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## Grounding service learning in South Africa

In response to the multiple and often contradictory demands on higher education, increased attention is being given to service learning (SL) in South Africa. This article reviews the debate regarding the desirability of theory for SL and considers the need for locally-grounded theory. Grounded theory is advocated as a research method which appears well-suited to the diversity which characterises SL. Based upon a constructivist paradigm of knowledge creation and employing primarily qualitative methodologies, grounded theory comprises concepts, categories and propositions which emerge from, and are verified through the experiences of the multiple stakeholders in SL. Although analysis is not structured by existing theoretical frameworks, a preliminary literature review is recommended to locate potentially relevant literature and to sensitise the researcher to themes which may surface in the study. The article concludes with such a review of the sources and nature of the literature and research, particularly that emanating from the South African higher education sector.

### Die fundering van diensleer in Suid-Afrika

In antwoord op die veelvuldige en dikwels teenstrydige eise wat aan hoër onderwys gestel word, neem die aandag toe wat aan diensleer in Suid-Afrika verleen word. Die artikel neem die debat rakende die gewensheid van teorie vir diensleer in oënskou en ondersoek die behoefte aan 'n teorie wat in die plaaslike werklikheid gefundeer is. "Gefundeerde teorie" word in hierdie verband aanbeveel as 'n navorsingsmetode wat op die oog af gepas is vir die diversiteit wat diensleer kenmerk. Hierdie teorie is gebaseer op 'n konstruktivistiese paradigma vir die skep van kennis en maak hoofsaaklik gebruik van kwalitatiewe metodologieë; dit bestaan dus uit konsepte, kategorieë en stellings wat voortspruit uit en geverifieer word deur die ervaringe van die veelvuldige belanghebbendes in diensleer. Alhoewel die analise nie deur bestaande teoretiese raamwerke gestruktureer word nie, word 'n voorlopige literatuuroorsig aanbeveel om potensieel relevante literatuur op te spoor en die navorser bedag te maak op temas wat in die studie na vore mag kom. Die artikel word afgesluit met sodanige oorsig van die bronne en aard van literatuur en navorsing, spesifiek dié afkomstig uit die Suid-Afrikaanse hoëronderwyssektor.

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Institutions of higher education worldwide are facing demands for increased social engagement, accountability, relevant knowledge and the education of ethical, competent leaders and citizens. Concurrent with these demands, international trends in higher education emphasise the need for creative teaching and learning; the recognition of different sources of knowledge and diverse styles of learning, as well as integrated, outcomes-based assessment. In addition to these demands and international trends, local higher education institutions are having to legitimise themselves in the new democracy, to respond to the effects of globalisation and to realign their relationships with their communities. These imperatives have led "engagement" to become central to such institutions' definitions of themselves.

The latest higher education policy requires them to promote "social responsibility and awareness amongst students of the role of higher education in social and economic development through community service programmes" (Dept of Education 1997: 1). SL is increasingly being seen not only as a way in which to fulfil State policy directives, but as one strategy by means of which higher education institutions can implement their own mission statements concerning service and development, and attempt to integrate these ideals with their teaching and research priorities.

SL thus offers great hope for addressing current challenges and is enthusiastically endorsed by many involved in its application. It is, however, also bedevilled by confusion and skepticism. While its broad aims and rationale garner wide appeal, its application and outcomes raise heated debate and serious concerns. Some years ago, Subotzky (1998) noted that, in spite of the confusion and debates, there was a steady, if relatively low-key push from South African education, authorities and youth consortia for its implementation. That push appears to be gaining momentum in the new millennium. SL is now being chosen more often as a pedagogy in disciplines which did not traditionally employ it, such as commerce (Ford 2001); psychology, drama and isiZulu (Bruzas & O'Brien 2001); education (Castle & Osmond 2003); engineering (University of Pretoria 2004), and urban planning (University of the Witwatersrand 2000-2004). One-third of lecturers who responded to questionnaires after their first year of participation in a programme of community/higher education, service partnerships (CHESP) had used

SL for the first time that year, 2001 (Evaluation Research Agency 2002b). Its use in local research-focused endeavours is becoming apparent (University of the Witwatersrand 2000-2004a; Erasmus 2003). It is mentioned, too, in policy statements (for instance the HIV/AIDS policy of the University of the Witwatersrand), disciplinary publications and local conference presentations (for instance Hlungwani 2002; Naudé 2003). In addition, it has become the subject of specific policies and strategies in local higher education institutions, examples being the establishment of supportive structures such as the Office of Community University Partnerships (University of the Witwatersrand 2000-2004b). And, in a step which promises to have a very significant impact, it has been included as one of three State-prescribed criteria for adjudging quality in South African academic programmes (Council on Higher Education 2004).

The increased attention being given to SL in our current context of multiple, diverse demands on South African higher education has brought the issue of theory for SL to the fore. In this article, the desirability of theory for SL (and, in particular, theory specific to local use) will be considered. Thereafter, a research strategy for developing such theory will be advocated. In line with the proposed methodology, the article will conclude with an overview of relevant literature and research, with particular reference to SL in the South African higher education sector.

## 1. A theory for SL?

A number of questions arise in relation to theory for SL. Is it wanted or needed? If so, by whom and under what conditions? Does its focus warrant the development of a theoretical framework?

The development of theory has traditionally been esteemed in academia as a way of systematically organising knowledge (Jacobs & Cleveland 1999) so that, depending on its level of abstraction and complexity, it may be used to describe, explain, predict, and control phenomena and processes. The universality implied by generalisable principles for knowledge, policy and practice theory has been challenged, however, in post-modern discourse, which has, in addition, posited that theory has created a gap between those who “know” and those who “practice”. While the former now face more critical questioning than

previously, the latter's knowledge still tends to be devalued, with a consequent reduction in their power and status. Postmodernist thinking begs the questions of "what constitutes legitimate [...] knowledge or theory, how is it best generated, and by whom?" (Fook 2002: 82).

Similar critical reflection is evident in the debates around the development of theory specific to SL. It is not that SL lacks any theoretical foundation. As an approach to education, it is coherent with, if not the direct focus of, Dewey's philosophy of education for democracy (Hatcher 1997) and Boyer's "scholarship of engagement" (Boyer 1990). As a pedagogy, it rests on theories of experiential learning (Kolb 1984). However, while such philosophies and frameworks offer ample ideological and pedagogical justification for SL, there appears to be a dearth of frameworks which take into account those aspects of SL which distinguish it from experiential learning and from the non-academic engagement of the higher education sector with local communities.

Some philosophers (for instance, Liu 1995; Richman 1996) have insisted that SL must be epistemologically grounded — that is, there must be a common understanding of what constitutes knowledge and how it is acquired:

the best defense of a pedagogy is also a defense of the account of knowledge and learning on which it is based. Only when such a defense is available will a pedagogy be able to sustain legitimacy in the academy (Richman 1996: 5).

Tucker (1999: 5), however, disputed the need for epistemological support for SL. He maintained that epistemology would not help us justify the pedagogy within our institutions, because, in reality, support is given to what works rather than pedagogies with sound epistemological grounding. He was sceptical that it would significantly influence our choices and activities, quoting numerous examples of behaviours and activities deviating from what we teach and profess to value. Neither, Tucker (1999: 8) maintained, would it promote the diversity or creativity inherent in the pedagogy. As each epistemology is but only a partial picture of a larger whole, if we waited until the whole was known, we would be paralysed in responding to urgent needs. He promoted, instead, a "robust version of pragmatism" not as a way of understanding the nature of knowledge, but as an encouragement to practitioners to commit

to disciplinary diversity and to new, creative ways of knowing, doing and thinking.

Academics at the coal-face of SL have also expressed concern that theory would just over-intellectualise SL which is all about action and pragmatism, although such theory is believed necessary to legitimise its use in academia, a case of justifying one's actions in the discourse of the institution (Wenger 1998). There are, however, more fundamental reasons for developing theory than just to gain the approval of specific audiences, important as this may be. One of these relates to the utility of theory *per se*. Theory plays an important role in "creating a world we can understand" (Eisner 1985: 29), thereby promoting more effective action and more robust learning. Human beings continuously, if unconsciously, develop theories in their everyday lives, needing to package a flood of external and sensory information in order to assimilate it. In more structured situations, theoretical frameworks allow activities, ideas and decisions to be interrogated, thereby increasing both awareness and competence. Beyond knowledge and skills, however, lies the important dimension of ethics — that arena in which choices are made, based not only on what can be done with given knowledge and skills, but what should be done (Bawden 1999; Palmer 1997). Theories assist in the critical re-examination of activities. Such review reflects the assumption of at least some responsibility for the outcomes of the application of our knowledge, and a willingness to change.

A number of theories of SL have been developed by, among others, Furco (1996), Kahne & Westheimer (1996) and Zlotkowski (1999). However, the discourse and existing theories of SL have been imported from the USA. While there are many similarities between educational institutions in different countries, there are, too, some important differences in their environments and constituents. Comparing transformation in higher education in the USA and South Africa, Eckel (2001) identified specific commonalities such as the need to respond to societal demands and to new economies, the need to diversify income sources, to balance quality and costs and to cope with globalisation. There were, however, a number of significant differences, including national mandates, the availability of resources, different reactions to the concept of "transformation", and decision-making processes, which impacted on the goals, strategies and priorities of institutions in the different coun-

tries. An obvious difference between the local context and what may be considered the home of SL is in the range and amount of financial support for SL. American SL programmes have a large number of potential sources of support in comparison with the few available to South African initiatives.

One of the most important differences in relation to SL between the institutions in each country, lies in their understandings of two concepts commonly used in SL discourse, namely, community and sustainability. Written accounts and personal experience of SL practice in the USA and in South Africa have revealed that, in the American context, community is often synonymous with organisations and institutions which provide non-profit services to that country's citizens/consumers. In South Africa, there appears to be a sharper differentiation between those who receive or are entitled to services and those who supply them, possibly reflecting a greater sensitivity to the different seats of decision-making or power between communities and service providers. Likewise, American SL practitioners appear to understand sustainability to be the capacity of the higher education institution to continue placing students in community-based organisations. In South Africa, however, sustainability is seen as the ability of communities to maintain initiatives without ongoing intervention by outsiders.

In South Africa, unlike in the USA, the mandate for transformation in higher education originates outside individual institutions. Following the civic responsibility commitment referred to in the introductory section of this article, the State identified SL as one of the three "core functions" of higher education institutions and set out specific indicators for the assessment of quality in SL programmes (Council on Higher Education 2003).<sup>1</sup> The re-emphasis on social responsibility by higher education in South Africa comes, however, amidst an "overabundance" of competing challenges of a greater magnitude and urgency than those encountered by American institutions (Eckel 2001). While some urgency begets energy, local SL champions have observed a "transformation fatigue" (Nuttall 2000: 4) among academics, presenting as

1 Further discussion of this function resulted in SL being subsumed into "community engagement" in a later document from the same public body with government links (Council on Higher Education 2004).

resistance to what they perceive are additional, imposed curricula requirements.

In contrast with the stability of most American institutions of higher education, the local sector may be said to be in a state of dynamic disequilibrium, a consequence of tensions between systems as they become increasingly complex. These tensions are reflected in debates on the functions of South African higher education itself, and whose agenda this sector should be following in relation to knowledge production and our goals in respect of our students. Our national policy for higher education, for example, which is reiterated in the mission statements of many local higher education institutions, demands that both local needs, or local historical inequities between sectors of South African society, and global imperatives be addressed. One of the outcomes of this tension in institutional function is difficulty in securing the most appropriate management style. While global priorities and highly specialised graduates may be commensurate with managerialism and corporatism (Ntshoe 2002), these managerial and leadership styles are not ideal for institutions focusing on the local community engagement simultaneously envisaged by our higher education policies.

Ekong & Cloete (1997) have reframed the debate in terms of whether higher education should be following the State's "developmental" path or that of the proponents of "institutional autonomy". This choice is reflected in, among other things, the value accorded to different methods of knowledge production, that is the basic/applied, or Mode 1/Mode 2 knowledge debate (Makgoba 1997; Muller & Subotzky 2002). The high value traditionally placed on pure research and disciplinary knowledge, has been challenged in recent decades by societal demands for accountability and relevance. These tensions have curricular implications with the content of academic programmes striving to produce graduates who are, at once, competitive individuals in the emerging global, market-driven environment, and critical, involved citizens, deeply conscious of local history and culture and competent to address local challenges.

The discourse on "indigenous knowledge" has contributed further to the motivation for theories of educational practice to be locally rooted. It is strongly believed that theory developed within particular contexts, institutions and countries may neither be desirable for, nor readily transferable or optimally useful to others (for example, cf Teasdale & Ma

Rhea 2000). Through colonialisation, and, more recently, through other mechanisms such as foreign aid (Brock-Utne 2000), higher education within South Africa has become dependent upon knowledge and theory generated elsewhere, predominantly in Britain, USA and Europe. Makgoba (1997: 141), the current Vice Chancellor of the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, has maintained that local “education was not inspired by its location but rather tried to change its location”. Nkrumah asserted in 1956 that “once [...] planted in the African soil [universities] must take root amidst African traditions and culture” (Makgoba 1997: 142). Le Grange (2002: 69), a South African academic, critiqued western knowledge, not for the ways in which it was formulated or for its content *per se*, but for its uncritical assumption of being a “universal truth [...] lack(ing) cultural fingerprints”, and of considering itself superior to that of any other knowledge. He cautioned, however, against the potential danger of subsuming indigenous knowledge into Western paradigms, or “archives” of ideas, texts, artifacts or classifications.

## 2. The multiple faces of SL

Living systems characterised by multiple tensions such as those discussed above, will normally strive to meet both internal imperatives and external demands in “mutually sustaining evolutionary” ways. They will, in other words, endeavour to change “situations of uncertainty [...] into opportunity” (Laszlo & Krippner 1997: 17). The higher education system in South Africa is eyeing SL as one of a number of such evolutionary strategies. It is a relatively new concept in South African higher education, and one which appears to defy simple and common understanding. Even in the USA, where it has been more widely practised for some decades, SL is open to a number of differing interpretations (Bawden 1999a), arising from its multiple goals, participants, funding and curricula characteristics.

Contributing factors to the confusion surrounding SL are its different labels and definitions. The multiplicity of labels by which it is known — such as SL, SL, community-based learning, community-based education, community service in higher education, community SL, academically based community service, problem or project-based SL, community-based research — intimate different emphases in SL (JET 2000), which make it a more complex notion to grasp than other pe-



dagogies, for example, such as “lecturing”. These various emphases are reflected in definitions of SL. Since academics are traditionally those most interested in definitions, many emphasise the pedagogical aspects of SL:

Service learning is a credit bearing, educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and 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 civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher 1995: 112).

Greater emphasis on non-academic outcomes is evident in Ira Harkavay’s description of “academically based community service”:

[...] the actual integration of research, teaching, and service, in which service is intrinsically tied to the research and teaching experience. What that also involves is the notion of not just serving and learning from the service, not just in fact engagement in which the student becomes a better citizen from learning from the experience, but actually involves trying to help solve, with communities, the structural problems which communities face. To differentiate that, it would be the difference between tutoring and trying to help change and reform a schooling system.<sup>2</sup>

SL has been recognised as both a philosophical approach to education and as a pedagogical tool (Castle & Osman 2003: 105). As an educational approach, it values scholarship, that is,

the interactive generation and transmission of knowledge by university students, staff and communities, through out-of-class learning experiences. [...] Mutually-defined, socially responsible and responsive teaching, research and service activities [...] rely on meaningful, enduring partnerships between the various stakeholders in higher education and those in private, public and civic organisations/groups. The approach recognises the multiple agendas brought by the different partners and aims to address the priorities of each while balancing the costs and benefits of participation in the partnership (University of Natal 2002: 1).

As a pedagogy, (it) comprises one of a number of learning and teaching activities within an accredited university module or a community’s educational, business, social or professional programme. It combines professional and disciplinary expertise with experience and practice by means of structured, cognitive reflection activities (University of Natal 2002: 1).

2 Personal communication, 4 July 2002.

Advocates of SL contend that it is well-placed to meet the multitude of social and educational demands on higher education because it:

- Advances a holistic approach to human development by simultaneously promoting intellectual, practical, experiential and ethical growth (Bawden 1999).
- Is underpinned by Deweyian notions of linking knowledge and experience, individuals with society, reflection with action, and democracy with community (Hatcher 1997).
- Promotes Paulo Freire's concepts of freedom from oppression, "critical consciousness", particularly in relation to power dynamics, transformation through dialogue, and the action-reflection that is "praxis" (Deans 1999).
- Appreciates the expertise of diverse people, in contexts outside mainstream academia (Plater 1999; University of Natal 2002).
- Recognises the value of diversity in providing that tension between the familiar and unfamiliar from which "deep learning" can emerge (Gibbs 1992).
- Emphasises structured, critical reflection opportunities which encourage students, and, indeed, all involved in the learning/serving experience, to "step outside dominant understanding to find new solutions" (Kahne & Westheimer 1996: 597).
- Seeks "win-win" situations by, ideally, focusing equally on communities' developmental priorities and students' learning goals. This duality differentiates SL from voluntary community service which primarily benefits communities, and from internships or fieldwork which prioritise student learning (Furco 1996), and
- Has the potential to restructure relationships characterised by unequal power, particularly those power differences between stakeholders within and outside of the academic institution, between teachers and students within an institution and between various types of hierarchically-ordered knowledge (Boyte & Kari 1999; O'Brien 1999).

Despite the above-mentioned claims, considered by Muller & Su-botzky (2001: 171) as "sometimes extravagant", there exist deep concerns about the practicality of SL, the very different guises under which

it is undertaken, its legitimacy as a method of teaching and learning, the various forms of knowledge emerging therein (McMillan 2002) and, particularly in South Africa, about its impact on the communities, off-campus organisations and higher education institutions involved in its implementation. Some of the questions which may yet be more satisfactorily addressed include:

- What is understood/meant by SL?
- How, by whom, under what conditions and with what results is it practised?
- Should SL be incorporated into higher education's academic and research programmes?
- What value can it add to all involved and at what cost to each?
- If considered appropriate in local conditions, how can it be practised to optimise its potential benefits and meet the challenges it poses?

### 3. Grounded theory for the study of SL

As SL, with its relative complexity, assumes more prominence in quality higher education programmes, more detailed answers to issues such as the above are being demanded. If, however, we are to avoid circumscribing our indigenous experience of SL through the imposition of foreign frames of understanding, we need to consider carefully the ways in which we seek these answers. A constructivist paradigm, with its unique view of knowledge and the relationship between researcher and those being "researched", appears to have the potential to prioritise local knowledge. Such a paradigm stands in contrast with a positivist paradigm which assumes an objective reality, or single truth waiting to be discovered, and posits that the researcher can remain uninvolved with the focus of the research. The "constructivist" does not perceive reality as something which already exists. Rather, it is created through our mental processes, experiences and language, and in interaction with others. As a personal and social creation, its emergence is mediated by existing power relationships as these determine who interacts and whose voices are heard. When there is some agreement, or similar understanding/construction of a phenomenon, knowledge is created. That knowledge will change, thus, as different interpretations are put forward. There can be "multiple knowledges" when equally competent or trusted interpreters

disagree (Guba & Lincoln 1994). Constructivism allows a holistic view of reality (Bawden 1999), accepting that there is an inescapable interconnectedness between people with each other and nature, a "synchronicity" (Jaworski 1998) or mutual impact.

A constructive view of knowledge and the evolvement of understanding favours qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for local SL research as it does not require "context stripping" (Guba & Lincoln 1994: 106). Rather, it values current realities and understandings, and, importantly, differences and diversity. It also recognises the researcher's involvement in the focus of the research, an important consideration as it is likely that those undertaking research on SL will have some involvement in it and would thus find it difficult to assume the dissociated stance dictated by the more purely quantitative methodologies. Personal involvement is likely to exist also in research conducted through the medium of SL as relationships between the academic staff and the community as well as between the students and community members would have to be nurtured before and in the course of undertaking the research activities (Mettetal & Bryant 1996).

Grounded theory is a way of undertaking qualitative research, sharing many of the characteristics of other qualitative methods, such as phenomenology, ethnography and case studies. It was initially proposed by Glaser & Strauss (1967), each of whom subsequently expounded their own versions of the method (Stern 1994). Grounded theory methods have been used for theory development in various fields of human endeavour, most frequently in nursing (for example, Khalifa 1993; Mtshali 2003), but also in business science (Pandit 1996) and education (Cocklin 1996; McCarthy 2001; Minnis 1985).

The evolution of theory occurs while conducting the research, through a continuous process of simultaneous data collection and analysis known as comparative analysis (Strauss & Corbin 1994). The "grounding of theory upon data, the making of constant comparisons, the asking of theoretically oriented questions, theoretical coding and the development of theory" constitute the essential features of a study which describes itself as "grounded theory" (Strauss & Corbin 1994: 283). Grounded theory is built on three elements:

- concepts, which are labels given by the researcher, to actions and observations,
- categories, which emerge from the linking of similar concepts, and
- propositions, which denote the relationships between the categories (Pandit 1996: 1).

These three basic elements are grounded by an ongoing, overlapping process of “data gathering” and interpretation. Data gathering — or what may more appropriately be conceptualised from a constructivist perspective as “accessing experience” — takes place through engagement with the issue and the people involved and/or through documentation of their experiences, with the researcher always returning to the original documents, or seeking additional experiences (“theoretical sampling”) to ensure that the relationships are indeed evident and under what conditions. Analysis is undertaken by means of coding, memoing and diagramming, with questioning and constant comparisons comprising important interpretive techniques (Strauss 1987).

Grounded theory appears relatively well-equipped to incorporate the special characteristics of SL and the multiple perspectives of those involved in its implementation, and to fulfil the criteria demanded of rigorous research for the following reasons:

- There is synergy between the symbolic interactionist foundation of grounded theory which “holds that the development of self is an interpretive process and occurs through discourse with one’s social world” (Swanson & Chapman 1994: 73) and that of Dewey’s educational ideology. Indeed, Strauss (1987) identified the pragmatism espoused by Dewey as one of the primary influences on the grounded theory approach to qualitative research.
- SL is characterised by a multiplicity of goals, foci, participants and activities within single instances of its application, and considerable diversity when a number of such experiences are examined. Given this complexity, it appears likely that the thick conceptualisations and constant comparison emphasised by the grounded theory method will be particularly helpful in dealing with the many contextual factors and in specifying relationships between them.
- Within SL are the voices of multiple stakeholders. According to our current understanding of SL, one of its ideals has been to integrate

these voices in ways which will allow joint learning and mutually beneficial action. This integrative characteristic resonates with grounded theory which demands multiple perspectives and places these at the centre of the development and verification research processes.

- The research process does not end with just a description, or the telling of others' stories. The researcher also interprets the voices conceptually — through constant comparison, theoretical questioning and sampling, and through developing concepts and their relationships. The researcher's own voice is thus added to the multiple perspectives, an interpretative process which cannot be done without close examination of the researcher's own perspectives. This reflective process is analogous to that in SL, in which the experience/service is converted to learning through a process of conscious reflection. In short, both SL and the grounded theory method prioritise reflection as an ongoing process of "making meaning".
- Social justice concepts permeate SL. In common with many researchers using other methods, grounded theory researchers consider themselves obligated to share their interpretations, and the reasons therefore, with those whose voices have been incorporated. And just as SL integrates practical, socially desirable activity with learning, so too must the grounded theorist ensure that the emergent theory will have practical applications and be of use to those beyond a single discipline or sector.

### 3.1 Informing grounded theory: literature and research

A unique characteristic of grounded theory methods is the emergence of theory from experience, rather than from existing theoretical frameworks. The place of literature and existing research is thus somewhat different when employing grounded theory methods than when engaging in other methods of research. Rather than using literature to identify and operationalise concepts in the theory for testing in the research study, grounded theory views literature as a source of data itself, to be questioned and compared with the concepts and relationships arising during the research process. Literature serves different functions at different stages of the research process. Initially, it is reviewed to assist in the preparation of a research proposal. As the study proceeds, literature on the emerging concepts is accessed to expand

one's knowledge and understanding of these concepts, enhancing the researcher's theoretical sensitivity, that is, his/her creative ability to label concepts and to recognise and postulate relationships between them. After analysis, the literature is again reviewed to compare the emergent theory with existing ones (Chenitz 1986). This comparison will enlighten one as to existing discourse/frames of reference, so that the emergent theory — the findings of the study — can be communicated in terms which can be understood by others (Fook 2002).

A preliminary literature review for the development of theory on SL is thus likely to explore the sources and nature of existing materials; ascertain prominent themes, and identify the range, intent and type of relevant research. The information gleaned from such an overview should assist in providing a rationale for such a study, in identifying broad research questions and in sensitising the researcher to emerging concepts. It is beyond the scope of this article to include a review of all literature sources, types and themes. However, to facilitate the development of locally-grounded theory around SL, a preliminary review of the sources and themes of South African material and of research around SL from here and abroad is presented.

### 3.2 Local sources and nature of information about service learning

References to SL in South Africa can be found in a number of conference papers, a few articles published in local academic journals, dissertations, popular literature and video tapes. The topic, however, receives relatively little attention compared with that accorded to it in American literature. Probably the largest single body of local literature on SL is in the form of unpublished reports by academics who have facilitated externally-funded SL courses through CHESP. Reference to SL on the electronic media originating in South Africa is similarly difficult to locate. No references have been found on the SA Data Archives. The large NEXUS database of "Current and completed research projects", accessed in March 2004, yielded only one record of SL (Wydeman 1995). Interestingly, this was a record of research completed in 1995, some years before the term "SL" was first heard in most universities. Many local university websites now mention, though do not contain extensive information about SL (for example, <<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/cdal/>>; <<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/cdal/>>; <<http://www.ukzn.ac.za/cdal/>>).

[//www.epu.uwc.ac.za/projects.htm](http://www.epu.uwc.ac.za/projects.htm)>; <<http://www.uovs.ac.za/communityservice>>). SL is also mentioned on the CHESP page of a non-governmental organisation, the Joint Education Trust (<<http://www.jet.org.za/level2/chesp/default.asp>>) and that of the Council on Higher Education, a government website <<http://education.pwv.gov.za/che/consultconf/default.htm>>. Such references to SL on local websites are, however, fleeting and, in comparison with the American sites, minimal. Terms such as “experiential learning” and “community service” are far more common on local websites. In some instances, the research or activity described on these sites may be analogous to SL in that the experiential learning comprises students’ activities in communities for the purpose of, at least, academically-accredited learning. More often, however, experiential learning denotes in-class practical activities (learning minus service) and community service refers to volunteer initiatives which are not formally connected with academic learning (service minus formal learning).

### 3.3 Themes in literature

Perusal of a wide range of local and international literature around SL suggests that it appears in a number of discourses, notably, but not exclusively, those of experiential learning, citizenship education, social justice and community and youth development. It is thus informed by knowledge generated from the much broader fields of, at least, “service”, “learning”, higher education, civil society and social capital (Putnam 1995), citizenship, democracy (Williams 2001), development, organisational development and volunteerism (Wilkinson & Bittman 2002). Literature likely to be of particular relevance in research about SL is that concerning the following topics:

- Broad educational ideology where Dewey is generally acknowledged to be the “father” of SL, as so much of SL reflects his principles of active engagement for learning and democracy. Other influential educational perspectives include those of Eisner (1985) and Freire (1993);
- Experiential learning (cf Hatcher 1997; Kolb 1984; Moore 1990; November 1997);
- Learning principles (cf Gibbs 1992);



- Problem-based (Gibbons & Gray 2002), project-based learning (Beyliefeld *et al* 2003; Von Kotze & Cooper 2000) and action learning (McGill & Beaty 1995);
- Higher education (cf the journals, *Studies in Higher Education* and *South African Journal for Higher Education*);
- Development (cf Community Development Resource Agency 1998/99; Kretzmann & McKnight 1993);
- Service (cf Greenleaf 1970; Gronemeyer 1992; McKnight 1988), and
- Learning communities (cf Bawden 1999; von Kotze 2002; Senge 1990; Wenger 1998).

South African materials to date tend to be practically oriented, with literature in which the practice of SL is related to theoretical concepts only beginning to emerge of late. Prominent themes in local literature and public fora include:

- Co-operative/professional education (Groenewald electronic communication 2003 January 20);
- Disciplinary applications of SL, “real life” learning, internships and field work, in the fields of, for example, education (Castle & Osman 2003; Henning 1998), nursing (Cassimjee & Brookes 1998), community development (O’Brien & Caws 2003), business information systems (Arbee 2003; Ford 2001), optometry (Jacobs & Jacobs 1998), political science (Trotter 2003) and social work (O’Brien *et al* 1996);
- Engagement of higher education institutions with external constituencies (cf De Gruchy 2002; Forbes 1999; Favish 2003; Jansen 2002; Meehan 1993);
- Linking SL with issues regarding sustainable development (cf Fourie 2003; Erasmus & Jaftha 2002);
- Institutionalisation of SL in higher education (cf Fourie 2003; Lazarus 2000; Nuttall 2001; Perold 1998);
- Outcomes of SL (cf Crafford 1999; Manicom & Trotter 2002);
- Partnerships (cf Bawa 2003; Lazarus 1998; Mfenyana 2001; Mitchell 2002; Subotzky 1998; Van Rensburg 2004);
- Societal concerns addressed in SL, such as HIV/AIDS (Frizelle & King 2002), gender and domestic violence issues (Hurst *et al* 2002), and conflict resolution (Wydeman 1995);

- Policy formulations (cf University of the Free State 2002), and
- Theory development (cf Coetzee 2000; McInerney 1999; McMillan 2002; Mtshali 2003; Muller & Subotzky 2002; Waghid 2002).

### 3.4 Research on SL

Much attention in the literature (cf Votruba 1996) has emphasised that just as SL should be integrated into teaching activities in higher education, so too should it be an integral part of research. Participatory action research (PAR) has been promoted as a particularly appropriate method to achieve such integration, offering sustainable, practical and often immediate benefits to communities in terms of knowledge about issues of relevance to them and skills in collecting information, to students in terms of PAR itself and to academic staff for whom publication then becomes viable (cf Erasmus & Jaftha 2002; Mettetal & Bryant 1996; Reardon 1998). Such literature, however, reports on research undertaken through SL, rather than on research about SL as an educational approach and pedagogy itself. This article is concerned with the latter, research about/on SL. It is recognised, however, that participatory action research is an eminently suitable research method to generate knowledge on SL. Indeed, as alluded to earlier in this article, it is often those involved in SL activities who choose to study it further.

Conferences like the International Conference on Service Learning Research, being held for the fourth time in the USA in 2004, from which a book series *Advances in Service-Learning Research* has emerged, and dedicated issues of various other journals, including this *Acta Academica Supplementum* in South Africa, all indicate that research on SL is being accorded greater prominence than in the past and that, as SL becomes more widespread, more detailed answers to the multiple issues raised in relation to its implementation are being demanded. Perusal of studies on SL as an approach and pedagogy suggest that in most, the focus of attention has been the phenomena being studied (for instance, assessment or institutionalisation of SL). However, of late, and particularly in overseas publications, interest is now being shown in the methods by which such research can be undertaken. Bringle & Hatcher (2000), for example, promoted quantitative research, Shumer (2000) justified qualitative approaches, while Harkavay *et al* (2000) proposed action research as a method.

As the research methodology, methods and tools used to study any phenomena have a direct bearing on the nature of the findings, consideration of methodological aspects of a study are potentially helpful in judging the findings and in identifying underutilised ways of generating knowledge. Quantitative methodologies for the study of SL have been popular, as emphasised in the recent publication of a collection of some 47 scales and measures for (USA) students engaged in SL (Bringle *et al* 2003). These scales measured students' motives and values, moral development, self-concept, development, attitudes and critical thinking. Qualitative studies, using ethnographic, case study and grounded theory methods in a range of disciplines, have, however, come increasingly to the fore (Denzin & Lincoln 1994). Conrad & Hedin (1991: 746) outlined a range of both quantitative and qualitative findings in relation to SL, believing both could be informative, although "evidence from quantitative methodologies is somewhat limited". From the South African literature reviewed to date, it appeared that only Manicom & Trotter's (2002) study has adopted a quantitative approach. A combination of quantitative and qualitative methodologies was used in the largest single study of SL undertaken in South Africa, namely the Monitoring and Evaluation Research Programme (MERP) of approximately 60 CHESP projects, all of which incorporated SL. The study was undertaken by the Evaluation Research Agency for the programme funder from 2001 to 2003. MERP was a three-phase study. It evaluated the project design, implementation and outcomes of the projects, and then derived criteria for quality assessment of SL. Data was collected primarily from the course templates, logic models, pre- and post-course questionnaires, and researcher-structured narrative and financial reports submitted by the projects' coordinators, and supplemented with occasional site visits by the researchers (Evaluation Research Agency 2002a). A computerised data base was used for information from the templates and questionnaires, while the narrative reports were analysed with a qualitative software programme, Atlas/ti (Evaluation Research Agency 2002b).

Case studies have constituted a popular method of research and their use has been refined by Driscoll *et al* (1996). Grounded theory appears to have been used only infrequently in research around SL. Instances of its use have been found, however, in two American studies (Boyle-Baise & Kilbane 2000; Rockquemore & Schaffer 2000) and two South African

ones, both of which focused on teaching and learning issues in the education of nurses (Coetzee 2000; Mtshali 2003).

One issue raised, albeit infrequently, in literature on research about SL is whether different ways of understanding and evaluating are needed if it is to be promoted as a new method of higher education learning, teaching and connecting with communities. Focus groups, interviews, participant observation and document analysis — often using students' journals — have been some of the common research tools used in research around SL. Giles & Eyler (1998: 69-70) recommended using multiple methods in longitudinal and experimental studies, in participatory action research and observational studies, noting that “we need to learn more about theory, design and gathering of data, [...] consensus on the domain of SL, and precise, measurable constructs”.

A characteristic of SL research is the complex nature of its analysis. It presents challenges in addition to those normally encountered in educational research. One confounding factor in analysis is the multiplicity of forms which service can take. It is not a “single, easily identifiable activity, like taking notes at a lecture. [It] may be visiting an elderly person [...] clearing brush from a mountain trail, conducting a survey [...]” (Conrad & Hedin 1991: 746). In addition, the outcomes of any single activity may be multiple, for example cognitive, affective, attitudinal, social, physical, economic or environmental changes, and there are a number of constituencies upon whom these outcomes impact, including students, academic staff, academic institutions, communities and community-based service providers.

### 3.5 Research foci in relation to SL

In addition to critically reviewing research methodology, it is also advisable to review those aspects of SL upon which researchers have focused so that gaps in our current state of knowledge about SL can be identified. For reasons discussed earlier in this article, the findings from existing studies would not be a primary concern at a preliminary stage of a grounded theory study. The precise findings would be more appropriately reviewed as the concepts and categories for the grounded theory begin to emerge (Dick 2000).

Not unexpectedly, the issues addressed in research about SL have been very diverse. In an attempt to ensure coverage of all the relevant issues, American academic stakeholders and community organisation representatives compiled a “research agenda” in 1991 (Giles *et al* 1991). This agenda listed ten questions needing to be researched, six in relation to the “how” (process) and four in connection with the “what” (outcomes) about students, educators, educational institutions, communities and society. Giles & Eyler (1998) revisited this agenda in their review of SL research over the following six years. In relation to the original ten questions, they identified progress and gaps in research about the following role players:

- Students

There had been a considerable number of findings in relation to the impact of SL on students. Attention had also been paid to the relationship between the SL programme, for example its duration, quality of service placement and opportunities for structured reflection, and the quality of learning that occurs, but less was known about the learning processes themselves.

- Educators

Some studies addressed the impact of SL on the teaching and research activities of academic staff, but there had been less attention to the barriers academic staff faced in using this pedagogy.

- Educational institutions

Institutional aspects of SL, such as the number of modules offered and staff involved, stability of funding and staffing, and the characteristics of governance most closely associated with institutionalisation of the pedagogy had been addressed by researchers. However, the impact of SL on academic curricula and scholarship, and on campus culture and transformation of institutions was less well researched.

- Community

A number of authors (cf Driscoll *et al* 1996) in addition to Giles & Eyler (1998) have observed a paucity in information about the impact of SL on the communities involved in SL programmes. While the nature, number and duration of services rendered in communities had been relatively well-documented, there was little evidence of community engagement in the planning or reflection activities of SL. Reports

from Mettetal & Bryant (1996) and Toole (1997) are two exceptions, while a major study by Gray *et al* (1999) evaluated the effects, on all participants, of a three-year SL programme, Learn and Serve America, Higher Education through which over 500 higher education institutions and community organisations were financially supported to enhance the links between them through SL programmes.

- Society

Research around societal impact had concentrated on indicators that students would be caring and concerned citizens in the future. Obviously, longer term studies were needed to ascertain if the immediate positive indicators of such civic responsibility accurately predicted future behaviour.

In the years following Giles & Eyler's (1998) review, greater attention in research studies appears to have been paid to relationships and partnerships in SL (cf Jacoby 2003). Holland & Gelmon's (1998) research revealed a number of characteristics of sustainable campus/community partnerships, while Anderson & Maharasoa's (2002) case study of a partnership between two universities allowed the evolution of principles for partnerships between academic institutions themselves. Perusal of a special research edition of *The Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, in 2000, and of South African literature indicated that other current concerns being addressed by researchers include:

- the role of race and gender (cf Chesler & Scalera 2000; Manicom & Trotter 2002);
- the integration of SL in disciplines (Zlotkowski 2000);
- the role research can play in SL policy formation (Pollack 2000), and
- national co-ordination of research (Furco 2000).

In South Africa, the research agenda has been partly influenced, of late, by an educational NGO which is promoting research on twelve aspects of SL. Mindful of the funder's interests, academic role-players applying for support from the NGO have developed proposals to explore the assessment of academic programmes incorporating SL and of student learning in such programmes. Partnership issues are also evident research foci, as is the institutionalisation of SL in higher education. Noteworthy among the research proposals to the NGO are those from service providers, who, as noted earlier in this article, are usually seen as a third partner, different from "community", in the SL partnerships

in South Africa. These service providers in government and non-governmental organisations are interested in researching the role of the service sector in SL.

#### 4. Conclusion

This review has indicated an increasing, although still limited and often relatively inaccessible, range of South African literature, research and other media upon which further research into SL may draw. There is also a considerable amount of literature and research from other countries against which our findings can be compared.

There are, however, a number of aspects of SL which have not as yet been adequately explored. Further research into these could usefully inform our practice and, indeed, alert us to the limitations and dangers of SL. This article has argued that a substantive, locally-grounded SL theory, not restricted to a single discipline or developed from a single perspective, could benefit local academics, communities, funders, policy-makers and students. By linking our vision with current reality (Van der Merwe 1993: 237), theory could assist us in fulfilling the potential this approach/pedagogy appears to offer, while avoiding unrealistic expectations of it, thereby constituting not a straitjacket within which our practice of SL will be curtailed, but a framework from which our challenges can be addressed co-operatively, creatively and energetically.

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