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Introduction: community service learning and the South African research agenda

The integration of research and community service learning (also referred to as service learning or service-learning in this volume) opens up opportunities for contributing to the much discussed transformation of higher education in South Africa, through which institutions of higher education are urged to become more democratic, more responsive to community challenges, and conducive to partnership-building with a wide variety of stakeholders. The twofold premise of this introductory article is the following: service learning as a pedagogy is strengthened through scholarly inquiry and, secondly, the South African research agenda can be advanced through the philosophy and epistemology of service learning that promotes collaborative, open systems of knowledge production. The aim of the article is to establish why and how the above should and could be achieved, placing the other contributions to this issue of *Acta Academica Supplementum* within the framework of a more inclusive service learning research agenda for South Africa.

Inleiding: samelewingsdiensleer en die Suid-Afrikaanse navorsingsagenda

Die integrasie van navorsing en samelewings- of gemeenskapsdiensleer (ook bloot diensleer genoem in hierdie bundel) skep geleenthede om by te dra tot die veelbesproke transformasie van hoër onderwys in Suid-Afrika, waardeur hoëronderrysinstellings aangespoor word om meer demokraties te wees, beter te reageer op die uitdagings van gemeenskappe, en om die bou van vennootskappe met 'n wye verskeidenheid belanghebbendes te bevorder. Die tweeledige aanname van hierdie inleidende artikel is die volgende: diensleer as 'n pedagogiese metode word versterk deur vak-kundige ondersoek en, tweedens, die Suid-Afrikaanse navorsingsagenda kan bevorder word deur die filosofie en epistemologie van diensleer wat samewerkende, oop sisteme van kennisproduksie bevorder. Die doel van die artikel is om te bepaal waarmee en hoe bogenoemde bereik kan word, en om die ander bydraes in hierdie uitgawe van *Acta Academica Supplementum* binne die raamwerk van 'n meer inklusiewe navorsingsagenda vir diensleer in Suid-Afrika te plaas.

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The phenomenon of globalisation, as well as the relatively recent democratisation of the South African society, has compelled government to reconsider the role of higher education (HE) institutions in the reconstruction and development of the country. According to national policy documents, government's HE transformation agenda rests on the following three pillars:

- Increased participation

The democratisation of and increased participation in the higher education system by an ever-increasing diversity of interest groups with the aim of eradicating the inequalities of the past.

- Greater responsiveness

The ability and willingness to react to a wide variety of social and economic needs, as well as a commitment to seeking solutions to societal problems which, in turn, require adaptations in respect of teaching and learning methods and curricula

- Increased co-operation and partnerships

Increasing co-operation and partnerships between institutions of higher education and all sectors of society (with the community, public and private sectors) for the sake of mutual trust, as well as increased accountability and transparency in the higher education sector (cf NCHE 1996, DoE 1997).

During the past decade of democracy in South Africa the above-mentioned need for HE institutions to venture beyond the academic "ivory tower" was reaffirmed in government policy documents (cf Fourie 2003). One issue that emerged from these documents is evidence that the previous vague use of the concept "community service", which had formed part of the mission statements of HE institutions in the past, gradually evolved towards a view of community service that is linked more closely with teaching, learning and research. Most of the contributions to this volume have taken their cue from a concerted effort to achieve greater integration of what is currently better known within the South African HE context as "community engagement"¹ with the more traditional core functions of teaching and research.

1 Often referred to as "civic engagement" in the USA context, cf Bringle & Hatcher in this volume.

It is noteworthy that “community engagement” is defined by the Council on Higher Education’s Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC 2004: 24) with specific reference to “service learning” 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. Community engagement typically finds expression in a variety of forms, ranging from informal and relatively unstructured activities to formal and structured academic programmes addressed at particular community needs (service learning programmes).

Internationally and nationally, the related concepts of “service learning”, “service-learning”, “community service learning” and “academic service learning” are increasingly being used to denote the integration of community service/engagement with teaching and learning, within the new paradigm of collaborative, participatory knowledge generation that is presently required of HE institutions. Most contributions to this volume bear testimony to such a paradigm shift within the South African academic environment. As early as 1997 the Education White Paper 3 specifically mentioned community service programmes as a means towards achieving the following two principles for incorporating social responsibility within the HE sector (DoE 1997):

- On the national level, the aim is to cultivate a sense of civic responsibility in students: “To promote and develop social responsibility and awareness amongst students of the role of higher education in social and economic development through community service programmes” — 1.27(8).
- At institutional level, the social responsibility of institutions of higher education is at stake: “To demonstrate social responsibility of institutions and their commitment to the common good by making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes” — 1.28(5).

These two principles capture the dual nature of what the integration of community service with scholarly work in South Africa sets out to achieve. Nationally, it serves as a pedagogical tool to develop a better understanding amongst students of how their academic work is linked with social and economic development in the country, while institutions of HE are simultaneously afforded the opportunity to uti-

lise their (academic) expertise to demonstrate their commitment to “the common good”. Proceeding from this dual purpose attributed to a type of community service that is integrated into academia, the SA agenda for the transformation of HE rests on the three pillars that have been mentioned above as the broadening of participation; responsiveness to local challenges and concerns, and the formation of collaborative partnerships that have a direct bearing on the production and application of knowledge in society. A profound paradigm shift is necessitated by this definite move away from the hegemonic position of “expert” knowledge and elite systems of the privileged classes towards more inclusive, open and responsive systems of knowledge production in the higher education and training sector (cf Kraak 2000: 8-12). Kraak (2000: 9) contends that the transformation of the research function is perhaps the most fundamental transition in HE yet, with the emergence of Mode 2 (problem-solving) forms of knowledge production

... which involve many more players than university intellectuals, and which are trans-disciplinary and accountable to larger social and economic needs than is currently the case.

For the purposes of this issue of *Acta Academica Supplementum*, the focus is on (community) SL as a means to open up HE to such heterogeneous, responsive, and participatory forms of inquiry. The twofold premise is that SL as a pedagogy is advanced through its integration with scholarly inquiry, and that both disciplinary knowledge production and the broader South African research agenda can be advanced through the philosophy, values, and practice of SL. The aim is to place the contributions to this volume within the framework of this multi-faceted enterprise and to suggest some specifically South African parameters and topics for further inquiry.

1. Defining the concept of community service learning for the South African context

The national Community-Higher Education-Service Partnerships (CHESP) programme² that is referred to in several of the contributions to this

- 2 An initiative of the Joint Education Trust since 1998, in partnership with the Ford and Kellogg Foundations, the aim being “to contribute to the reconstruction and development of South African civil society through the development

volume, has been promoting SL as a mechanism for integrating scholarly community service (a scholarship of engagement) into the academic curriculum. In a draft policy framework (Dept of Education 2002: 5) for Community Service in HE, it is stated that community SL emerged as one of three broad categories of community service in HE.³ The Community Service Learning Focus is further described as

Meaningful community service that is linked to students' academic experience through related course materials and reflective activities. The primary focus is on integrating student learning and community development. There is recognition of the notion that learning can be enhanced by community involvement, i.e. that communities provide opportunities and experiences which enhance learning.

In view of the fact that the context of a “developing” country adds to sensitivities in respect of underlying power issues and contradictions, especially regarding concepts that include the term “community”, the following extended definition of (community) SL is offered for the purposes of the argumentation in this contribution. This comprehensive, contextualised working definition has evolved over a period of four years at the University of the Free State and contains elements of various definitions available in the literature. The duality in the nature of research about/through SL is reflected in the two sections of the definition:

SL as a teaching methodology (pedagogy) can be defined as follows:

- SL is a course-based,⁴ credit-bearing (academic/scholarly) educational experience, based on well-structured, organised service activities, aimed at meeting both service needs identified by a local community and specific, matching learning needs of students.

and promotion of socially responsive ‘models’ for higher education. Central to these ‘models’ is the development of *partnerships between communities, higher education institutions, and the public, private, and NGO sectors* [my emphasis, MAE]. The purposes of these partnerships are: community empowerment and development; transformation of the higher education system in relation to community needs; and enhancing service delivery to previously underserved communities” (Lazarus 2001).

3 The other two being those categories with a community service focus (terms used: volunteerism; national community service) and with a learning focus (terms used: internships, field education; experiential learning).

4 Please note that the well-known term “course” should preferably be substituted with “module” within the framework of outcomes-based education, which is currently the norm within most South African HE institutions.

- SL is a particular type of action learning within the field of experiential education, which incorporates community service, seeking a balance between student learning and service to the community.
- SL involves both community-oriented and community-based education (COE and CBE), and incorporates academic learning, as well as reflection on the service activity in order to gain further understanding of curriculum content and inter-disciplinary linkages.
- SL requires appropriate formative and summative assessment and joint, collaborative quality assurance involving all the partners.
- It contributes to the student's understanding of community life and challenges; and in addition fosters a sense of civic responsibility among all the parties involved (students, academic staff and external partners).

SL as a philosophical and epistemological notion entails the following:

- The joint and mutual acquisition of competencies/abilities (knowledge, skills and attitudes) within a collaborative, triad partnership consisting of an HE institution, the service sector and local communities.
- Reciprocal teaching and learning among all members of the partnership (academic staff and students, members of communities and representatives of the service sector).
- Open, inclusive systems of knowledge generation in an application context (Mode 2, problem-solving knowledge production).
- Collaborative, participatory, and democratic processes in a partnership context.
- The inclusion of local and indigenous knowledge of communities, as well as prior and experiential knowledge of all the participants involved.

In the above-mentioned Council on Higher Education's document *Criteria for Institutional Audits* (HEQC 2004), community engagement is proposed as one of the sub-areas for inclusion in the quality assurance mechanisms of HE institutions, creating the impression that it is seriously regarded as an apt mechanism for strengthening the social commitment and civic responsibility of HE institutions. However, since the Ministry of Education's new funding framework for public higher

education institutions of February 2004 does not reflect this special emphasis on community engagement,⁵ one is left with the impression that the Department of Education (or rather the CHE) is currently not putting its money where its mouth is.

Since there is no direct monetary assistance for engaging in the community service programmes required by the Department of Education it is of paramount importance that innovative ways of advancing community SL as a worthwhile scholarly activity should be pursued. The argument put forward in this article is that the link between SL and research should be strengthened by advancing SL through research and by advancing the national research agenda through SL. The following quotation from Fourie (2003: 5) underscores the value of the integration of SL and research:

This [integrated] approach to community service is so powerful because it recognises and builds upon what is most distinctive about universities: scholarship and critical inquiry, where knowledge and truth and insight and understanding are pursued — without fear or favour — not for gain or foreseeable tangible reward [...] but because it is our task.

2. The integration of research and service learning: a proposed South African paradigm shift

For the South African context, where the concept of SL has been introduced fairly recently, mapping the various ways in which community engagement, SL and research can be linked and integrated is important in establishing how they will develop in the future. Bringle & Hatcher (in this volume) provide a comprehensive and informative discussion on what the systematic study of the nature of SL entails; the SL areas in which most research has been conducted (with regard to student outcomes) thus far; how research on SL should ideally be conducted; and what the role of theory is or should be in such research. The level of attention through scholarly inquiry that SL as a pedagogy has been receiving in the USA is considerable. The other contributions to this volume

5 Whereas the previous draft funding framework still indicated community service as a category for funding, this one provides only for teaching (both contact and distance) and research.

also bear testimony to this trend to study and conduct research on SL and civic (or “community”) engagement as a scholarly endeavour. However, strengthening the linkage between SL and the broader national research agenda (as discussed later in this article) could lead to even greater acceptance of SL as a worthwhile scholarly endeavour in the South African context.

In an article that deals precisely with this challenge, Furco (2001) proposes three strategies for advancing and institutionalising SL at research universities in the USA. These strategies focus on how SL can serve the research agendas of academic staff (“faculty” in the USA idiom), the disciplines, and institutional missions. This shift of emphasis away from SL as a pedagogy provides an opportunity for broader integration and application that can be adapted fruitfully to suit the South African HE transformation agenda.

Furco’s (2001: 70) first contention is that academic staff should be convinced that SL is not only about teaching (a pedagogy), but that it also involves “the theoretical and practical exploration and investigation of social issues through a particular disciplinary lens”. Consequently academic staff from all the disciplines are encouraged to find ways to align their research interests and disciplinary (including inter- or trans-disciplinary) specialisation with a pertinent aspect of the social issue that is being addressed by students in the SL course. Advancing their own research agendas through such a link with SL, in ways that would allow them to increase their research output and to qualify for new categories of research grants favouring responsiveness and relevance, is bound to promote greater support among academic staff from across the disciplines. The second strategy neatly ties in with the first, namely that SL should be made a central part of the academic work of the disciplines and can be promoted as such on campus. Furco’s (2001: 76) analysis is pertinent to both the US and South African contexts:

The more that service-learning can be tied to the disciplinary work of faculty [members], the more likely it is that [they] will consider it an important and legitimate part of their work.

The third strategy that Furco proposes for advancing SL at research universities is to reaffirm the mission of the HE institution to finally “shed the ivory tower image through the development of campus-community partnerships in which faculty [members] can explore a scho-

larship of engagement”, and to encourage forming intellectual cross-disciplinary learning communities. According to Furco (2001: 74) many of these HE reform initiatives of the past decade in the USA are closely aligned with the philosophy, goals and pedagogy of SL, allowing for campus-community collaborations to become an inherent part of the very fabric of the institution. In South Africa the potential role of SL as a vehicle or mechanism for institutional reform should be explored more fully; it should take up its rightful place as a transformational force within the South African HE agenda, leading inevitably towards the legitimisation of applied, socially relevant research, teaching and service. In this regard Lazarus (2001: 5) states that recognition on an epistemological level is required; the question, then, is:

Does the institution perceive, value, encourage and support knowledge gained through experience of community service as an academically credible method of creating meaning and understanding?

In this regard it should be noted that symbolic acts, such as including community service in a mission statement alone, are not enough to bring about such a paradigm shift; HE institutions should not be seen as paying lip-service to a noble idea, without creating institutional mechanisms for implementation, with timeframes attached to the implementation goals.⁶

In comparison to what would be required in the USA, a pronounced commitment to opening systems of knowledge generation in order to include democratic participation is probably more needed in the South African context. Issues such as reciprocity and recognition in the sharing of knowledge, unequal power-relations, as well as other “terms of engagement” (Bringle & Hatcher 2002) have to be negotiated and more comprehensively spelled out in a country that is alleged to have a 42% unemployment rate and where more than half of the population is believed to live under the (international) poverty-line. Consequently, the role of the service sector, ranging from government departments to non-governmental organisations, in the SL and research partnership becomes crucially important for the purpose of conveying the expectations re-

6 The UFS (2002a) Community Service policy document, which includes objectives for implementation, constitutes an effort to take a mission statement to its full consequences.

garding comprehensive service-delivery to the sector whose key responsibility it is to deliver these services and to drive development initiatives (cf the article by Botes & Marais in this volume).

When conducting research by exploring the more open, non-elitist framework that SL offers, it is of paramount importance that researchers heed the plea of Bringle & Hatcher (in this volume) to observe and interrogate their theoretical positioning — including the paradigm and dimensions of the process of inquiry. Owing to the collaborative, participatory nature of SL, research paradigms that allow for a plurality of perspectives, positions and contributions to be accommodated (phenomenological, critical, post-modern) would be more appropriate for those components of the research that require or allow joint, mutual, reciprocal knowledge production to take place. However, there will be room for all the epistemological (valid knowledge is also generated in more open systems), ontological (a focus on the nature of being, which in this case is viewed through a variety of disciplinary lenses) and methodological (systematic inquiry based on different paradigms) approaches that are appropriate and useful within and across the disciplines. Fostering a sense of social responsibility is central to the concept of SL so that the sociological dimension to this type of learning and research should never be overlooked.

As far as the social dimension of research through SL is concerned, the following are paradigms and theories that would allow for the opening up of the elitist, “ivory tower” elements in the HE system. They are phenomenological, interpretative paradigms, which regard people as actors in the social world, constructing concepts in order to make sense of their life-worlds and to promote self-understanding. In addition, heuristic inquiry (cf Moustakas 1990; Patton 2002) and other constructivist approaches such as grounded theory (cf O’Brien in this volume) are founded in epistemological assumptions that are ideal for this purpose. Research paradigms that encourage the kind of critical analysis of the social world, that accepts the link between inquiry and power as a given (critical feminism and Marxist theories), are also useful, as is post-modernism with its celebration of difference and plurality and its rejection of the hegemonic “truth” claims of “scientific” meta-narratives. Babbie & Mouton (2001: 645) contend that post-modern social theory

[...] supports the search for concrete, context-specific, and historically situated narratives that are not divorced from the social and political interest of concrete people.

Research linked to SL programmes would benefit from such assumptions, especially in the South African context where, to borrow from the emotive Marxist idiom, our apartheid (and colonial) history still hurts.

The definitive link with action learning that characterises the pedagogy of SL allows for action research methodologies to emerge in the quest to accommodate multiple ways of knowing. The working definition of action research offered by Reason & Bradbury (2001: 2) illustrates just how well it resonates with the philosophical paradigm and practice of SL:

[...] action research is a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. 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.

Participatory action research (PAR), with its even more pronounced commitment to the ideal of non-hegemonic knowledge production than that which is described in the above definition, also provides a meaningful framework for collaboration between research team members, including students, and those outside the academy (cf Strand *et al* 2003). This broad category of research methodologies is defined by Pimbert & Wakeford (2003: 187) as “the evolving forms of *emancipatory* and *accountable* co-inquiry, generally grouped under the label ‘participatory action research’” [my emphasis, MAE]. The natural affinity between SL and PAR (cf Erasmus 2003), with the latter including both action learning and action research, is illustrated by their common features, including the fact that they promote inclusive, collaborative learning and inquiry; reciprocity between theory and practice; the fundamental premise that community members possess and can generate valid knowledge about the social systems in which they participate and that they should be full partners in defining, investigating and acting to meet the relevant challenges, and reflection on service experiences and the actions for bringing about social change.

Bearing in mind that the integration of SL and research in South Africa might require a more concerted effort to bring about the above paradigm shift, the national research priorities and how they relate to the contributions in this volume will be discussed next.

3. The current national research priorities and South African service learning research

Ways in which knowledge production and national goals can be aligned through SL research are evident when recent policy documents such as the CHE's Criteria for Institutional Audits (HEQC 2004) and especially the National Research Foundation's Focus Area Programme (NRF 2004) are studied. With reference to quality arrangements for research, the CHE document reaffirms the strong emphasis of the White Paper 3 (DoE 1997) and the National Plan for Higher Education (DoE 2001) on the need to develop research capacity and to increase research participation in order "to ensure both open-ended intellectual inquiry and the application of research activities to social development". Criterion 16 (HEQC 2004: par 2.2.2.2) requires, *inter alia*, that development opportunities should be supported and that incentives should be available to new researchers at all levels of research activities for collaborative and problem-solving research, in particular at the local/regional and national levels.

Through its Research and Innovation Support Agency (RISA), the National Research Foundation (NRF) has identified a portfolio of focus areas that collectively provide a broad framework for researchers across the spectrum of disciplines (the natural, social and human sciences, engineering and technology) to pursue their research interests while taking into account the global or macro-environment as well as relevant national, regional and local developments. Hence, the following nine focus areas for research are offered by the NRF (2004) as part of its strategy for supporting and promoting research:

- Challenges of globalisation: perspectives from the global south
- Conservation and management of ecosystems and biodiversity
- Distinct South African research opportunities
- Economic growth and international competitiveness
- Education and the challenges for change

- Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS)
- Information and communication technology (ICT) and the information society in South Africa
- Sustainable livelihoods: the eradication of poverty
- Unlocking the future: advancing and strengthening strategic knowledge (open category).

The framework provided by these focus areas may indeed be regarded as a broad set of guidelines for the South African research agenda. An endeavour to establish the extent to which current research on and through SL addresses issues that fall within these areas should be valuable for purposes of determining where the most pressing research gaps are. The following brief discussion of the contributions to this volume will indicate where links with the NRF research focus areas are evident and some conclusions will be drawn for the purposes of defining the relevant parameters, as well as some topics for future inquiry.

The three contributing authors from the USA, Bringle, Hatcher and Uphoff, could almost be regarded as scholars writing from an “insider” perspective, since they have all shown intense involvement and commitment with regard to the South African context for the development of SL and civic/community engagement over a period of time. The exceptional contribution that Bringle and Hatcher have made to the development of a scholarship of engagement in South Africa is once again evident from their article, in which they make suggestions, based on their own rich experience in the USA, of how SL could serve as a source of research and scholarship in the South African context with its unique challenges and opportunities, given Government’s transformation goals for the HE sector. These authors indicate how these goals resonate with Ernest Boyer’s (1996) vision for engaged campuses that had such a profound influence on HE in the USA. They propose several avenues that can be followed for research and scholarship, in order to serve the development of both the pedagogy of SL and to strengthen HE’s commitment to civic engagement in South Africa.

Uphoff also refers to Boyer’s contribution to changing HE perspectives in the USA, invoking his vision of the four functions of knowledge: discovery (analysis), integration (synthesis), application and dissemination. On the basis of first-hand experience in rural development, Uphoff contends that utility should be regarded as a true value within

the dynamic relationship between research and practice; and that both the generation and the application of knowledge should be valued, especially in contexts where the collective need for change overshadows sectional or partisan interests. He supports the utilisation of PAR for its meaningful integration of rural development research and community service, and he provides examples of how universities move beyond “extension” programmes to the collaborative forms of knowledge generation.

O’Brien grounds SL, with its distinct USA origins, in the South African context, proposing that the constructivist paradigm, and grounded theory in particular, should be considered as a way towards achieving this ideal. Her analysis of research on SL, with particular reference to qualitative methods, extant literature (including research literature) on SL, and deficiencies in the South African knowledge base, provides a preliminary point of departure from which the uniquely South African features of SL can be addressed. Extending O’Brien’s suggestions for research on SL to include the grounding of disciplinary and inter-disciplinary work through SL in the South African context, as proposed in the present introductory article, seems an almost inevitable next step in the quest for more inclusive, open systems of knowledge generation.

Most of the other contributions to this volume are affiliated with the CHESP initiative mentioned above. The article by Mouton & Wildschut, which is based on an evaluation study of the CHESP programme (cf footnote 2) that was commissioned by JET Education Services, covers a number of CHESP SL programmes offered during 2001 and 2002 at five HE institutions in South Africa. Their valuable comparative analysis illustrates how these institutions grappled with issues of conceptualisation, implementation and the achievement of sufficient institution-alisation of SL to create an enabling environment for sustaining it. Responding to the possibility that the activities required by the monitoring and evaluation programme of the CHESP initiative could wrongly be considered to refer to true research into SL, Lategan draws a distinction between research and monitoring and evaluation of SL — a distinction which, in his view, has not been set out with sufficient clarity in the objectives and approach of the CHESP programme. He distinguishes between these two approaches to collecting information about SL modules and programmes by drawing on notions from the philosophy of science.

The article by Mitchell *et al* focuses on research undertaken to promote and assess the institutionalisation of SL at the HE institution that was formerly the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) during a five-year period. Different assessment procedures were used, including the CHESP/MERP activities, the results of which could all serve as a basis for strategic planning at the institution, even if that had to be put on hold as a result of the merging of HE institutions in the region. Their conclusion is that institutional and national policy processes should, in any case, not be allowed to overshadow practitioner-driven SL networks since much of the strength of SL lies in sustaining a bottom-up approach in the academy.

In their contribution Seale, Wilkinson & Erasmus introduce a step-up action research model that was developed for the continuous improvement and revitalisation of two SL modules for first-year nursing students at the University of the Free State. In terms of the focus of this volume it is noteworthy that more effective integration of learning, research and service has been achieved by placing the curriculum-based community development project undertaken by the students within the modules into a (quantitative) research-based framework. During this development project students assess and diagnose the needs of a community and also address some of the identified issues in collaboration with representatives of the community. An action research approach has been found particularly useful for the ongoing process of module revitalisation in which the focus is on balancing the development challenges of the communities with whom the nursing students interact, on the one hand, with the need of the School of Nursing to enhance, extend and enrich the learning experience of its students, on the other.

Botes & Marais conclude the volume with another sound warning regarding the roles of the various partners involved in community service projects, imploring HE institutions not to overstep the limits by venturing into the territory of service and development agencies. Carefully negotiating the terms of engagement with especially service sector partners is proposed, with emphasis on the possibility of entering into research partnerships with them, also introducing research that is specifically aimed at informing policy. Thus the authors contribute to the debate of whether or not the university should enter into the partnership as expert or, as participant in an equitable, reciprocal process.

From the above discussion it is obvious that the focus area (NRF 2004) into which most of the above articles fall, is the one referred to as “Education and the challenges for change”. However, some of these articles also illustrate ways in which SL can contribute to communities, already touching on a broader research agenda that remain wide open for purposes of further inquiry through SL programmes in the South African context.

Within the national CHESP programme of the JET Education Services, a number of SL related research themes for which funding could be obtained were identified during 2003 (cf CHESP website). All but one of these themes had SL *per se* as its main focus, ranging from its institutionalisation, accreditation and implementation, to the roles of the various partners, student assessment, cost-implications, and benefits. The last theme in the list alludes to the broader implications that the integration of SL and research could have within the context of knowledge production that would be responsive to national research priorities. The research question of this last theme is: “How can service-learning contribute to knowledge production?” The contributions in this volume, when viewed against the research agenda set by the CHESP/JET programme, demonstrates that more attention was focused mainly on the SL as pedagogy, outcomes for participants (particularly students), and other pertinent aspects of this relatively new “animal” in the HE *kraal* (in our colourful South African idiom).

Each of the articles of South African origin in this volume does indeed represent a significant contribution to the very limited body of published research outputs in the field of SL in South Africa. However, both the NRF and CHESP research agenda illustrate that the scope of possibilities for linking SL and research is so much wider than the areas that have been investigated in South Africa thus far, and that there is a dire need to move from mainly focusing on what SL as a pedagogy entails, to exploring the disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives that are opened up through this way of actively engaging with the world.

4. Proposed parameters and some topics for further research

The scope for enquiry in the field of SL is especially exciting in view of the fact that so little material relevant to the South African situation itself has been published. Even more exciting are the multiple possibilities posed by the integration of research on SL and research through SL in South Africa. Both academic staff and students have the opportunity to engage in this kind of research in collaboration with partners such as the public and private sectors, government organisations and NGOs, as well as a multiplicity of different communities with varying needs. The collaborative efforts in designing and implementing actions for social change by these parties certainly can have far-reaching consequences also for research.

4.1 Advancing the pedagogy of service learning through scholarly inquiry

As far as research directed at the pedagogy of SL is concerned, the following themes should be considered in subsequent South African research:

- Impact studies to establish the longer-term outcomes of HE institutions' attempts at demonstrating their social responsibility through SL and other forms of community engagement on institutions, service sector, communities, and residents.
- Investigations into the influence of SL on student retention, especially in the light of the new funding regime for HE, requiring throughput as a prerequisite for payment of subsidy funds.
- Programme evaluation studies determining whether SL has an impact on success in finding employment.
- Longitudinal studies in respect of the eventual performance in the workplace and demonstration of social responsibility of such students.
- Conceptual and applied studies of how SL relates to and compares with similar pedagogies such as outcomes-based, community-based and community-oriented education.
- Inquiries into the impact of community engagement through SL on attitudes towards issues pertaining to social responsibility of academic staff members, who are the key initiators and drivers of SL and research initiatives.

- More studies to delineate the roles, responsibilities and expectations of HE institutions in relation to and compared with those of external partners in the SL endeavour.
- More research on appropriate ways of assessing student learning in SL settings, involving external partners in the process (a South African example is the study by Beylefeld *et al* 2003).
- Critical studies of ethical issues pertaining to the practice of SL in the South African context — could SL be regarded as just another form of exploitation and further reification of unequal power relations; the continued entrenchment of the dominance of HE institutions as “superior” generators of “elite” knowledge?

In addition to the above, as has been stated before, South African scholars of engagement might need to place more emphasis on SL as an epistemological approach providing excellent opportunities for allowing the broader South African society to contribute to and benefit from knowledge production.

4.2 Advancing the national research agenda in and across the disciplines through service learning

In the future, SL should also be increasingly utilised as a mechanism for investigating pertinent social issues through particular disciplinary lenses. As a result of the complexity of social challenges, such investigations inevitably lead to multi-, inter- and cross-disciplinary collaboration within teams of researchers. SL often serves as the common ground for initial collaborations in HE. There seems to be almost limitless scope for disciplinary and interdisciplinary research. However, the existing gap between, on the one hand, social sciences and the humanities and, on the other, the natural and economic sciences must be bridged. While there is generally an affinity between the former group and socially-based concepts such as SL, the latter group is often reluctant to engage in the discourse surrounding SL.

Multi-, inter- and trans-disciplinary research is necessitated, *inter alia* by the socio-political issues that provide the context for SL in South Africa. It is significant that the NRF (2004: 1-2) document sets the following requirement in this regard:

Research conducted in all the focus areas should —
Strengthen disciplines while at the same time stimulating multi-,
inter- and trans-disciplinary work.

A more comprehensive research agenda for SL in South Africa should focus increasingly on themes that are aligned with the NRF focus areas, continuously interrogating whether there is true reciprocity and collaborative knowledge-creation among the partners/participants in the SL triad (academics, service providers, residents). In this way SL becomes a vehicle for the capturing, inclusion and proper recognition of IKS and other forms of local knowledge. The following conclusion from Fourie (2003: 37) illustrates that current approaches to SL often seem to predispose academic staff and students to lack a regard for the community as a source of learning in order to contribute to their own development:

There is a lack of interrogation and utilisation of local epistemologies and cosmologies in order to move to a true process of sustainable development.

The challenge that faces HE is to create an enabling environment that makes it possible for researchers from all the disciplines to utilise community engagement as a mechanism to open up the system of knowledge generation and application, and to address issues of social responsibility through the lenses of their disciplines (cf Billig & Furco 2002; Battistoni 2001). In addition to this, the NRF document requires that research should be “designed to impart skills and encourage students into research”. Example of this are the methods-based approach to SL (cf Collier & Morgan 2002) and community-based research approaches (cf Marsteller Kowalewski 2004) in which research methodologies are used as tools for facilitating SL that is aligned with the specific research interests of the academic staff member.

5. Concluding remarks

The contents of this volume establish that there are many exciting, challenging topics to be investigated in the development of SL as a mechanism for transformation in South African HE. In addition to enhancing the relevance of HE institutions’ teaching and research activities through the integration of their community service initiatives

within the paradigm of a scholarship of engagement, SL may assist institutions in bridging the ever-increasing gap between the forces of mega-development and the concrete challenges of the local and regional communities that they serve. The distinct and considerable role of HE institutions in the emergence of the global knowledge society is infused with possibilities, as Bawa (2003: 50) contends, to explore alternative, innovative knowledge flows in order to enable the political empowerment of communities “to foster their entry into the knowledge era on their own terms, as knowledge producers and users”.

A noteworthy aspect of SL as a mechanism to include more co-inquirers in the research process, is the opportunity that it provides for the development of research capacity, “especially among young researchers, black researchers and women researchers”, as suggested in the NRF document. This paradigm shift in HE towards more open, democratic systems of knowledge production and dissemination in South Africa requires a cadre of courageous scholars with a firm commitment to the common good, who are not afraid “either to leave the comfort zones of their laboratory or lecture room, or to give up the hegemonic position of scientific knowledge” (Erasmus & Jaftha 2002). The articles in this volume reflect this commitment and reinforce the expectation that SL and community engagement will continue to grow in South Africa in ways that contribute to more democratic institutions, including institutions of HE.

The full integration of community SL with research will increasingly provide forms of legitimisation for negotiating and eventually permeating the boundaries between “sacred” and “profane” knowledge (McMillan 2002). Marginalised voices can be heard if they are respectfully observed and given due recognition through ethically sound research practices. Reason & Bradbury (2001: 15) made the following thought-provoking statement in this regard:

Given the condition of our times, a primary purpose of human inquiry is not so much to search for truth but to heal, and above all to heal the alienation, the split that characterizes modern experience.

This is clearly relevant to the South African HE context — now as much as ever before. Community SL has much to offer as a response to this appeal.

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