather than the glucose strips originally planned and budgeted for. He was asked to formally motivate for this radical change of direction, using a project scope change request form. We are still awaiting receipt of the scope change request. A suggested template for this tool is included as Annexure 4.

(5) **Project wrap-up report**. However, when a project has been conceptualised and operationalised it is reasonable that at its conclusion a 'wrap-up' report should be produced – even if, as might well be the case with an action research project, it might simply be the conclusion of a certain phase of the project. Key components of this report are: project overview/synopsis; an account of goals and objectives and the extent to which they were achieved, including information on milestones and deliverables. An example is included as Annexure 5.

(6) **Lessons learned**. Closely allied to the project wrap-up report, and possibly a part of it, is the 'lessons learned' document. Based on participant reflection and feedback from all stakeholders this document/report is an indispensable tool in any project as it constitutes the learning, or knowledge creation component of the experience. A possible template for capturing this reflection is included as Annexure 6.

5. Responses to the Proact Model

The research model described in this paper is still in the early phases of development, but initial responses from staff, students and community members who have been familiarised with it at workshops and capacity-building sessions, and those CUPP task team leaders who have embraced it, have been positive. In capacity-building sessions the idea of action research is introduced using the notion of first, second and third person action research (Reason and Bradbury 2001: xxvi). First level action research centres on the ability of the researcher to foster an inquiring approach to his or her own life, while second person action research concerns the researcher's ability to inquire face-to-face with others into issues of mutual concern. At the level of 'third person', researchers aim to create a wider community of inquiry. Participants are asked to individually work through a personal issue and then discuss the process with other participants. Observations made by a group of ¹³*Intuthuko* students after doing this exercise suggest that the process gave food for thought as well as being of practical value:

- "At least there are other people who have the same worries that seem to be challenges for me on a daily basis."
- "[I enjoyed] working with diverse people, totally different from ones I am used to working with."
- "Step by step... Easy to use."
- "Learning to think out of the box."
- "This is interesting and useful to me. As a result I'm going to use it in future for my own research purposes to deal about community (society) matters, and even to deal about family matters as well."

Participants (staff, students and local community personnel) at a ¹⁴ProAct capacity-building workshop noted how the action research cycle leads or forces the researcher, through observation and ordered thinking, to be more focused, self-questioning and deeply analytical about *problems* rather than simply looking for *solutions*, and instead of just complaining one starts to take action, through a process of generating and selecting or rejecting various alternative solutions – which in turn generates more questions. Working in this way breaks

¹³ *From Cap-in-Hand to Hand-in-Hand: a model for researching and implementing collaborative projects between universities and communities*. Second presentation (29.05.10) on a short course for students participating in the *Intuthuko* 'science shops' project 2010. Feedback was in written form.

¹⁴ CUPP staff, student and community capacity-building workshop in Action Research and Project Management, UNIZULU, 11.06.10, attended by approximately 25 people. Feedback was in written form.

resistance to change. Participants noted, as did the students in the first group, that we actually share common problems, and that we can address the issues by involving others. In fact, the methodology forces you to communicate. On the matter of communication, one participant noted how the ability to ask questions, of oneself and others, is a skill to be developed. A further interesting observation was that people need a platform for storytelling, and action research provides this.

At a ¹⁵third capacity-building workshop attended by a number of fledgling entrepreneurs and non-government organisations (NGOs) participants commented variously on: a realisation that community members, university staff members, students and service providers can solve community challenges by working together; research is necessary before starting a project, but that research 'is for all people'; the importance of networking and sharing challenges and problems; and how planning is "something that will improve my life and other people's too".

Feedback on the use of selected project management tools in combination with action research indicates that the Gantt chart for project scheduling invariably has the most appeal and perceived usefulness. The CUPP task team leaders have been using ProAct in the field and in their quarterly reports. In conversation with students it appears that while some of them find the model interesting and potentially useful they have not adopted it in their own research, preferring to follow more traditional models as dictated by their study guides.

6. Conclusion

In this paper I have described a research methodology which has as its base the collaborative and democratic, and often tentative, process of seeking to solve context-bound real-life problems which characterises action research, tempered by a project management orientation in which time and resources have to be managed carefully. In so doing I have taken the model beyond the 'conceptual exploration' and 'theoretical construct' posited by Whitehead (2005) and concur with Wilkinson *et al.*'s (1997) assertion (noted earlier in this paper) that working within a formal project management framework is important in implementing action research, and that greater familiarity and awareness with how action research works in practice, together with strict project management and control, should ensure such research has maximum usefulness.

¹⁵ Workshop on the ProAct model for approximately fledgling entrepreneurs (19.03.2011) organised by Lower Unfolozi Municipality. Feedback was in a mixture of oral and written form.

Annexure 1
Project Charter/Initiation Document

Team Leader:

Team Members

.....

.....

.....

Project overview (including purpose)

What is the nature of the issue which is being investigated?

.....

.....

What do you hope to achieve?

.....

.....

Who are the current/present stakeholders?

(Use the schematic on the next page of this document to identify the stakeholders (including yourself!) and the nature/status of the current relationship between them in terms of the suggested typology, aiming for those which emphasise empowerment.

Are there any envisaged future stakeholders?

Yes No

What resources (human, financial, other) do you currently need?

.....

.....

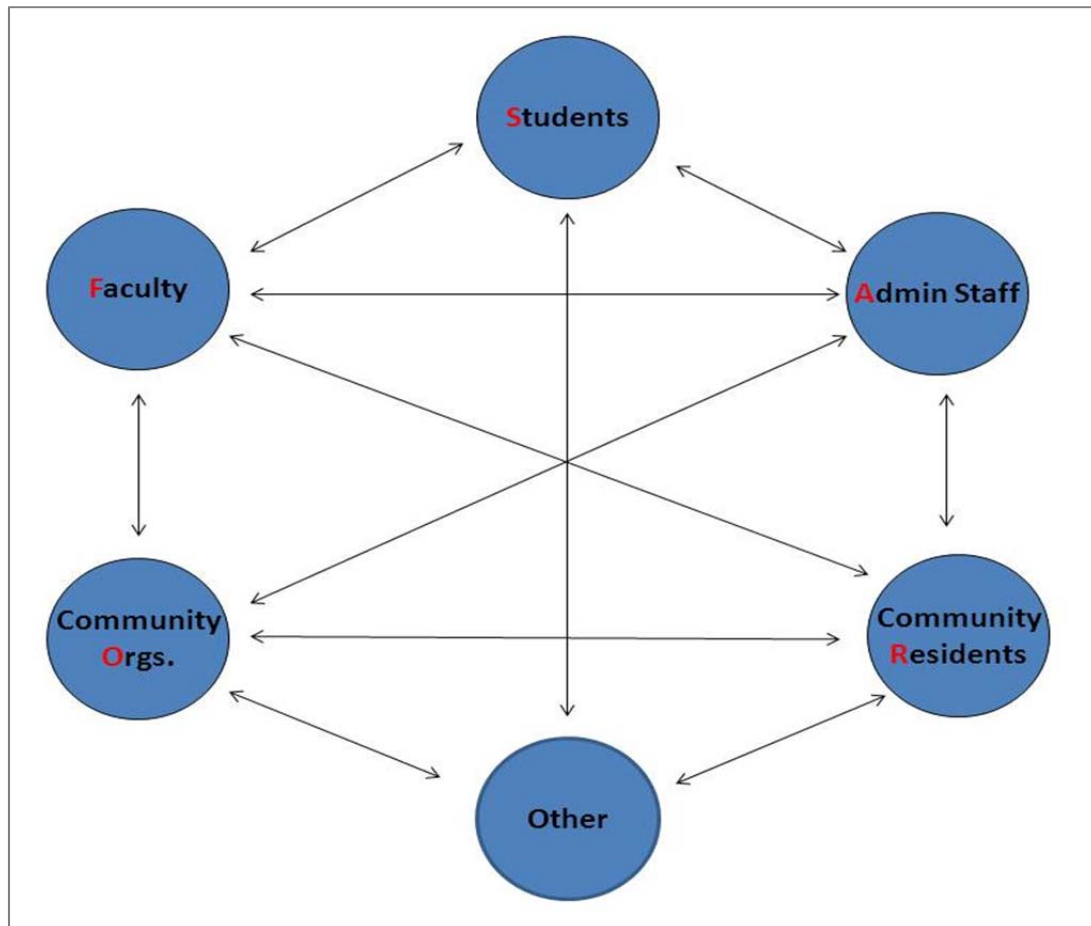
.....

How will you monitor progress and measure/assess impact?

.....

.....

.....



Source: Bringle *et al.* (2009).

The SOFAR model of stakeholder/constituency interaction

Typology of participation (Pretty 1995):

- **Passive Participation:** People participate by being told what has been decided or has already happened. Information being shared belongs only to external professionals.
- **Participation by Consultation:** People participate by being consulted or by answering questions. Process does not concede any share in decision-making, and professionals are under no obligation to take on board people's views.
- **Bought Participation:** People participate in return for food, cash or other material incentives. Local people have no stake in prolonging technologies or practices when the incentives end.
- **Functional Participation:** Participation seen by external agencies as a means to achieve their goals, especially reduced costs. People participate by forming groups to meet predetermined objectives.
- **Interactive Participation:** People participate in joint analysis, development of action plans and formation or strengthening of local groups or institutions. Learning methodologies used to seek multiple perspectives, and groups determine how available resources are used.
- **Self-Mobilisation and Connectedness:** People participate by taking initiatives independently to change systems. They develop contacts with external institutions for resources and technical advice they need, but retain control over how resources are used.

Annexure 2
Example of a Gantt Chart

ID	Task Name	Start	Finish	Duration	Oct 2011				Nov 2011				Dec 2011				Jan 2012				Feb 2012				Mar 2012							
					9/10	16/10	23/10	30/10	6/11	13/11	20/11	27/11	4/12	11/12	18/12	25/12	1/1	8/1	15/1	22/1	29/1	5/2	12/2	19/2	26/2	4/3	11/3	18/3	25/3	1/4		
1	Task 1 (person responsible)	2011/10/06	2011/10/06	1d	[Gantt bar for Task 1]																											
2	Task 2	2011/10/06	2011/10/06	1d	[Gantt bar for Task 2]																											
3	Task 3	2011/10/06	2011/10/06	1d	[Gantt bar for Task 3]																											
4	Task 4	2011/10/06	2011/10/06	1d	[Gantt bar for Task 4]																											
5	Task 5	2011/10/06	2011/10/06	1d	[Gantt bar for Task 5]																											
6																																
7																																
8																																

Annexure 3

CUPP Task Team: Project Status/Summary Progress Report

To: {distribution list} **From:** {team leader}
Subject: Summary Progress Report **Date:** _____

Project name:		Report period:	
Project manager:		Phone: E-mail:	
Project description:			

Key accomplishments last period:

List brief 1- or 2-sentence descriptions of what was accomplished in this last period:

- Include important schedule milestones if any occurred in this last period.
- Include any events that significantly reduced risk in the project (optional).
- Include key tasks that closed an issue that was regarded as 'open' on the previous report.
- List any issues which need resolution

Upcoming tasks for this period:

List brief 1- or 2-sentence descriptions of what you plan to accomplish this next period.

- Include important schedule milestones, if any, that will occur in this period.
- Include any upcoming events that will significantly reduce risk in the project (optional).
- Include key tasks that will move an open issue toward closure.
- Include any item you specifically need Management's help on – and what actions you need.

Change in status of relationships/partnerships between stakeholders:

Refer to the template used in the Project Charter/Initiation Document and indicate any changes.

.....

Annexure 4
Project Scope Change Request

Project Name: _____

PART A – Requestor Section	
Date submitted	
Project leader	
Department	
Proposed change	
Motivation	
Cost implication (if any)	
Relevant supporting documentation	
PART B – Reviewer Section	
Date reviewed	
Reviewed by	
Reviewer's role	
Approved	
Rejected	
Deferred	
Comments	
Signature	

Annexure 5
Project Wrap-Up Report

Project name:

Team leader:

Reports to:

Team members:

Name	Affiliation
.....
.....
.....

Summary/synopsis/Overview of project

.....
.....
.....

Objectives	Level of achievement
.....
.....
.....

Reasons for non- or partial achievement of objectives

.....
.....

Further action required (if any)

.....
.....

Signed:

Approved:

Annexure 6

Questionnaire to be completed by CUPP Task Team Members

(These questions have been adapted from www.ProjectConnections.com)

Name of Task Team:

Date:

Note: add any particular comments you wish.

1. How clearly defined were the objectives for this project?

Very Somewhat Not very Not at all

2. How clearly defined were the objectives for your work?

Very Somewhat Not very Not at all

3. How clear were you on your role in the project?

Very Somewhat Not very Not at all

4. How adequately involved did you feel in project decisions?

Very Somewhat Not very Not at all

If you did not feel involved, what decisions did you feel left out of?

.....
.....

5. How efficient and effective were project team meetings?

Very Somewhat Not very Not at all

What would you change?

.....
.....

6. Do you feel appreciated, recognized and rewarded for your efforts?

Very Somewhat Not very Not at all

What if anything has been lacking?

.....
.....

7. To what degree do you feel the entire team was committed to the project schedule?

Very Somewhat Not very Not at all

What if any issues are there?

.....
.....

8. To what degree have any 'people issues' got in the way?

Very Somewhat Not very Not at all

What issues?

.....
.....

9. What communication, organisation, structural problems in general were encountered, and how could we have done better in these areas?

.....
.....
.....
.....

10. What were the main causes for schedule slips, and how could we avoid those causes in the future?

.....
.....
.....
.....

11. Was the project significantly delayed/hampered by outside dependencies (outside to the project, that is)? Which ones? How can we resolve these issues?

.....
.....
.....
.....

12. Feel free to add any other comments here:

.....
.....
.....
.....

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ProjectConnections.

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A Comprehensive University at the Heart of its Communities: Establishing a Framework for Engagement

PAPER 5

A comprehensive university and its local communities: Establishing a framework for engagement

Abstract

Just over a decade ago, the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) was designated a 'comprehensive' institution, tasked with "serving communities in northern KwaZulu-Natal by assisting in rural development (including teaching, nursing and agriculture) and with technical and technological competency training for local industry". Adopting the slogan of 'Restructured for Relevance', UNIZULU's principal response to this decree has been to open a city-campus in Richards Bay and to develop sub-degree programmes (diplomas). Stakeholders involved in community engagement have also used the re-designation as an opportunity to revision the University's profile as a rural-based higher education institution with an urban footprint, and in particular its relationship to, and responsibility for, its immediate local community. In this paper, based on personal experience over the past ten years, I offer discussion and proposals on the overarching framework of structures, relationships and strategies for promoting, facilitating and sustaining engagement between a university and its local communities. The paper commences with a brief summary of the development of the University's community engagement brief, starting from its redesignation as a comprehensive institution, highlighting significant governance and management achievements. The paper then offers two visual models, with rationale, for capturing the 'big tent' of community engagement and the distributed allocation of responsibilities for its oversight and implementation. Using the metaphor of building blocks and cement, the paper continues with a check-list of the institutional structures and processes (the building blocks) which need to be in place for the successful implementation of a model of community engagement which, if not fully integrated into the traditional activities of teaching and research, at least affords it the opportunity to be considered on a par with them. The paper suggests that even more important than these building blocks are the 'cement' of changing mindsets, and capacity-building for staff, students and community members. Practical models and activities are suggested. The paper concludes with the assertion that unless an institution accepts to a significant extent that assisting its local communities is a bona fide activity for a university and that community engagement is a vehicle for staff, students, curriculum and institutional development, community engagement will always lag behind the more established higher education activities of teaching and research.

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1. Introduction

As noted in Boughey (2014, Paper 1, Section 1), since the release of the White Paper on Higher Education (1997), community engagement has increasingly been identified as an overarching strategy for the transformation of higher education through the broadening of democratic participation and access; greater responsiveness; and a renewed emphasis on cooperation and partnerships. Higher education institutions (HEIs) have been urged to demonstrate their social responsibility and commitment to the common good by integrating community engagement with teaching, learning and research as a core value and as a mechanism to infuse and enrich their teaching and research with a deeper sense of context and application. But, as further noted in Boughey (2014, Paper 3, Section 1) it has so far struggled to achieve par with the other core activities of teaching-and-learning, and research.

Within this national context, in the course of this paper I will reflect on the unfolding story of community engagement at the University of Zululand over the past decade, not from a detailed historical narrative perspective, but with a view to offering comments and proposals which will hopefully be a contribution to the quest to secure community engagement as a valid undertaking for higher education. In so doing, I will frequently resort to use of the first person. Not to do so would be difficult, and somewhat artificial, as I have been intimately involved in this story from the outset. I will commence with a brief factual account from which I will then draw inferences and conclusions on those aspects of governance, management and mindset which constitute the building blocks and cement for creating a sound culture and practice of community engagement in higher education in general, and the comprehensive University of Zululand in particular.

2. Community Engagement at UNIZULU over the Past Decade

Just over a decade ago, in 2002, the University of Zululand (UNIZULU) was re-designated as a 'comprehensive' university (RSA DoE 2002) tasked *inter alia* with "serving communities in northern KwaZulu-Natal by assisting in rural development (including teaching, nursing and agriculture) and with technical and technological competency training for local industry". In so doing, the University was expected to develop sub-degree (certificate and diploma) programmes to complement its degree programmes.

To assist with the transformation to a comprehensive institution, the University's Council in 2003 established an Overarching Reconfiguration Committee (ORC). Chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, this committee comprised 13 sub-committees and working groups. Community engagement – or 'outreach' as it was known then – was the responsibility of the Committee for Outreach and Linkages (COAL). Two years later outreach and linkages were de-linked,

with outreach now being the responsibility of the Community Outreach Working Group (COWG). Under the management of the Assistant Vice-Rector, Research and Community Engagement, the Working Group's brief included an undertaking to encourage a systematic review by key staff to see how University facilities and expertise could be made more available to the community in structured and responsive ways, and to sharpen community outreach focus by undertaking specific, small-scale projects which would make a visible difference to people living within a 50 km radius of the University. In the following year, 2005, the University for the first-time made provision for dedicated community outreach project funding.

Three years later, after another name change, the Community Engagement Working Group (CEWG), chaired by the Director of Academic Development (the post of Assistant Vice-Rector, Research and Community Engagement, having been discontinued), began a programme of community engagement capacity-building and structural change which included the following: the running of campus-wide and faculty-specific workshops on community engagement in general and service learning in particular; the allocation of funding for community engagement projects; the production of a university-community engagement policy; the initiation of a Vice-Chancellor's Award; and the establishment of a Senate Committee on community engagement, which, in 2013 took over the responsibilities of CEWG, which was then dissolved. The Senate Committee is chaired by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Teaching and Learning, but day-to-day responsibility still lies with the office of the Director of Academic Development.

Community engagement at UNIZULU was given a further fillip in 2010 with the initiation of a Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP¹), funded by the Department of Science and Technology (DST). The CUPP is a pilot project initiated by the Department of Science and Technology and administered by the National Research Foundation (NRF), specifically targeting South Africa's rural-based universities in the belief that they are "key institutions in shaping social, economic and scientific development within their geographical space" (RSA DST/NRF 2009a). Synthesising statements in the DST and NRF documentation (RSA DST/NRF 2009a, 2009b) the aim of the proposed community-university partnership

¹ The DST's idea for establishing CUPPs in HEIs in South Africa came through a chance encounter with the University of Brighton in the United Kingdom (Sagren Moodley, personal communication). According to the document "Cupp Working with us" (2013), the early work of Cupp at Brighton was focused around three interrelated aims, based on The Talloires Declaration (2005) "that higher education institutions exist to serve and strengthen the society of which they are part" [see <http://talloiresnetwork.tufts.edu>] namely: to ensure that the university's resources (intellectual and physical) were available to, informed by and used by its local and sub-regional communities; to enhance the community's and university's capacity for engagement for mutual benefit; to ensure that Cupp's resources were prioritised towards addressing inequalities and disadvantage.

programme might be summarised as being to simultaneously facilitate and effect change in HEIs and their surrounding communities through collective and innovative efforts, arising out of equal, fair, democratic, reciprocal, interactive and sustainable partnerships between stakeholders, which promote the identification of shared goals.

The implications of these statements for a university engaging with its communities include:

- Doing things *with* communities (working hand-in-hand), rather than simply *for* communities (communities coming cap-in-hand), or even worse, *to* communities (leading to community enragement not engagement).
- Taking a people-centred approach to development (Dazé, A., Ambrose, K. and Ehrhart, C. 2009) in which partnerships respect and promote local perceptions and creativity, and in which community members are viewed as knowledgeable and capable of solving their own problems, with assistance where and when appropriate.
- Adopting a (participatory) action research methodology as opposed to more traditional higher education research paradigms (see Boughey 2014, Paper 4).
- Embracing a more holistic and integrated conceptualisation of a university's key activities which focus more on the role-players involved (students, staff and community members) rather than the traditional three pillars or silos of teaching, research and community engagement (see Boughey 2014, Paper 3).
- In addition to the 'knowledge exchange' orientation implied in the above (i.e. combining community knowledge with university expertise), adopting the principle of 'knowledge mobilisation' rather than 'knowledge/technology transfer', so that the university seeks to maximise the social benefit of non-commercial research with and for organisations rather than make financial gain out of commercialising its research (Phipps 2012). An example of this philosophy is UNIZULU's Hydrology Department, whose Head has been developing a low-cost ceramic water filter, and capacitating local community members in how to manufacture them. The University is having difficulty persuading him to even patent the device (much to the chagrin of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Innovation), let alone make money out of it.

The DST has given no indication as to whether it will continue to fund the CUPP after the official end of the project in April 2014, but with what has been accomplished so far, particularly in the quality and reciprocal value of the partnerships established with a number of communities, particularly in the small-scale agriculture and health and nutrition, it is likely that the programme will continue. The CUPP project has provided two important factors in the development of community engagement at UNIZULU, namely significant funding, and a vision and model to aspire to. It has been through the process of implementing the CUPP that issues of 'community' and 'engagement' have begun to be explored more rigorously.

3. 'Community Engagement': A Very Big Tent

Various epithets have been applied to the possible scope of the concept broadly known as 'community engagement'. I have used the metaphor of 'big tent', but might equally have used the phrase 'broad church'. Whatever the case, it is widely conceded that community engagement is really a portmanteau term. For it to serve any useful purpose, one of the first tasks must be to arrive at a delineation of the term which suits the profile and mission of each individual institution of higher education. The scope of the term *community engagement* as interpreted at UNIZULU is the subject of the next section.

3.1 The categorisation of community engagement activities

Ironically, the issue of what is and what is not 'community engagement' at UNIZULU has not been the subject of much debate in terms of policy deliberation. In fact, the policy's categorisation of community engagement has not been contested since it appeared in the policy's first formulation in 2007. However, from looking at faculty annual reports it is clear that there are still misconceptions held by some staff members who, for example, list external examining for other universities and serving on school boards *per se* as their contribution to community engagement. With the policy having only been approved so recently (2013) the strategy at the time of writing annual reports for 2013 will be to remind deans of faculty about what does and does not constitute valid community engagement activity, and perhaps to provide a generic template to assist staff in providing the necessary relevant information.

The final version of the University's Community Engagement Policy (2013) divides community engagement activities into four categories:

3.1.1 Curriculum-based community engagement

This category includes all forms of community engagement that are integrated into academic programmes of students. This includes curricular forms of engagement such as service learning; community-based practical components of degree programmes required by legislation; fieldwork and community-based research in the curriculum; as well as clinical practice, professional training, and work-integrated learning (WIL).

3.1.2 Community-based research

This category refers to appropriate, responsive research that is undertaken in partnership with communities for application purposes, including the following:

- Research by staff members aimed at scholarly achievements, contributions and outputs (i.e. conference papers, academic publications, and academic qualifications).
- Commissioned research and other community-based research projects.
- Community-based research undertaken by students in partnership with community members.

3.1.3 Scholarly or other specialised service to the community

This category refers to community engagement activities undertaken by staff members, both academic and administrative, linked to academic and/or professional expertise. These include management of, or involvement in, community development projects; offering short courses and training programmes; consultation and workshops; and technology transfer in collaboration with community partners.

3.1.4 Extra-curricular, volunteer work and community projects

This category includes all forms of volunteer work that is undertaken under the banner of the University (e.g., traditional forms of community outreach) by staff and students.

3.2 A visual model of the categorisation of community engagement

As indicated in Boughey (2014, Paper 1, Section 4), as a way of clarifying these categories for myself and of assisting colleagues in their elucidation, I have found it useful to take Naudé's (2006) adaptation of Furco's (1996) typology of community engagement constructed according to the main goal and main beneficiary of the activity, and recast it as a graph on which to plot all of the categories and associated activities listed in the community engagement policy rather than just forms of community engaged learning.

Naudé's adaptation of Furco's continuum of different forms of community engaged learning is depicted in Figure 1 below.

My further adaptation is depicted in Figure 2. (Feedback from colleagues from other universities with whom I have workshopped the model, indicates that the visualisation of community engagement in this way is a useful tool for clarification and further debate.)

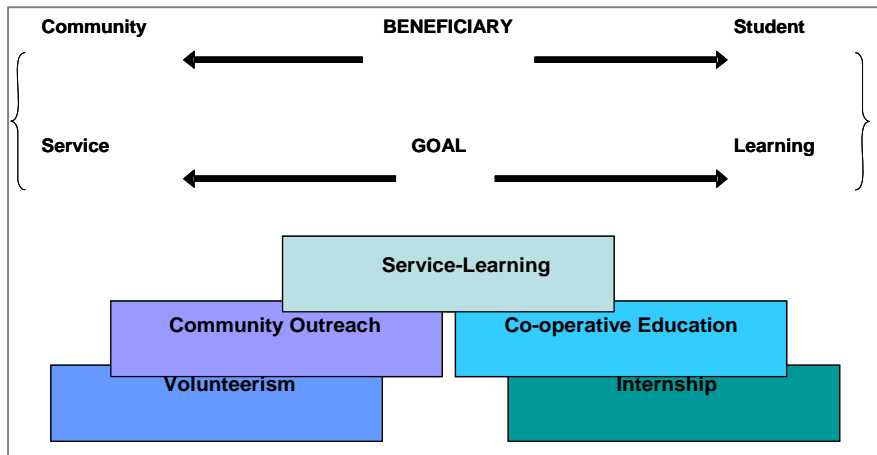


Figure 1: Furco's (1996) continuum of different forms of community engaged learning (adapted by Naudé 2006)

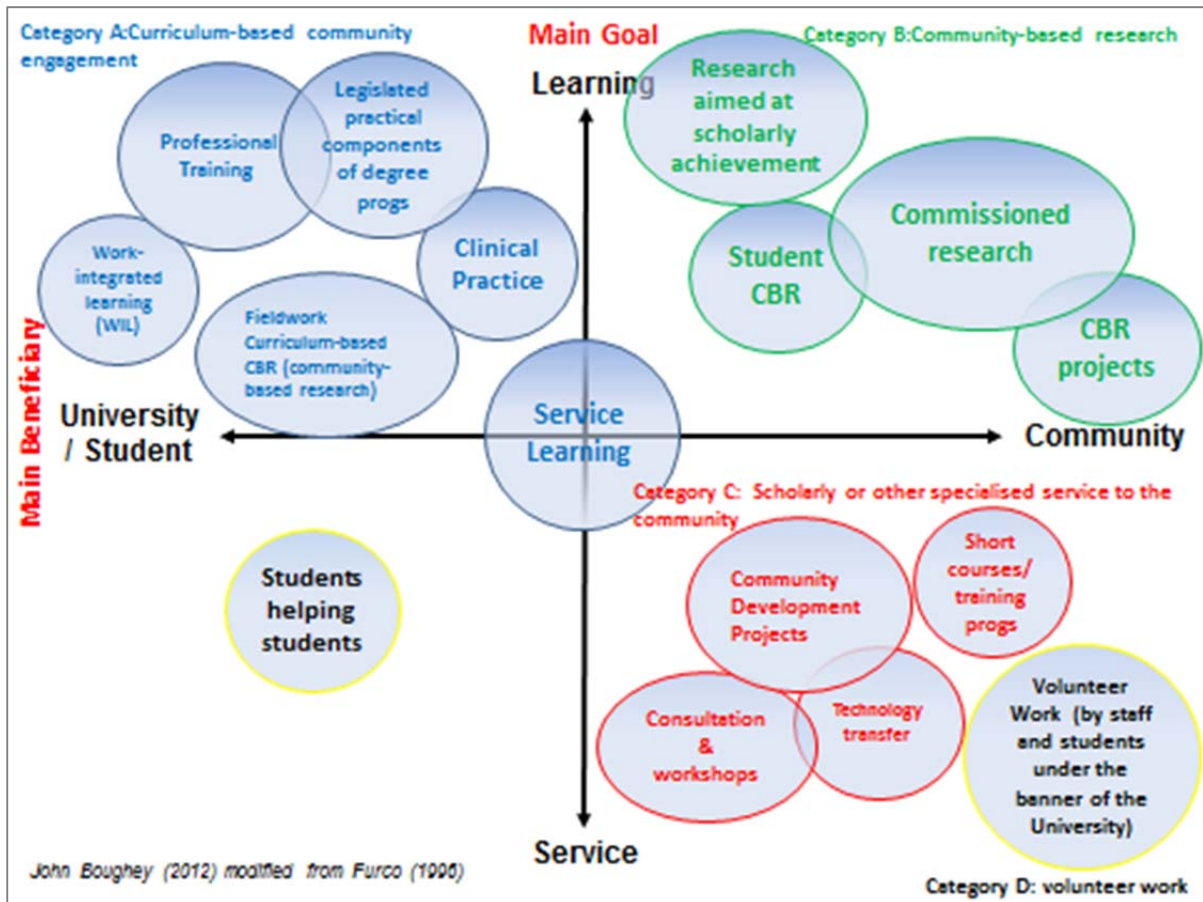


Figure 2²: A classification of community engagement activities (adapted from Furco 1996 and Naudé 2006)

² Figure 2 also appears in Boughey (2014, Paper 1, Section 4).

This section has outlined the activities which might legitimately be considered as 'community engagement' and has allocated each to one of the four categories of curriculum-based community engagement, community-based research, scholarly or other specialised service to the community, and volunteer work. I have further suggested that clarification of the nature of these activities and their relationship to each other is aided by considering each activity in terms of its main focus (university or community) and its main goal, i.e. providing a service or focussing on the learning opportunities for the university – in particular its students. Having established what community engagement is, the next step is to decide with whom or with which structure the responsibility for each activity resides.

4. Community Engagement: Whose Responsibility?

As mentioned above, in addition to needing to agree on what does or does not constitute engagement with the community, there needs to be agreement on who takes responsibility for fostering and overseeing the various activities. This is still proving to be a contentious issue.

4.1 The allocation of prime *loci* of responsibility for community engagement

From debates within the two Senate Committees on Teaching and Learning, and Community Engagement, four principal *loci*, or repositories of community engagement activities are emerging: academic departments; a community engagement office or directorate (still at the discussion stage); the office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Innovation and the Academic Development Directorate.

4.1.1 Academic departments

In any conceptualisation which aims to embed community engagement within the fabric of a university, academic departments are obviously going to be key *loci*. Their responsibilities include: legislated practical components of degree programmes; clinical practice; professional training; fieldwork; community-based research (CBR); CBR projects; WIL and service learning.

4.1.2 The office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Innovation

This office is the primary location for technology transfer, commissioned community-based research; and community-based research aimed at scholarly achievement. In identifying this office as the main locus of control, it should be understood that these activities involve, and even emanate from academic departments.

4.1.3 Directorate/Office for community engagement

As indicated in the summary of the development of community engagement at UNIZULU at the beginning of this paper, overall responsibility for community engagement has for the past number of years resided in the office of the Director of Academic Development. The conceptualisation of a dedicated community engagement office or directorate is still the subject of debate, but with reference to the categories of community engagement delineated in the policy and plotted on the graph in Figure 2, a community engagement directorate or unit would take prime responsibility for non-credit-bearing and non income-generating short courses and training programmes; consultation and workshops with the community; student community-based research not linked to a curriculum; and students helping or assisting their fellow students. Over the past few years I have assisted students in their individual/group, faith-based, and academic department-based capacities in facilitating orientation and capacity-building sessions for fellow students in such activities as strategic planning, leadership, managing group work, and improving English language proficiency. Volunteer projects would not be allowed to remain as a one-way philanthropy from university to community, but would be steered towards the more participatory and inclusive (staff, students and community members) model of engagement which informs the Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP).

The CUPP in Figure 3 below is depicted as encompassing the whole of the work of the proposed unit for community engagement as well as overlapping with the other *loci* of responsibility. The line is dotted rather than solid to indicate that the CUPP does not hermetically seal the community engagement unit, but that the work undertaken in the unit could all fall within the ambit of the programme. This reflects the status of the programme at the moment. It is a pilot project, externally funded, but in the view of some stakeholders it has become THE face of community engagement at UNIZULU (Human Sciences Research Council – HSRC 2013). Indeed, if the institution so decides, it might become the institutional model for community engagement.

4.1.4 The Academic Development Directorate

Once a dedicated community engagement structure is established, Academic Development's prime responsibilities with regard to community engagement would centre around providing administrative support and capacity-building initiatives to departments in the fields of WIL and service learning. The proposed allocation of responsibility for WIL and service learning to the Academic Development Directorate warrants more detailed mention.

WIL is understood as assessed curriculum-related work experience in the formal employment sector (e.g. industry and commerce), but also in the small, medium and micro enterprise (SMME) sector, with its working environment structured in varying degrees structured working environment. Service learning is understood as assessed curriculum-related work experience in the community, again in a range of environments ranging from the formal/structured to the less formal and less structured, for example Non-profit Organisations (NPOs), Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs), Faith-based Organisations (FBOs), and community associations of interest. As McLennan and Keating (2008:6) observe in the Australian higher education environment, generally within these generic terms (WIL and service learning), one finds a range of different approaches including cooperative education, work experience, placements, practicum, internships, fieldwork, workplace projects, workplace research, work-based learning, sandwich years, cadetships, community-based learning and service learning. WIL activities can vary substantially in terms of the type of participation, who arranges it, duration, timing within a course (in-term or vacation, first year to final year), relationship to other course content, whether it is an elective or compulsory part of a course, project or research-based, whether and how it is assessed, whether and how it is remunerated, and how it is taught or supervised. In addition, the partnerships on which WIL are based can vary from more informal one-off arrangements to highly formalised and collaborative relationships between the university and industry.

In some universities in South Africa WIL and service learning are located in the community engagement domain, as in the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. In others, for example Tshwane University of Technology, they are separated, with WIL being part of academic development and service learning handled by a community engagement unit. In some universities they are accommodated in a Cooperative Education Unit, which in the case of Vaal University of Technology, reports directly to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic. The Durban University of Technology and Mangosuthu University of Technology both have Cooperative Education Units. At the (comprehensive) University of Johannesburg the WIL office resides in the Centre for Psychological Services and Career Development.

There is also variety in the extent to which WIL and service learning activities are centralised in a specialist unit or decentralised to faculties and academic departments. At Flinders University (Australia), which has a very strong WIL profile, management of WIL largely resides with academic departments, with the Learning and Teaching Centre providing resource materials, capacity-building, and the facilitation of a WIL Community-of-Practice (CoP). A model similar to this is the one depicted in Figure 3 below, in which academic departments are responsible for building WIL and service learning into the curriculum and operationalising it, but supported administratively and professionally by a specialist unit

located in the Academic Development Directorate to assist with capacity-building and logistical support. The rationale for locating this unit – Learning in the Workplace and Community (LWC) – in Academic Development rather than in a Community Engagement Directorate is that WIL and service learning are essentially curriculum-based activities. However, one would envisage that there would be close liaison with the Community Engagement Directorate regarding identification of and communication with prospective host communities if academic departments are experiencing difficulties with this. The linking of WIL and service learning in an Academic Development Directorate of course raises the question of which activities would be the responsibility of a Community Engagement Directorate or Unit.

4.2 A visual model of the allocation of responsibilities for activities listed in the UNIZULU Community Engagement Policy

In debating the allocation of community engagement responsibilities with colleagues, particularly on the two Senate committees of Teaching-and-Learning and Community Engagement, I have again found it useful to make a graphic representation, as depicted in Figure 4 below. (The graphic includes Academic Development’s provision of an orientation and capacity-building programme to assist academic departments in integrating community engagement into the curriculum. This is discussed in detail in section 5.2 below.)

While some activities involve more than one entity, the colour denotes the primary locus of the activity. Thus, for example, while the activity of Commissioned Research resides with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Innovation (even if not initiated in that office), it necessarily requires the agency of academic departments, and may involve the Community Engagement Directorate in identifying or liaising with specific communities which have requested or been offered the research. Displaying community engagement graphically in this way quite strikingly shows the centrality of academic departments in the whole community engagement endeavour.

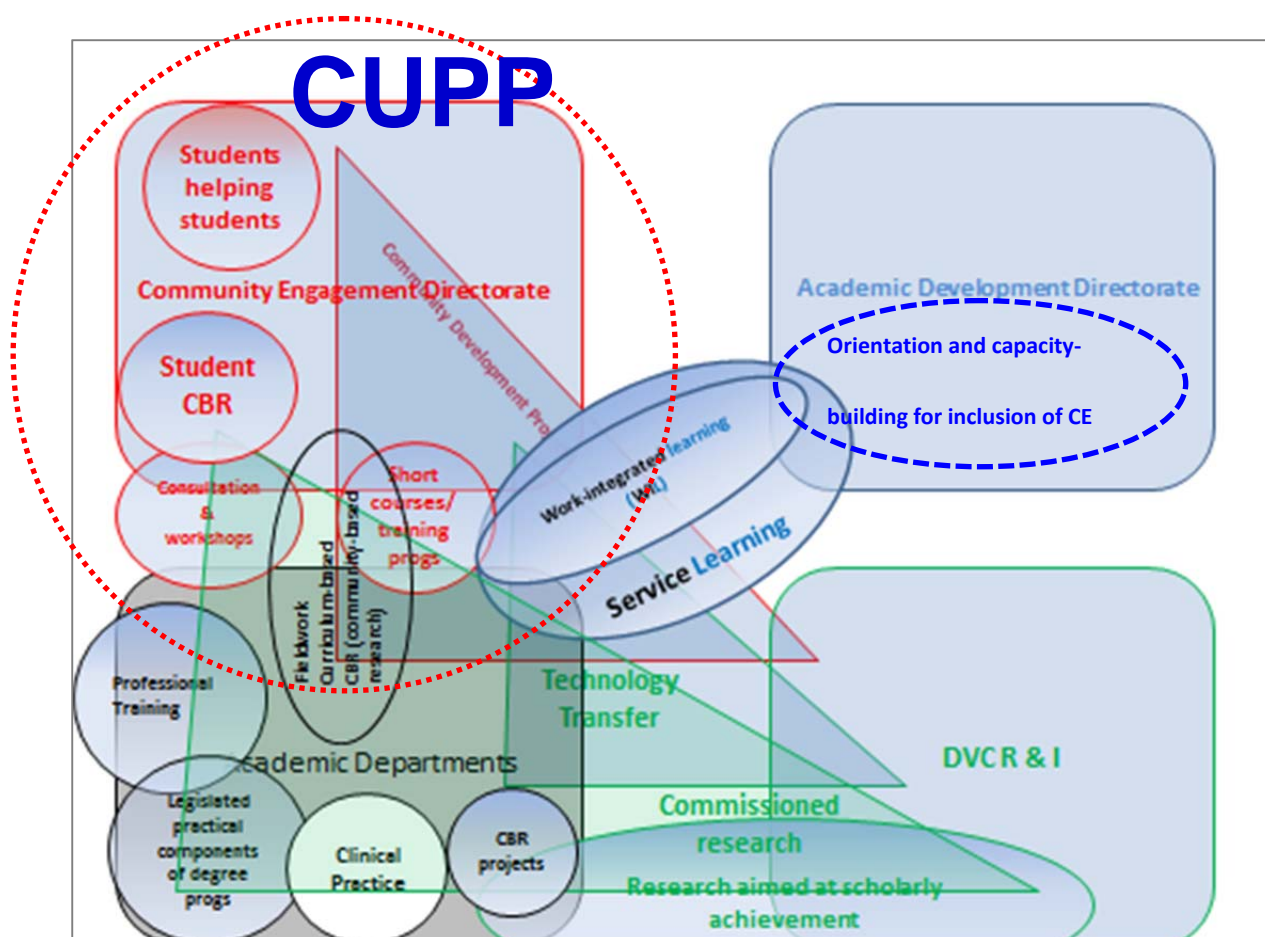


Figure 3: A model of the allocation of community engagement activities and responsibilities

A disadvantage of the distributed model depicted here is that it is difficult to give a simple answer to Holland's (2013) question of the importance of having clarity on who in the institution is ultimately accountable for leading community engagement as a strategic priority. In any case, decisions of this nature are often a matter of personality and exigency rather than pure logic and objectivity. Community engagement currently resides with the office of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Teaching and Learning, but the majority of the Senate Committee on Community Engagement, based on the models outlined above, feel that it should report to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Research and Innovation. However, the incumbent of this position feels strongly that community engagement is essentially about teaching-and-learning. Indicative of the contested nature of community engagement, the outgoing Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Teaching-and-Learning personally favours a structure comprising the three domains of community-based research activities, curriculum-based activities, and volunteer work (in partnership with the Dean of Students), reporting to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Teaching and Learning. We shall see what the incoming Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Teaching-and-Learning favours in due course.

5. The Building Blocks and Cement of Community Engagement in a Higher Education Institution

The previous sections have dealt in some detail with the questions of what constitutes community engagement and with whom the responsibility lies. However, for community engagement to become established in an institution of higher education there are other aspects which need to be attended to. What are the major building blocks and cement for the establishment and maintenance of a comprehensive and overarching framework for promoting, facilitating and sustaining engagement between a university and its local communities? It is to these issues that I now turn.

5.1 The structural building blocks of community engagement in higher education

The physical (governance and management) building blocks listed here are not new, having been identified by a number of other people over the years (see Albertyn and Daniels 2009; Badat and Kalawathie 2007; Holland 2013), but for the purposes of this paper they bear repeating:

- A university should be sure of, and be comfortable with, its own identity. Each university will interpret its community engagement mandate in its own way. For those universities like UNIZULU which were ordered to change their identity by decree, this is not a quick process.
- The second point is closely linked to the first. Notwithstanding the current universal preoccupation with 'globalisation' and 'internationalisation', the cause of community engagement is greatly aided by a university's vision and mission statement, which first of all acknowledges the university's relationship with and its responsibility to the communities in which it is located. (In Boughey, Paper 1, Section 6, it is noted how only a small number of South African universities mention specific local geographical areas in their mission statements, and further noted how at UNIZULU the vision and mission have moved away from a specific commitment to local community in the past twenty years. I have personally advocated a mission statement as unequivocal as that of the University of Western Sydney which concludes with the statement "... beginning with the people of Western Sydney".) In addressing this issue, Holland (2013) poses a simple question: "Is community engagement included in the top three priorities of your institution right now?"

- Unequivocal declarations of intention and support from executive leadership. As mentioned elsewhere (Boughey 2014, Paper 1, Section 6), Saha (2003) quoted Professor Sir George Bain of Queen’s University Belfast as saying that “the best universities are rooted in their local community”. At the Community-University Expo 2013 the Governor-General of Canada, His Excellency the Right Honourable David Johnston (himself a former vice-chancellor), asserted that “*All* institutions of higher education are closely related to local communities” and that “for higher education, community engagement is a major strategy for distinction” (Johnston 2013). Other vice-chancellors are not so forthcoming.
- A community engagement policy which clearly spells out the following:
 - The extent of the university’s ‘local’ community in geographical terms.
 - A conceptual understanding of the terms *community* and *community engagement*.
 - A clear delineation of the sorts of activity which constitute ‘community engagement’.
 - An indication of the university structures which are responsible for them.

In making these stipulations I take heed of Hartley, Saltmarsh and Clayton’s (2010:397) concern that “engagement defined only in terms of activities connected to places outside the campus often fails to focus sufficient critical attention on the process – how engagement is enacted – or the purpose – why engagement is undertaken”. Matters of process and purpose of course have to be attended to (see section 5.2 below), but in my experience, defining the boundaries of ‘places outside the campus’ is a necessary starting point.

- A Workload Formula (WLF) and Selection and Promotion Criteria which give due prominence to community engagement alongside the other key responsibilities of teaching and research. An argument could easily be made for including selection and promotion criteria in a community engagement policy. However, given the importance of this issue as a litmus test for the embracing of community engagement (see below), and the resistance it would inevitably create in certain quarters, it is questionable whether or not a policy containing reference to this issue would receive the necessary support from all of the necessary university structures.
- The establishment of structures such as senate and faculty community engagement committees and reporting processes which mirror those of teaching and research. With structures at levels lower than senate it is important to stipulate that formal minutes be taken of meetings so that these bodies are accountable.

- In addition to promotion incentives the presence of an award system for staff, students and community members which rewards and celebrates community engagement achievements.
- Whilst ultimately aiming for staff to offer students an expanded form of ‘engagement’ which is learning-centred, research-informed and community-contextualised (Bougey 2014, Paper 2), all staff and students should have at some stage in their sojourn at the university experience *engaging* with a community at least to some level (excluding the one-way collection of data from the community).
- It is helpful if those community engagement activities not distributed to other units such as the office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor, Research and Innovation, individual academic departments, and the Academic Development Directorate are orchestrated and operationally supported through a dedicated office, staff and funding, *inter alia* to run a helpdesk, maintain a database, and orientate and capacitate staff, students and community in CBR.

In considering the implementation of plans and strategies we should be mindful of the effect of what Argyris and Schön (1974:6-7) identify as ‘espoused’ theories as opposed to ‘theories in use’. Our espoused theories are those to which, in Argyris and Schön’s words, we give allegiance, and which, upon request, we communicate to others. However, what we actually *do* in practice might be another matter entirely. Thus, we might be able to faithfully recite the university’s vision and mission, but the matter ends there. As Argyris and Schön also observe, we may sometimes not even be aware that our theory in use may be incompatible with our espoused theory.

Likewise with policy. The implementation of policy depends on a number of factors, including the level of commitment to the policy by those being requested to implement it; the degree to which they are familiar with it; and the capacity of the institution to monitor implementation. Regarding community engagement, Albertyn and Daniels (2009:417) note the need for either infusing it into existing policies or creating new policies, but in either case they should represent “ethical practice with empowering intent and reciprocal benefits” rather than being simply disciplinary or window dressing.

There are also qualitatively different degrees of leverage associated with the planning and policy mechanisms listed above. As Lazarus (2001:7) observes, “academic staff promotion and reward guidelines are perhaps the most important factor determining the roles that academics assume and the activities they engage in”, because these signal the value the institution places on our various roles and responsibilities. UNIZULU’s current promotion criteria state that promotion rests on performance in four categories, namely teaching-and-

learning, research, community engagement, and university service, but only evidence of achievement in teaching-and-learning or research are obligatory. Lazarus' sobering conclusion with regard to an institution's commitment to community engagement is that "[i]f the guidelines do not reflect this commitment, the institution's civic engagement agenda is likely to remain on the margins, driven essentially by a handful of innovative academics and students inspired largely by altruistic motives". In the same paper, Lazarus points to 'resource allocation' as being 'the ultimate test' of an institution's commitment. From my experience, there are two issues here. The first is that making *financial* resources available without the necessary human and infrastructural resources is a recipe for under-spending. Secondly, with activities like community engagement, which at this juncture of higher education's history as a fledgling democracy like South Africa is attracting 'soft' funding from other agencies, there may be the temptation for an institution to rely on this sort of funding rather than commit funds from its core budget.

5.2 The cement for binding the community engagement building blocks in higher education

If the afore-mentioned tangibles like strategic plans, mission statements, policies and resource allocation are metaphorically the building blocks of establishing community engagement in higher education, what is the cement that is necessary to bind them into a solid and durable structure? For me, there are two prime constituents: mindsets and capacity-building. These are discussed in some detail in the sections below, but as they go hand-in-hand there is considerable overlap.

5.2.1 Changing mindsets

Lazarus (2001) makes reference to a third factor in the promotion of community engagement, additional to plans and policies, and resource allocation, namely capacity-building. A more fundamental issue, but closely related to capacity-building is that of changing mindsets (what we choose and the reasons for so doing). Two fundamental aspects of a changing mindset are firstly, the conception held by staff and students of community engagement in terms of its status as a curriculum enabler or simply as an addition should time and opportunity allow, and secondly, the conceptions that university members and community members each might hold of the other. These are discussed in more detail in the following sections.

5.2.1.1 Community engagement as a pedagogical paradigm: The concept

Kaburise (2007:81) speaks of community engagement as a 'pedagogical paradigm'. Looking at the Education White Paper 3 – *A Programme for Higher Education Transformation* (RSA

DoE 1997), one of the purposes of higher education is seen as “to contribute to the socialisation of enlightened, responsible, and constructively critical citizens”. Although this is a toned-down version of the original draft formulation of ‘being responsible for’ the above (not just making a contribution to it), the question arises as to how this is effected.

The critical issue for me, from a community engagement perspective, is the one alluded to by Hartley *et al.* (2010:394), i.e. “not merely that it is the university’s aspirational role to prepare students for civic responsibility *after they graduate*, but that *through their educational experiences* students experiment with and practise democracy through community-based educational experiences” [emphasis added], meaning that engaging with communities is actually an integral and enhancing enabler of the higher education learning experience, not something which one is empowered to do after having been prepared exclusively in the lecture hall. That community engagement might have this pedagogical function is not something which is immediately accepted. However, once a staff member has engaged with community members, changes start to happen in other domains. De la Garza (2007:66), for example notes how the going out of the classroom and entering ‘the realities of communities’ in turn influences the epistemologies of education and research, changing how people think and impacting on the curriculum. This idea of entering the realities of community informs the New Lecturer Orientation (NLO) strategy of including a bus tour of the university’s local community as part of the programme. Open to all staff members, academic and non-academic, established as well as new, these tours are regarded by the majority as ‘a real eye-opener’³. It is striking how little staff members know about the communities on their doorstep. Fear of the unknown then plays its part. A young female lecturer once flatly expressed the view that “if you want me to visit the local township you’ll have to provide me with an armed guard. I have a child and a husband to support”.

Thinking of community engagement as a pedagogical paradigm is in direct contrast to the norms of academe. Hartley *et al.* (2010:396) in reporting on a 2008 colloquium of civic and higher education leaders in Dayton, Ohio, note the consensus view that the dominant epistemology of the academy runs counter to the civic engagement agenda. They cite one colloquium participant’s observation that the ‘expert’ academic model, with its ‘excessive homage to a narrow disciplinary guild’ has robbed the academy of its ability to effectively challenge society or to create change. They ask how might a democratic epistemology be created? With regard to building academic staff capacity in the domain of teaching-and-learning, as Director of Academic Development, this sounds a personal warning bell for me

³ In response to feedback from participants, and to guard against such tours turning communities into tourist attractions, future tours will include stopovers in which university personnel will be able to interact with community members.

to modify my promotion of unique discipline-specific academic literacies, as opposed to a generic academic literacy (Boughey 2012), to take more account of the current socio-political contexts in which the discourses of disciplines are couched. This would also open up the space to discuss whether our efforts, in terms of our disciplines and our community engagement (or ‘the value base’, as Badat and Kalawathie, 2007, call it) are about simply making improvements to the existing *status quo* or seeking to change the *status quo*, with the latter’s potential to “shift epistemology, reshape the curriculum, alter pedagogy, and redefine scholarship” (Hartley *et al.* 2010:404).

5.2.1.2 Community access to the university: Formal and epistemological

Reference was made above to the establishment of a helpdesk as being an enabler of university-community relations. Practical experience has shown that the community often does not know how to approach the university. A helpdesk is therefore a useful first port of call. However, this physical access to the university is only half of the story. Comparisons have already been made between Academic Development and community engagement, with Badsha (2007:94) borrowing the Academic Development’s term *infusion* to describe a model of community engagement integrated into teaching and research. I would like to borrow another concept embraced by Academic Development, namely Morrow’s (1993) contention that students need epistemological as well as physical admission (access) to their university studies, and apply it to engagement of communities with the university. If the university is to work in a democratic way with community members then each will need to develop an understanding of how the other thinks and goes about its business, so to speak.

From the university’s perspective I have described (Boughey, 2014, Paper 4) the negotiation of a common understanding of action research as a methodology to be jointly used by university and community. But action research is not a methodology which finds general favour in the academy. Nyden (2007:170) notes that we, as the university, use our established methodologies and theoretical frameworks (often refined over periods of many years) and our resources to rigorously gather and analyse information in order to find solutions to pressing problems. Seeing that, as Nyden also observes, this university-based knowledge is essentially ‘mined’ from the social and natural world should we not even the playing field by considering ways in which the general discourse of academe – for example, how we communicate with each other, and what we value – can be made more accessible to our community partners? Such issues are epistemological in nature. Carter and Little (2007:1323) note that epistemology is about making value judgements about what constitutes trustworthy knowledge. But as Rambe and Mawere (2011:7) also note,

epistemological access is not just about possessing the knowledge but knowing how to make it (i.e. the values, attitudes and practices that go into its making).

One way of approaching this is to invite community partners to our seminars and conferences, and also to do joint presentations with them – even to produce joint academic journal articles. For example, in the past two years I have invited the chairperson of a local secondary cooperative (with more than seventy primary cooperatives on its books) to a seminar on *The Green Economy: Renewable energy, climate change and social justice*, the local municipality's coordinator of the Local Economic Development (LED) Forum and the Small, Medium and Micro Enterprise (SMME) Forum to a seminar on *Building local economies: Enterprise development, entrepreneurship and innovation*. Additionally, I have jointly presented with a community partner (chairperson of a local all-female cooperative) at a national seminar on *Sustainable livelihoods: Cooperatives, access to markets, health and wellness*, and an international conference on community-university engagement. In the case of the last mentioned community member, we are also in the process of writing an article for publication in an academic journal. In each of these cases, the community partner found the experience illuminating and practically very useful. In raising this idea, I am aware of two issues to be wary of: firstly, suggesting that there is a single generic epistemology for the institution (see discussions on the existence of discipline-specific literacies rather than a generic academic literacy [Boughey 2012]), and secondly, that epistemological access is a one-way process from community to university.⁴ In discussing these ideas in more depth with one of the community members mentioned above, she surprised herself by realising: "I'm passionate about education, but academics don't inspire me! I love learning, I read, I have a degree, but I'd never want to be an academic." When asked to reflect on what she had learned about the university during our partnership, she replied that in addition to finding out how much the university was doing for its local communities she was struck by the level of empathy with community displayed by some staff members. However, she continued: "But having said that, I still think the university needs to do more to change how it's perceived out there. It's not the best at representing itself in this regard. Perhaps it has something to do with the fact that some in this world would rather not dilute what these institutions were created for. But then we live in a world which is constantly changing, so my suggestion would be that those in academic institutions who already embrace the change should just speak with one loud voice!"

⁴ The rest of this section contains extracts from an extended discussion with a community member in 2013. I transcribed her comments on my laptop computer as we talked. She was aware that her comments would appear in this thesis and has since seen them and approved them.

When I asked her what she thought I had learned from working with her and her community, her response included the following observations:

“You have come to realise that we, as a partner from another world to yours, harbour the same aspirations as most people out there, even those of a higher social standing than us. People are generally more alike than they are different, no matter who they are. You have learnt (I would like to believe) that we are the same as most people in wanting to put our best foot forward and anything less than that we take as personal failure, which may lead us to be defensive when there’s actually no need to do so. Thirdly, you have learnt that we are not deterred by challenges. Fourthly, that we possess our own knowledge and have a way of doing things that we believe in. Fifth, that even in our world some sort of hierarchy exists and is accepted if it’s for the benefit of a collective. Lastly, that women indeed do look out for each other.”

5.2.2 Capacity-building

Attention to changing mindsets (dealing largely with what is desirable), needs to go hand-in-hand with capacity-building, including demonstrating what is possible and how it might be achieved. Community engagement capacity-building in an institution of higher education is not only for academic staff members, but also for students and community members.

5.2.2.1 Community engagement as a pedagogical paradigm: In practice

As Holland (2013) avers, engagement is academic work. “Community Engagement is a method – a way of doing our teaching, learning and research differently by involving ‘others’”, but as Albertyn and Daniels (2009:417) observe, academics may not see the value of community engagement because there is no theoretical framework to underpin their practice. This suggests to me that rather than simply wait for academic staff to engage with the community and see for themselves the effect it will have on their teaching-and-learning, we could be more pro-active in our capacity-building activities by promoting community engagement as part of pedagogy, particularly in the orientation of new lecturers. The service learning literature can be of great use here, with its well-theorised expositions on the relevance of Kolb’s learning theory and the importance of ‘reflection’ in the transformation of experience into learning (see Hatcher and Erasmus 2008; Naudé 2011; Stanton and Erasmus 2013). In discussing community engagement academics, in my experience, also voice a number of relevant concerns to do with what I term ‘the nuts and bolts’ of physically including community engagement in their curricula, for example, credit-value and how and by whom work is assessed, finding a community in the first place for those who are not already researching in a community, and the practical logistics and safety and security concerns of

getting students to and from the field. Two resources publications of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) are very useful in this regard, namely their *Service learning in the curriculum: A Resource for Higher Education Institutions* (RSA CHE 2006a), and *A good practice guide and self-evaluation instruments for managing the quality of service learning* (2006b).

5.2.2.2 Boundary spanning

Goddard (2011) identifies ‘boundary spanning’ as a skill often lacking in academics and one which presents a barrier to civic engagement. The ‘boundary zone’ which needs spanning refers to the spaces between two communities of practice (in our case, university and community) which are spaces of challenge, contestation and playing out of power relations, but also potential sites for new learning opportunities and new knowledge (McMillan 2009:49). The actors who facilitate the activities across the boundary zone have a complex role of translation, coordination and alignment between perspectives. And above all, they need legitimacy on both sides of the boundary. We therefore need to understand the skills, values and knowledge “required by academics to do this work successfully, as they are often the most centrally placed potential boundary workers” (McMillan 2009:50). (In identifying boundary spanning as an important skill to be learned by academics working in communities my own experience suggests that in many cases it is key community members who perform this function. This is particularly so when university staff members, such as myself, do not speak the local language [in this case, isiZulu]. In working on agriculture-related projects I rely on the university’s farm manager, who is not an academic but has a master’s degree from a prestigious university, is a well-respected member of the communities with whom we work and about whom he is very knowledgeable. From my perspective he is a boundary worker *par excellence*.)

5.2.2.3 Community engagement capacity-building for students

In considering community engagement capacity-building we should also not forget to include the students we are trying to involve. In catering to their needs I have constructed a linked three-phase programme as depicted in Figure 4 below. A first step is to orientate students to the notion of community engagement in higher education and then to focus on specific ways in which community engagement can be effected – with service learning being a primary vehicle. As pointed out by Van Heyningen (2008:121) one function of orientation is to help students “move mentally out of their traditional academic boxes into a ‘non-traditional’ learning approach”, but this of course makes an assumption that students are in fact in their traditional boxes and not already thinking in non-traditional ways. Based on the experience of academics over the years that assumption might be a reasonable one, but in all matters

concerning orientation I have always found it advisable to follow David Ausubel's (1968) time-honoured dictum of "first find out where the student is and teach them accordingly". So, rather than simply telling students what community engagement is and how it should be carried out, it is better to let them think about the matter and pose their questions.

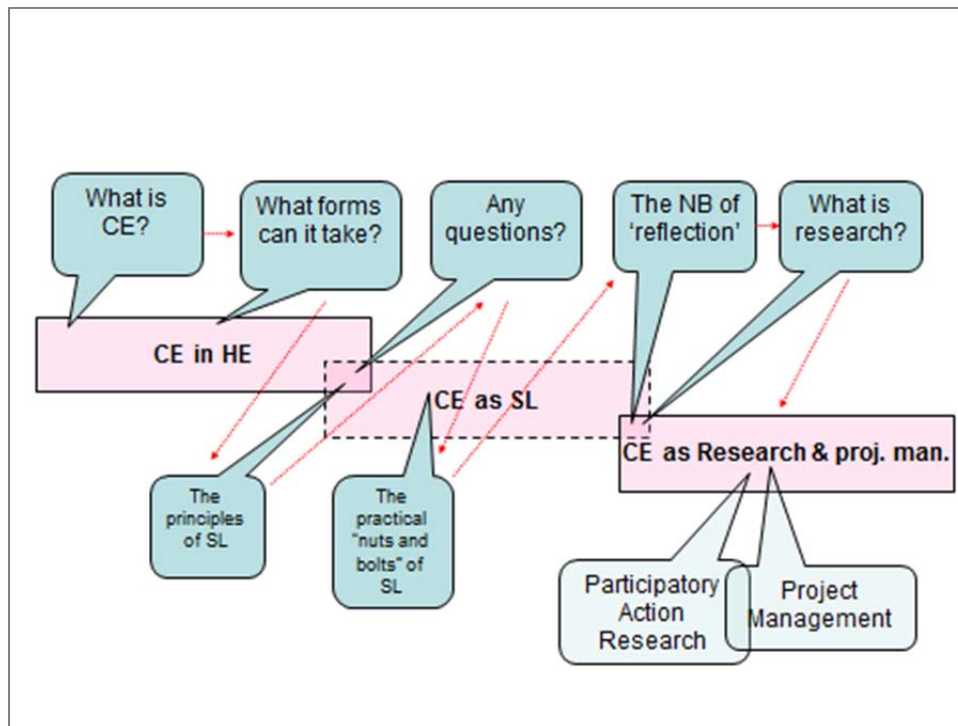


Figure 4: Three-phase orientation programme for students to community engagement in general and service learning in particular

As the examples below show (taken from a ⁵class of undergraduate consumer science students) that students are well able to articulate their views and identify key issues. The question 'what is community engagement?' elicited a range of responses, including:

- "It is where you work hand in hand with the community. Allow them to make input in on what you want to achieve."
- "It is when you are working and you need some society members to help you. When you conduct a research or you take some task of work that you need to do, and you need society's input, no matter what the input is, but it involves community members; that means they are also engaged into that particular task. This is called community engagement, once the society members are involved that is how it is called."

⁵ Comments (via written feedback) elicited during a Service-Learning orientation session with a class of Consumer Science undergraduate students in 2009. Permission was sought, and obtained, to use this feedback in other workshops and the like, although at the time my interaction with these students was not intended to form part of this thesis.

- “It is about interacting with the community, learn on how they live, their culture, and try to develop a relationship with them and then try to find a way to help them with their problems by involving them in findings solutions, and in turn you are benefitting as well as the community.”
- “The community engagement is the cooperation of the community and the researcher to come with the resolution of the problem. Is the working together of the community and research: the researcher has to use the communication skills by means of negotiating by using different strategies.”
- “I believe it is when the community is engaged or involved in activities among themselves as community, they share ideas and partake wherever possible situations they have to overcome whatsoever problems. They engage themselves in community work that will enhance themselves in terms of advancement, towards the community.”

The elicitation of these responses then allows an *entrée* to the epistemological distinctions between doing things ‘to’, ‘for’ and ‘with’ communities. In doing this, in addition to asking students to reflect on their own understandings of community engagement I ask them, in groups, to respond to the following statements collected from ⁶interviews with other students:

- “We are not at university to engage with the community. We’re just here to learn and go.”
- “Interaction with society adds value to your degree. Theory and academic discourse [alone] does not give you a wholesome or holistic education.”
- “It’s useless to produce graduates who will not end up strengthening the community. Developing of the community economically depends upon the educated community members.”
- “I think we should look at the community as a resource to fulfil our curious mind in research, and in return, the community will make a living by being involved in this endeavour.”

Before starting the second phase - taking students through what I call ‘the nuts and bolts’ (i.e. practicalities) of service learning as a vehicle for community engagement - I ask students to think about questions that have occurred to them so far. The same group of Consumer Science students came up with some very reasonable, and often very insightful concerns. I have grouped these under the following sub-headings:

⁶ In all of the interviews, workshops and conversations with staff, students and/or community members verbal permission was always obtained to use feedback and quotes as might be deemed appropriate. Anonymity was also always assured.

Expectations

- What is expected of you?
- What is the service which needs to be delivered to the community?

Student readiness

- What do we need in order to conduct service learning?
- Do I need any qualifications as a student to do service learning? If yes, what are they?
- Have I learnt enough to do something for the community?
- Did I do the correct research?

Community readiness

- Is the community ready for this kind of service?
- Which type of community do we start with?
- Do we target the community that surrounds the university socially or we can take it to professionalism, e.g. firms, companies, etc.?
- How will I know if the community is willing to work with me?
- How do we get the community to participate?

How to do it

- How will it be done?
- Will there be any guidelines?
- What type of procedures need to be followed?
- How much time will it take a week?
- Who do we consult before getting involved with a certain community?
- Do we have meetings to discuss what is needed in that community?
- What kind of communicating are we going to use? Meeting or telephone?
- How are going to minimise communication barrier since some people are not educated?
- Logistics (how and when transport)?

Assessment

- Would there be a certain syllabus that we'd have to do in order to gain the credit?
- What methods or mechanism will be used to monitor or assess our progress?
- Is it going to be tested in exams?
- What is expected in my report presentation?
- If ever you are not doing OK in the serving learning, will it have an impact in your result?

Benefits

- How important is the service learning to the student?

- Do I benefit from helping the community?
- How are you contributing to the community?
- Does the community really benefit from my knowledge?

The third phase of the programme involves introducing students to a research model appropriate to working with communities. As described in detail in Boughey (2014, Paper 4) the model I am currently developing (*ProAct*) entails adopting a Participatory Action Research orientation to addressing community needs, but integrating selected project management principles and tools, in the interests of the equitable attainment of effectiveness and efficiency. Barnett (2011) asserts that the ‘critical engagement’ engendered by students undertaking what he prefers to call ‘lifewide’ learning rather than ‘lifelong’ learning through having worthwhile learning experiences outside of their formal learning situations, carries the potential for ‘an assault’ on the university’s dominant epistemological assumption that “the human being is a kind of interested spectator inquiring into a world out there” and its dominant ontological assumption that “the inquirer is separate from the world, separate from it [and] dispassionate towards it”. Asking students to discuss their own understandings of ‘research’ opens the door to debate on these assumptions, as is evident in the following examples, the first collected from one UNIZULU student, and the second a composite made from a number of individual responses to the question ⁷‘what is research?’.

- An organised way of finding the truth.
- A person, or group of people, systematically and thoroughly digging deep into an existing problem, a new problem, or a general life problem, through interviews, questionnaires, journals, case studies, the Internet, and the library, in order to change a situation, investigate a topic you are interested in. (Composite answer from student responses).

5.2.2.4 Mindset-changing and capacity-building for community

The ProAct model alluded to in the previous section is the same one used for capacity-building of community members in the rationale and methodology of Participatory Action Research. This is dealt with in more detail in Boughey (2014, Paper 4). In Boughey (2014, Paper 1, Section 5.2) it is noted that just as there are some university staff members and students who conceptualise community engagement as an unequal and non-reciprocal enterprise involving the ‘knowing’ university lending its expertise to support the ‘unknowing’ community, there are some community members who also hold this view.

⁷ This feedback (written responses) was collected from a Research Methodology workshop conducted with *Intuthuko* students on 19.05.10. Permission for subsequent use was obtained.

To recap, this section of the paper has looked at what I have termed the major building blocks (issues of governance and management) and cement (changing mindsets and building capacity of all stakeholders) for the establishment and maintenance of a comprehensive and overarching framework for promoting, facilitating and sustaining engagement between a university and its local communities. Continuing with the construction analogy, the blocks and cement adumbrated above need a foundation. For me, that foundation is the belief expressed in 5.2.1.1 above, that engaging with communities is actually an integral and enhancing enabler of the higher education learning experience, not something which one is empowered to do after having been prepared exclusively in the lecture hall.

6. Conclusion

At the 2011 Community Engagement Conference in East London, Badat (2011) provocatively asked the audience a three-part question: Can you imagine a university which does not teach? ('No', came the audience's reply); Can you imagine a university which does not do research? ('No'); Can you imagine a university which does not do community engagement? ('Yes'). At the same conference Goddard (2011) quoted the Vice-Chancellor at his own university: "The combination of being globally competitive and regionally rooted underpins our vision for the future. We see ourselves as not only doing high quality academic work ... but also choosing to work in areas responsive to large scale societal needs and demands, particularly those manifested in our own city and region." These two examples underline the accepted wisdom that each university's interpretation and execution of community engagement will depend on its differentiated place in the higher education landscape. This is where an institution's own understanding and acceptance of its profile is important. But even in a university like the University for Development Studies in Ghana, which was set up by government decree as a developmental university specifically for a particular area of the country, the role of community engagement has its detractors and dissenters within its own ranks and the disapproval of sister institutions in the country (Kaburise 2007).

The seeming reluctance of the Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa to make community engagement part of the funding formula is a symptom of the dilemma and a reason for most institutions not to fully embrace community engagement as an activity equal in stature to Teaching and Research. Full acceptance requires the full range of building blocks I have referred to in this paper (including institutional self-identity, unequivocal support from institutional executive leadership, plans, policies, structures, and funding), but more importantly the cement which binds the blocks together, including familiarity with

communities and knowing how to interact with them, changing mindsets and building capacity.

In concluding I would like to stress two points. The first concerns our understanding of the purpose of higher education. Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker and Donohue (2003) unequivocally ask the question: “What is the purpose of higher education... if not to reach out so as to provide something useful to society, starting with the communities that surround them?” If university leadership, staff and students, and community colleagues do not hold to a belief which at least approximates to this tenet, then community engagement will always struggle to be accepted by the academy.

Secondly, I would like to reiterate the centrality of the belief, as encapsulated by Hartley *et al.* (2010) that community engagement is a vehicle for staff, student, curriculum and institutional development, not something which is an additional extra which is to be indulged in after other key areas like teaching-and-learning and research have been attended to. Without this belief we will have to concur with the question posed at the 2006 Bantry Bay conference by the governance and management working group: “Can you even contemplate quality community engagement, if there are serious shortcomings and shortfalls in existing teaching and research outputs?” However, *with* this belief, we could turn the question around and ask: “Can you ever contemplate quality teaching and research if there are serious shortcomings in your engagement with your local communities?”

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⁸ An isiZulu word meaning “we see you”.

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A comprehensive University at the Heart of its Communities: Establishing a Framework for Engagement

Conclusion

1. Introduction

The purpose lying behind the title of this thesis has been a very practical one, namely to put together a conceptual and practical framework which would enable a rural-based comprehensive university with an urban footprint to work more closely with its local communities. As I indicated in the introduction, the concept of 'comprehensive', as applied to higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa, is still a relatively novel one. This is particularly true of the University of Zululand (UNIZULU), which is one of only two HEIs in the country to be reconfigured as 'comprehensive' without involving the merger of a traditional university and a technikon/university of technology. The choice of the phrase 'at the heart of its communities' was a deliberate one, as the metaphor conveys the meanings of being the life-blood of something and also central, not peripheral to engagement. The choice of the word 'communities' (rather than 'community') is also deliberate. At a broad level, it foreshadows the acknowledgement that UNIZULU has a strong rural base but is also located in a municipality which is heavily industrialised and vibrantly commercial. At another level, 'communities' signals that even within a single geographically defined community there are numerous communities comprising people with similar interests and aims. The constructing of 'a framework of engagement' was felt to be important for defining, promoting, sustaining and developing community engagement at UNIZULU.

The issues highlighted above were dealt with in the course of the five papers which constitute the thesis. The findings of the five papers are set out below.

2. The Papers

Paper 1.

Notions of 'community engagement' appropriate to a Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP) in a South African rural-based comprehensive university – Siyanibona!

The aim of the first paper was to tease out contested understandings of the notions of 'identity', 'community' and 'engagement', which once clarified could then serve as a foundation from which to explore other elements of the University engaging with its various

communities. The exploration of these notions was undertaken largely through an analysis of University planning documents over the past twenty years, supplemented by interviews with University staff and students and community members. The insights drawn from these sources reveal a complex and shifting relationship between UNIZULU and its local, international and global communities, and a variety of interpretations as to what constitutes engagement between them, as UNIZULU seeks to adjust to being a rural-based comprehensive higher education institution with an additional urban footprint.

The Paper started to explore three particular ideas, taken up in later papers, namely the notion of 'relationships of fate' needing to transform into 'partnerships of choice' (which is explored in more detail in Paper 2); the link between the circumstances of a particular university's birth, and its acceptance or otherwise its responsibility to its locale (which is discussed more fully in Paper 5); the need for all stakeholders in the community-university engagement endeavour to know more about each other at a level deeper than simply the institutional or organisational, as partnerships involve degrees of closeness, equity and integrity (themes taken up in Papers 2 and 5), which from a university perspective entails respect for local perceptions and creativity and a belief that community members are knowledgeable, and capable, with assistance where and when appropriate, of solving their own problems.

Paper 2.

From pillars to people: Reconceptualising the integration of teaching, research and community engagement in higher education.

From defining terms (Paper 1), the aim of the second paper was to broaden the field of vision to address the struggle community engagement has faced in achieving par with higher education's other core activities of teaching-and-learning, and research. In so doing, I chose not to look at teaching, research and community engagement as activities or objects, but rather to look at them from the perspective of the individual stakeholders (staff, students and community members) engaged in those activities. The exploration of this idea picked up on the distinction between 'relationships of fate' and 'partnerships of choice' first articulated in Paper 1 and expanded the concept of 'engagement' to encompass the relationships between staff and students (not just those between the university and community members), and discussed ways in which staff, students and communities would need to interact with each other. Treating all stakeholders as partners in the co-creation of knowledge led to a reconsideration of the university as a learning organisation (as opposed to an organisation about learning). The Paper acknowledges that wholesale transformation will be necessary, but concurs with those who suggest a more modest approach, utilising the theory of second-best, which maintains that rather than perpetually advocating and striving (but continually

failing) to achieve optimum conditions for the necessary transformation, it would be more realistic and productive to engage with the constraints which are part and parcel of mass higher education.

Paper 3.

SMMEs and higher education: Possibilities for partnership?

Following on from the discussion in Paper 1 on the overarching concepts of 'institutional identity', 'community', and 'engagement', and a more detailed discussion of 'engagement' in Paper 2 Paper 3 homed in on a particular community sector, the SMMEs, to ascertain the extent to which the sector might be able to partner with UNIZULU to their mutual benefit. This sector constitutes a large component of the South African economy and therefore needs to be explored as a potential partner for work-integrated learning and service learning opportunities. The major limitations of the survey were that it sampled only a very small percentage of the SMMEs in the area. Nevertheless, feedback received was illuminating. Firstly, it confirmed that the opportunities for work experience for students in micro- and survivalist enterprises are limited. But the survey also revealed that UNIZULU could be doing more to 'reach out' to its communities by making them aware of who the University is, what it can offer, how it can assist, and perhaps most importantly, how it can be accessed. Seeking to draw small enterprises into the CUPP rather than adding them to a database of student work experience sites, therefore recommends itself as a more productive route to follow.

Paper 4.

ProAct: An integrated model of action research and project management for capacitating universities and their communities in the co-production of useful knowledge.

Paper 2 looked at the traditional higher education activity-focused domains of 'teaching', 'research' and 'community engagement' from a relationships/partnerships people-focused perspective and argued that the traditional research paradigm of the academy would have to become flexible enough to accommodate action research, and more especially participatory action research in its panoply of accepted and supported research techniques as an appropriate research methodology for university staff and students and community members to jointly employ in the interests of collective, fair and reciprocal interaction. Based on observation and reflection, Paper 4 tells the story of the evolution of a hybrid model of action research and project management (ProAct) which takes account of the need for research in the university-community context to be accomplished democratically, but within specific parameters of time and other resources by grafting selected project management tools onto the basic action research cycle. In taking the basic model of action research, with its four moments of Plan → Act → Observe → Reflect → and adding six project management tools

(project charter, project scheduling, status report, scope change request, wrap-up report, and lessons-learned report), I gave practical and concrete form to the conceptual and theoretical constructs of other researchers who had considered the linking of action research and project management. Feedback from those employing the model has been positive. Interestingly (but predictably, given the dominant paradigm in the academy), students who reportedly found the model interesting and potentially useful did not adopt it in their own research, preferring to follow more traditional models as dictated by their study guides.

Paper 5.

A comprehensive university and its local communities: establishing a framework for engagement.

The main purpose of this concluding paper was to reflect on my own personal inquiry and experience, combined with consideration of the deliberations of others, in order to address the overarching question of how to establish a framework for engagement between a university and its communities. While the paper employs the well-used ‘building construction’ metaphor, I believe the paper has broken new ground in differentiating between the essentially management and governance building blocks (including institutional self-identity, unequivocal support from institutional executive leadership, plans, policies, structures, and funding), and the ‘cement’ for holding the framework together (including familiarity with communities and knowing how to interact with them, changing mind-sets and building capacity). Continuing with the construction analogy, the paper offers the opinion that the necessary foundation for the edifice is the institutional belief that engaging with communities is actually an integral and enhancing enabler of the higher education learning experience, not something which one is empowered to do after having been prepared exclusively in the lecture hall. In summing up, the paper re-iterates the centrality of the belief that community engagement is a vehicle for staff, student, curriculum and institutional development, not something which is an additional extra which is to be indulged in after other key areas like teaching-and-learning and research have been attended to, and adds that if an institution does not come close to holding the view expressed by Strand, Marullo, Cutforth, Stoecker and Donohue (2003:2) that the purpose of higher education is to reach out so as to provide something useful to society – starting with the communities that surround them – community engagement will always struggle to be accepted by the academy.

3. The Significance of the Study

The White Paper for Post-school Education and Training (Nov 2013) indicates that the Ministry will encourage what are referred to as “suitable feasibility studies and pilot programmes” to explore the potential of community service to, *inter alia*, for giving young

people the opportunity for “constructive social engagement” and to “enhance the culture of learning, teaching and service in higher education”. It is hoped that this thesis will make a contribution to this endeavour. By way of immediate contribution I would like to single out a few issues – perhaps ‘realisations’ would be a better word – which have given me food for thought and which other researchers might find worthwhile exploring further too.

3.1 Institutional identity

In looking at institutional identity the question of how the university was established in the first place, is important. As was mentioned in Paper 1, Brighton University grew out of its community and they both seem to have grown together organically. By contrast, UNIZULU was established by *apartheid* decree and in many people’s view foisted on the community. The University’s reincarnation as a ‘comprehensive’ university soon after the start of the new millennium was also by government decree.

3.2 Community identity

I have found the distinction between ‘communities of fate’ and ‘communities of choice’ to be an illuminating one.

The need to understand how communities perceive the university, as well as how the university constructs its notions of ‘community’ is important to bear in mind.

3.3 Engagement

On this topic, there are three major re-conceptualisations which, taken together, will assist in the establishment of community engagement as an activity on par with the traditional activities of teaching and research. The three re-conceptualisations are:

1. Talking about the stakeholders involved in a university’s traditional activities of teaching, research and community engagement, rather than those activities *per se*.
2. Expanding the notion of ‘engagement’ to encompass relationships other than the one between university and community, most notably, the one between staff and students.
3. Transforming ‘relationships of fate’ into ‘partnerships of choice’.

3.4 Community Engagement as Purpose and Pedagogy

For community engagement to make any real headway in higher education there are two issues of ‘mind-set’ which need to be in evidence. The first is that the institution and communities must embrace the belief that interacting with the communities that surround

them is one of the purposes of a higher education institution. The second is that there has to be a belief that community engagement is a vehicle for staff, student, curriculum and institutional development, not an additional extra to be indulged in after other key areas like teaching-and-learning and research have been attended to.

4. Conclusion

In speculating on the significance of this thesis I would not like to leave out the importance that this whole exercise has had for me personally. Completing this thesis has given me the opportunity and the impetus to explore issues which are of fundamental importance to me in my capacity as manager of the community engagement portfolio at UNIZULU. My specific responsibility as team leader for the Community-University Partnership Programme (CUPP) has meant that I have kept in mind the importance of research as one of the University's principle activities, while my role as Director of Academic Development has ensured that I have not lost sight of the need to adopt a teaching-and-learning perspective on community engagement. The personal highlights in the journey of assembling this thesis have been the exploration of a hybrid action research and project management research methodology, and the shift in focus from looking at teaching-and-learning, and research and community engagement as domains of activity to looking at them as the product of enactment and interaction between key stakeholders. As a result, I now feel in a position to promote a more integrated model of teaching, research and community engagement to my university, community colleagues, students, and community engagement peers in other universities.

However, in saying that, I look back on conversations and conference and seminar presentations ranging from campus to Canada, and reflect on the difficulty of the task before us as proponents and advocates of community engagement in higher education. While some of the titles of my presentations were upbeat ("Linking teaching, research and community engagement: Challenges and opportunities"), others were humorously cynical ("Linking teaching, research and community engagement: Holy Grail or Bermuda Triangle?", "Linking teaching, research and community engagement: Round the corner or round the bend?").

In thinking about how to facilitate the necessary changes in mindset and operationalisation, I am already moving beyond the insights I have gained in the writing of this thesis. In Paper 2, recognising the possibly overwhelming task which presented itself, I advocated adherence to the theory of second-best, i.e. a greater engagement with the reality of our constrained situations rather than the perpetual advocacy of 'first-best' solutions which we continually seem to fail to achieve. I am thinking that "greater engagement with our current reality" might be facilitated by "complexity science" (Bivens 2013) and the model of "systemic action research" being developed by Burns (2007). Bivens (2013) asserts that we need insights into what he calls "the intermediary processes" which enable higher education community engagement aspirations to come to fruition, rather than simply promoting the concept of community engagement and evaluating its impact. He further notes that these intermediary processes are not linear, but are the product of various actions across the university, planned or otherwise. Similarly, the common thread running through the various interpretations of "systemic action research" is "a concern to take account of the wider context within which issues are situated" (Burns 2007:10), and one which presents a challenge to the current dominant linear models of 'best practice' and strategic planning (Burns 2007:1). These observations echo the sentiments expressed by Brydon-Miller, Greenwood and Maquire (2003:23) on the need to analyse the dynamics that make universities what they are.

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