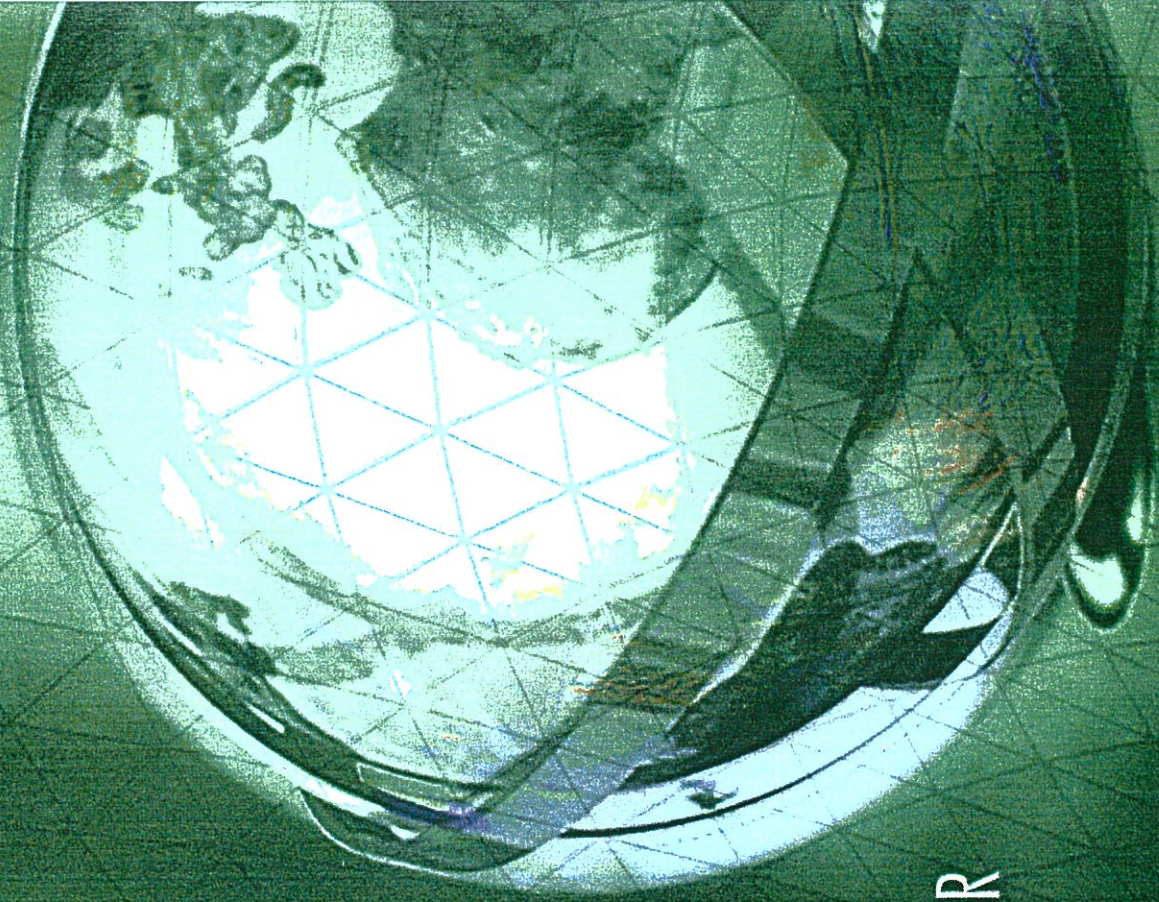




# HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

A SCHOLARLY LOOK BEHIND THE SCENES



EDITOR  
ELI BITZER

18

RESEARCH WITHIN THE  
CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY  
ENGAGEMENT

Ruth Albertyn & Priscilla Daniels



*Higher Education in South Africa – A scholarly look behind the scenes*

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# 18

## RESEARCH WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Ruth Albertyn & Priscilla Daniels

### **ABSTRACT**

*Community engagement is a concept with a complexity of meanings, approaches and application. Derived from the scholarship of engagement of Boyer, community engagement reflects a commitment to relevance within the context of higher education institutions. The chapter aims to explore the issues that emerge in the continuing debate around engagement with communities. This is done from the perspective of the global era that impacts on knowledge production which is integral to the mission of community engagement. The South African response to engagement also reflects conflicting interpretations and imperatives that influence the application of community engagement in universities. The dichotomies in the conceptualisations of community engagement influence higher educational institutions on three levels: that of management, the academics in their teaching and learning, and the community. The concepts of knowledge and power have implications for all three levels of engagement. These will all impact on efficacy and sustainability of engagement efforts. The issues and challenges on these levels are highlighted for further debate. Possible avenues for research on the level of management, the academic and the community are suggested.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In a continually changing context, higher education institutions (HEIs) are required to equip graduates by putting processes into place to facilitate the production of knowledge and development of skills needed to live in a diverse society. HEIs are also required to enable students to make responsible informed decisions, and to work collaboratively with the view of contributing to social transformation. This challenges

modes of teaching and learning, research and community engagement, and calls for radical changes in higher education institutions regarding developing new institutional cultures.

Globalisation is at the core of a discussion on the context of community engagement (CE) within higher education. Social responsiveness and accountability are not only moral imperatives, but also fundamental elements of the knowledge society and Mode 2 knowledge production. The latter refers to knowledge created in broader transdisciplinary, social and economic contexts—that occurs within contexts of application and involves greater involvement with local communities and governments (Gibbons, Limoges, Nowotny, Schwartzman, Scott and Trow 1994). This has implications for institutions in policy formulation and for academics in their conscious mission regarding their scholarship in higher education. Implications of globalisation for development, specifically within the politico-historical African/South African context, increase the urgency of being responsive to communities where HEIs are situated. Developing nations have added pressure of dealing with global changes whilst struggling with difficulties arising from inadequate responses to old persisting challenges (Maruatona 2007; Papoutsaki and Rooney 2006).

In this chapter, several concepts are discussed. They have various interpretations at different higher education institutions addressing social responsiveness of HEIs. The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) defines CE 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” (HEQC 2006:12). While there are debates around the interpretation of community engagement, we accept the HEQC definition as it represents the framework against which HEIs are audited. CE is therefore a vehicle to fulfil the outreach role of academics and Boyer’s scholarship of engagement (1990, 1997). However, academics most often neglect this aspect when they are faced with the pressures of multiple roles. This may partly be due to the research role having high prestige and recognition within the academic environment (Bitzer 2006; Boyer 1997). Universities have different missions, cultures, histories and community contexts that require consideration. The reality is that we need to infuse CE in the teaching, learning and research institutional cultures of higher education institutions in South Africa to facilitate the manner in which institutions decide to embrace CE. The ways of integrating the three roles of academics proposed by Waghid (2002) could play a role in ensuring a symbiotic relationship between the



university and the context where it is situated. This symbiosis should be acknowledged, maintained and nurtured to ensure the relevance, stature and sustainability of HEIs in South Africa.

Within the South African higher education landscape this relevance imperative is acknowledged and policies<sup>25</sup> are in place for implementation. However, the reality suggests that implementation is problematic on various levels. In this chapter, related CE challenges and issues for management, the teaching and learning environment, and the community within HEIs are identified. The implications for research are also highlighted.

Figure 18.1 is a synthesis of the literature. It provides a representation of how research is informed by various institutional cultures at higher education institutions within a South African context on which they impact by their existence in the global reality.

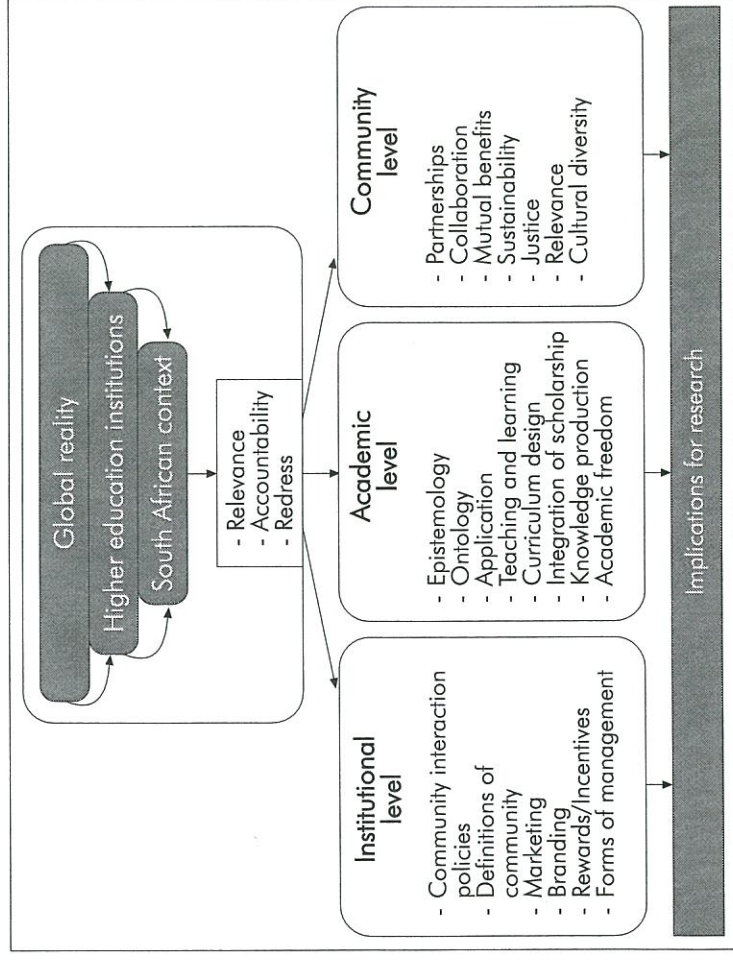


FIGURE 18.1 Issues related to community engagement

<sup>25</sup> Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation 2 (DoE 1996); Education White Paper 3: A Programme for Higher Education Transformation (1997); Higher Education Act (1997) Founding Document of the HEQC (2001).

## ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES

In an era of globalisation and universal change, transitions impact on HEIs. Le Grange (2005) comments on two sets of pressures, namely intrinsic pressures related to epistemological challenges, and external pressures related to the rapid pace and dissemination of information and 'commodification'<sup>26</sup> of knowledge. This 'push' and 'pull' appears to be a theme that runs through any discussion on CE within HEIs in the global era and impacts in various ways. It relates to the South African context and the need for transformation versus the pressures of global competitiveness. It is evident in opposing pressures in the two different modes of knowledge production practised on a micro-level. It is found at the level of discussion regarding academic freedom versus responsiveness to the context of the university and it lies at the heart of issues of the structure of knowledge, power discourses and the definitions of communities (Hall 2008; Henkel 2007; Sall, Lebeau and Kassimir 2003). Given the contexts of HEIs in addressing social responsiveness, CE is often perceived as 'unsafe' terrain as it has not really been linked to teaching and learning and research in an academic framework. In a presentation by Gibbons at the 2006 Council for Higher Education conference, he identifies a metaphor called 'agora' that proposes a public space where "science and the public meet" to provide the opportunity for production of "socially robust knowledge" (CHE 2007:24). The issue of knowledge production is a key concern in higher education.

Various authors have discussed the changes in the current reality of the global context. These changes are related to economic implications, as well as to the epistemological changes reflected by the so-called Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge production (Gibbons *et al.* 1994; Bloland 2005; Pearson 2005; Hazelkorn 2004; Kraak 2004). They fundamentally influence the core business of the HEIs. The implications for HEIs relate to multi- and transdisciplinarity, socially distributed knowledge, dispersion of knowledge production sites, implosion of disciplinary boundaries, applied lifelong learning, and the need for knowledge workers who are highly skilled and productive to provide the competitive advantage to the economy (Aitchison 2004; Bloland 2005; Imenda 2005; Sall *et al.* 2003). Jonathan (2001) refers to this as an ethos of individual competition and the reproduction of social advantage in HEIs.

The moral imperative of HEIs provides a look at the other side of the coin. This social transformative aspect in response to changes in the political arena in South Africa

<sup>26</sup> This is in line with the current demand for graduates who can perform and contribute to the knowledge economy characteristic of the globalised era (McAlpine and Norton 2006).



has been noted (Andreasson 2006; Horsthemke 2004; Kraak 2004; Jansen 2002; Waghid 2002; Gultig 2000). HEIs should be the vital centres of a nation's work, and science should be of practical service to the nation where there is active respect for the concerns and challenges faced by society. Confidence in HEIs grows as academics serve a greater purpose and participate in building a more just society (Mseleku 2004; Boyer 1997). Daniels (2007) believes that the success of education in attaining a civil society lies in preparing the higher education student to function in an ever-changing world.

The role of CE expected of academics is seen as being in line with Boyer's scholarship of application. The varying terms, definitions, interpretations and approaches to CE have caused much debate (Hall 2008). Often definitions of community within the South African context have been limiting and prescriptive. This is especially true of those that focus on service. Consequently, certain disciplines have been excluded, as their field does not lend itself to these limiting definitions of community. Service learning, an integrative strategy that has a theoretical base and a methodology for applying engagement, could be seen as one approach to interacting with the community. The broad definition of scholarship of engagement (application), however, entails the application of disciplinary knowledge and skill to address important societal problems (Braxton 2005). Boyer (1997:92) explains that

[t]he scholarship of engagement means connecting the rich resources of the university to our most pressing social, civic and ethical problems ... [It] also means creating a special climate in which academic and civic cultures communicate more continuously and more creatively with each other, helping to enlarge ... the universe of human discourse and enriching the quality of life for all of us.

Boyer proposes that research should contribute to push back frontiers of human knowledge (discovery), to place discoveries within a larger context and create more interdisciplinary conversations (integration), to keep the flame of scholarships alive and avoid discontinuity (dissemination), to apply knowledge to avoid irrelevance and be more vigorously engaged in matters of the day (application). The integration of various scholarships therefore seems crucial to the professional development of academics.

#### **SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT**

Where knowledge and information are key areas embodying development, the challenge for HEIs in South Africa is to "produce knowledge through research and teaching and learning programmes" (HESA 2007:15). In most countries, governments as major

funders of higher education have a vested interest in the quality of higher education processes and products (Brennan and Shah 2000). Cloete and Muller (1998:532) explain that “[i]n the case of South Africa, this context is that of a developing and modernising African country in a period of transition from racial discrimination and oppression towards a democratic polity with constitutional provisions for social justice and equal opportunity”.

The South African democratisation process has been underpinned by various political and economic reforms providing guidelines for transformation. The Reconstruction and Development Plan (ANC 1994) provided a framework to redress the past imbalances. The document also highlighted the need for transformation through partnership, community development and collaboration between communities, services (both governmental and non-governmental), the private sector and higher education institutions. In its 2007 document, Higher Education South Africa maintains that “[c]arefully conceptualised and planned, such engagement can create and advance economic, social and cultural opportunities and development respectively” (HESA 2007:18). In order to develop sustainable communities and overcome complex social problems, collaborative solutions need to be facilitated by equal partnerships between role-players. In this way assets, strengths and capacities will be enhanced.

Reddy (2004:38) points out that community engagement aspects are embedded in South African policy documents such as the Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation of 1996 and the White Paper on Higher Education of 1997, which emphasised the following goals:

... social responsibility and awareness amongst students of the role of higher education in social and economic development through community service programmes; producing skilled graduates competent in critical, analytical and communication skills to deal with change, diversity and tolerance to opposing views.

The Department of Education’s National Plan for Higher Education (2001), the Founding Document (HEQC 2001) of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), the Criteria for Institutional Audits (HEQC 2004a) and the Criteria for Programme Accreditation (HEQC 2004b) also outlined CE and linked it to issues of quality assurance. The Founding Document (HEQC 2001) identified “knowledge-based community service” as one of the three areas – along with teaching and learning, and research – for the accreditation and quality assurance of higher education. This highlights the shift in the kind of knowledge



which is needed in society. Muller and Subotsky (2001:167) affirm that higher HEIs “will have to adjust from being adept producers of (mainly disciplinary) knowledge to being creative reconfigurers of knowledge in solving increasingly complex problems”.

According to Asmal (2002), the process of contextualised engagement for HEIs in a knowledge-driven world encompasses the following three aspects:

- The development of human resources: human talent and potential need to be mobilised to contribute to life in a rapidly changing society;
- High-level skills training: training and provision of person power to strengthen the country’s enterprises, service and infrastructure. This requires the development of workers with skills, who are socially responsible and conscious of their role in national development;
- Production acquisition and application of new knowledge: continuous technological improvement and innovation for national growth and competitiveness driven by vibrant research and development systems, integrating the research and training capacity of higher education with the needs of industry and of social reconstruction.

In the policy framework for higher education, the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE 1996) identified three vital principles: increased participation, greater responsiveness and increased cooperation and partnerships. Greater responsiveness would require new forms of management and assessment of knowledge production, dissemination and curricula. It was hoped that this would result in a more dynamic interaction between higher education and society, which would promote development and accountability.

#### **IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

In view of the growing pressure for greater corporate accountability, neither public nor private institutions can afford to ignore the imperative to act responsibly towards their stakeholders. Since global realities are forcing HEIs to reconsider their paradigms, new arenas are opening up for debate and research. Another ‘push/pull’ within a discussion on CE refers to contrasting pressures of engagement for relevance (internal or moral imperative) and for accountability (external), which relates to social corporate responsibility. This is the ‘agora’ Gibbons (2007) refers to where societal and scientific problems are debated and solutions negotiated. Knowledge is seen as a public and private good, the key to economic advance and social inclusion (Henkel 2007). Hall



(2008) indicates that CE can be seen as a key public good in the 'third sector', filling the space between the private sector, on the one hand, and the role of the state in providing infrastructure and social transfers on the other. These opposing factors will influence practice on various levels.

### Institutional level

Universities should play a role in defining the development agenda rather than responding to short-term demands by governments. They may thus help to maintain accountability while providing a source of debate on current directions and visions of future society (Sall *et al.* 2003). There needs to be mobilisation of awareness and consciousness that not only coincide with national goals, but are also a constructive criticism of them (Singh 2005).

Universities present a mirror image of the society where they are located (Sall *et al.* 2003). A survey of policies and practices has shown that although South African HEIs referred to community service in their mission, there was little indication of whether this was included in their policy or strategic planning processes (Perold 1998:46). It is thus a clear mandate to universities to become relevant and focus on the needs of the communities it serves and to develop students with commitment to service in communities. Boyte (1998:32) contends that "to address the crisis in democracy from the vantage of higher education will require that we recast the work of our institutions as public work. This will mean that we re-examine our scholarship and the nature of our disciplines, our reward systems, our purposes and our institutional practices." HEIs need to reflect on their view and concretisation of the scholarship of engagement. These relate to the mobilisation of the development of human resources as well as of knowledge and professional skills, and the production, acquisition and application of new knowledge. The process of initiating discussion and debate on the issue of CE in South Africa can be led by Hall's (2008) paper on CE and could provide the catalyst to stimulate this debate.

No single strategy can bring about academic renewal. The scholarship of engagement as indicated by Boyer should therefore present an opportunity to participate in thoughtful reflection on practice, provide a framework for this introspection, present a set of guidelines for implementation with regard to the production of knowledge, and apply assessment through peer review and channels of communication and publication (Holland and Ramalay 2008). Holland and Ramalay (2008) propose various strategies, namely planning, leadership, engagement strategies, accountability



frameworks and more institutions taking routine, strategic or transformative approaches to the engagement process. The means of ensuring this process includes situating CE within academic disciplines and interdisciplinary programmes, providing incentives (monetary and staff development opportunities) in order for academics to engage in CE, and linking the research outputs of CE activities with staff reward structures (Smith 2008). This implies that the university needs to develop the infrastructure which seeks to align CE into the existing core functions through the infusion into policies or through the development of policy. For higher education institutions to incorporate a scholarship of engagement as proposed by Boyer would imply that institutions seek to align existing practices to include the central tenets proposed by his model and that CE either becomes infused into the existing practices or become a separate but distinct core function of the institution.

For effective implementation there need to be theoretical underpinnings to lead action in CE. Mapesela, Leboena and Setenane (2005) warn against action pursued without a conscious mission. The lack of a theoretical framework within the field of CE needs to be addressed for academics to see its value. However, Barnett (2004) states that in the era of super-complexity, there are too many frameworks of meaning to understand what they mean and how they relate to each other. Thus managing risk and uncertainty become a major task in higher education. According to Bloiland (2005), traditional modernist rational approaches should still be used to solve problems, but frameworks of meaning and new meta-narratives need to be developed, examined and argued. There should thus not be a notion of a unified purpose of universities, but plurality of departments, ideas and debate should be recognised as the basis for developing new skills and ideas. The various types of HEIs (traditional universities, universities of technology and merged institutions) with their specific characteristics and foci have an impact on the accomplishment of the mission of CE and this should be borne in mind in terms of the application of the policies. Singh (2003) suggests that one must guard against narrow understandings of engagement and that universities and their contexts should negotiate the terms of engagement. Guidelines for good practice may thus be more appropriate than policy imperatives. The definition of community should also be flexible and open to interpretation based on the discipline and context in question.

In the quest for relevance and true development, policies may have the effect of being disciplinary rather than empowering in intent and could as such work against development (Andreasson 2006; Vambe 2005). Community engagement should also not just be window dressing. Policies should be in place for ethical practice with empowering intent and reciprocal benefits. On the other hand, the importance of



corporate social responsibility within organisational environments has become a *fait accompli* and is a vital part of the competitive advantage that one organisation has over another. The practice of engagement has thus become a strategic imperative. Weerts and Sandman (2008) found that HEIs who succeeded in their CE strategy were those who incorporated the engagement imperative in the corporate branding of the university.

This form of scholarly undertaking creates opportunities for academics to engage in academically relevant work that aligns itself with institutional mission and vision and community needs. In this way, HEIs adhere to national policies through engagement activities responsive to development challenges. It also gives institutions intellectual visibility and credibility as HEIs engage proactively with society at an intellectual and cultural level.

### Academic level

The scholarship of engagement is often seen in isolation and is rarely linked explicitly to the scholarship of teaching (Kreber 2005). Integration of the various scholarships to ensure a balanced professional development is needed. There tends to be a gap between knowledge and development practices. CE is often perceived as an 'add on' activity and academics are often reluctant to engage in this activity (Sall *et al.* 2003:144). Ideally, CE should be connected to the key performance areas of HEIs, i.e. teaching, learning and research, and community. This implies that for academics their research and teaching must be aligned with the equity commitment.

Community engagement presents an opportunity for academics to fulfil their moral citizenship through academic involvement. Engagement can facilitate the connection and can link the community to the curriculum in ways that bring new meaning to the why, what and how of learning, teaching and research approaches at universities. Opportunities for transdisciplinary knowledge need to be created so that graduates will be able to develop necessary skills to enable them to apply knowledge in creative ways. This goal is facilitated by an interdisciplinary approach to teaching, learning and research. Academic research on CE and contributing to an emerging trans-disciplinary body of knowledge presents several advantages for academics. These include extra space to publish, being a role-player in the development of new and emerging areas of knowledge creation, working across disciplines and with other academics, and being at the forefront of developing innovative models of integrating CE into various disciplines. The prospect of CE within higher education, its staff, academic interest

groups and individual disciplines resides in its viability and its relevance to intellectual discipline and pedagogy (Zlatkowski 1995). In order for this gap to be narrowed, research is required.

Much has been written about the qualities required of students within the global economy. This is expounded by Barnett (2004) who concludes that the increasing complex environment would require teaching and learning strategies to change. There should be a move from the emphasis on knowledge and skills acquisition to the preparation of students to deal with super-complexity. This focus on ontology and away from epistemology is propounded by Dall'Alba and Barnacke (2007) who believe that students need to learn how to 'be' in the realities of the knowledge economy. This has implications for teaching and learning in HEIs. The scholarship of application provides the unique opportunity for students to gain experience in being exposed to super-complexity. It provides a forum for the application of skills learned and the possibility of problem solving where accountability and relevance are required for students to dig more deeply than just their knowledge acquired in formal study. This involves a spiritual dimension, what Barnett (2004) refers to as the emphasis on 'being'. Educational goals of developing skills of self-management, autonomy and social responsibility are also fostered in the process of CE as students go out into the community and are involved in solving real problems. This provides them with the opportunity to develop intellectually (critical thinking) and morally (social responsibility).

Global trends also have an impact on teaching and learning. There has been a noticeable trend in South Africa towards facilitation of learning rather than transmission teaching (Horsthemke 2004). Educators can prepare students for the changing environment by creating opportunities for them to put coursework theories into practice in their own world situations (Daniels 2007). The generation and development of knowledge is therefore contextual in nature (Makgoba, in Horsthemke 2004). Bloland (2005) refers to disciplinary boundary implosions, where academics no longer remain within their disciplines, but explore core subjects in other disciplines leading to demystification of disciplines and increasing criticism of each other's fields. Imenda (2005) mentions three sociological foundations for educational reforms in South Africa, of which two are directly related to CE. These entail becoming involved in communities outside of the physical boundaries of HEIs and having education take place at various sites. Implications for curriculum design and for integrated approaches to learning and teaching are imminent. According to Le Grange (2005:1214), "engagement involves a process of negotiation about what knowledge is most worth producing and also how the knowledge might be produced – the ontological and epistemological frameworks



underpinning the knowledge production process are interrogated no matter what form or mode of knowledge". Academic professionals need to take the responsibility of seeking meaning in the changing environment. They should also interpret it for society and find solutions (Bloland 2005).

Organisations have a further role in securing a sustainable future for humanity by avoiding socio-economic and environment crises. This has implications for ethics, morality and sustainability, which are at the interface (boundary) of the HEIs and the community. Issues of social equity and justice should be generic components of all courses, as students will face these issues in the communities where they will be engaged. This may be through CE, in whatever form, appropriate to the field of specialisation, and within the community where they will be working once qualified. In any professional development and identity formation of students, this is an issue that needs to be addressed. It also includes the development of their social responsibility.

### Community level

The Talloires Network (2005:12) emphasises that HEs need to be committed to strengthening their civic roles and social responsibilities:

Higher education must extend itself for the good of the society to embrace communities near and far. In doing so, we will promote our core missions of teaching, research and service. The university should use the processes of education and research to respond to, serve and strengthen its communities for local and global citizenship

HEIs therefore need to engage with the redefinition and importance of their role in the social development agenda. Knowledge production and distribution have moved beyond the boundaries of the university and are produced and consumed in many different physical sites. This situation challenges the modernist higher education's control of knowledge. Consequently, higher education is losing its knowledge monopoly (Bloland 2005). As a result, the significance of community knowledge systems is being taken seriously (Kolawole 2005; Vambe 2005) and there is an increased awareness that learning within community settings needs to be recognised. Singh (2005) contends that values in post-apartheid South Africa must go beyond the individualism of human capital theory; it should focus on the social fabric that binds individuals to social formations and intersect to create cultural capital for different groups. Participatory and democratic structures of community-based research projects are fundamental to how the university fulfils its public mission through research (Berman 2007). Knowledge

generated by grassroots people should be valued, documented, preserved and made accessible to all stakeholders (Kolawole 2005). Henkel (2007:90) further states that in the global era, knowledge has become democratised with a decreased distinction between 'experts' and 'non-experts'. She quotes Noworthy and colleagues (2001) who say that contemporary society 'speaks back to science'.

The World Declaration on Higher Education for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century identifies areas where HEIs could become relevant to society (Kolawole 2005). Relevance should be assessed by what society expects of institutions and what they do. It should be a reinforcement of the role of service to society through transdisciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to analyse problems and issues to ultimately create a new society. For a mission such as CE there benefits need to accrue to both partners. Reciprocal learning is at the core of sustainability, a key factor in any CE initiative. The principles of social justice and ethical practice are integral in this process. Butin (2006) criticised service learning for the university dominance of the partnership in practice. The research agenda is often dictated by the academics, and the impacts are mainly measured with a university interest bias. Weerts and Sandmann (2008) report on the "two way approach", "mutual benefits" and "collaborative model", which are different from the more traditional approaches to CE. The change in approach from needs-based to asset-based community development illustrates this shift in attitude. These processes, however, take time to implement and with an already pressured environment, the question remains whether these approaches are in reality implemented during CE initiatives.

The scholarship of engagement broadens and deepens public aspects of academic scholarship. Barker (2004:123) identified five core elements of engagement scholarship, each of which has a distinctly different focus: (1) *Public scholarship* employs forums open to the community created through the process of public deliberation enabling a greater comprehension of community problems and issues; (2) *participatory research* stresses the dynamic role of society in engaging in the creation of knowledge, emphasising and promoting participation and focusing on the marginalised or previously excluded groups; (3) *community partnerships* focus on scholarly engagement practice aimed at bringing about social transformation; (4) the development of *public information networks* identifies resources and assets in communities and (5) the development of *civic skills or civic literacy* through engagement in teaching, research and outreach improves democratic processes, ensuring that disciplines supply the community with the knowledge required for reflective judgments on issues (Barker 2004:129-132). The emphasis is on reducing the separation between the expert specialist and the lay public. Each of the five core elements has its own methodology and conception of



democracy, and most central tenets overlap with each other. They are interrelated as they share the common practice of a problem-driven approach located in the public domain (community), subsequently contributing to the common democratic good of society and social transformation. This calls for a new approach or a different lens for viewing and identifying research problems, which ensures that research is relevant and that it narrows the gap between universities and the communities they serve. Universities have the opportunity of using public funding for academic endeavour for the public good. In practising integrated scholarship in CE, certain approaches are better suited for research. Applied research methods to address context-specific research problems would be most appropriate (Barker 2004; Gibbons 2007).

There is a pressing need to understand the complex relationship between HE and society and research is needed 'on the ground' to reveal the ways in which African universities and societies intersect and mutually shape each other (Sall *et al.* 2003:144). The focus clearly needs to be on mutuality as this will ensure sustainability.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR RESEARCH**

Relevant engagement with communities within the African context requires the creation of new knowledge spaces through negotiation whereby social strategies and technical devices are used to produce new knowledge (Le Grange 2005). Mseleku (2004) believes that South African universities tend to be extensions of European universities and that they are not rooted in the African experience. Clearly, through engaging with communities and producing relevant research, HE will contribute towards creating an African identity in its institutions. The scholarship of engagement places community issues on the scholarly agenda and provides an opportunity for integration across teaching, research and service. It provides the opportunity to contribute to the body of knowledge, namely to the development of new technology, materials or methods and the integration of knowledge or technology, which will lead to new interpretations and applications in the arena of CE.

Engaging in research in communities could motivate academics currently not involved in community engagement to expand their area of practice. This could be so especially if the definition of community is broadened. Stanton (2007) identifies some reasons for CE research. These are: documenting the impact of CE on students and/or community partners; constructing new theoretical models; placing CE in an African context and incorporating the perspectives of universities, the public sector, industry, professional bodies and community members; placing CE within the paradigms and theories of

disciplines and developing/expanding its language; structuring CE curricular activities within the larger context of teaching and learning; evaluating CE effectiveness with regard to partnerships and institutionalisation; documenting innovative activities and sharing within an academic context and for assessment and quality management. These appear as compelling reasons for engaging in CE research. Based on the discussion in this chapter there are various research statements which are suggested as foci for research. They are discussed below.

The motivations for policies on CE at national and institutional level will be influenced by the realities of those implementing the policies and the disjuncture, and which may have arisen due to rapid global changes. This needs to be addressed, possibly through the following research statements:

- Identification of the governance issues that institutions in South Africa are facing, as this will influence the CE mission of universities;
- The changing patterns of governance in the global era within the South African higher educational context;
- Identification of the CE issues in mission statements and quality management policies of universities;
- Identification of resources and incentives for academics for CE.

Academics that are experiencing the manifestation of global pressures in the implementation of their task may be hesitant to respond to the moral imperatives of CE. The narrow definition of community may be excluding academics in disciplines other than the more service-oriented disciplines. The extent to which this is the case may be the focus of the following research:

- Identification of the attitudes of academics to CE;
- Identification of the academics' definition and perception of community;
- Identification of barriers and facilitating factors for CE.

There is a need for research regarding the positive 'pull' factors that will encourage CE. These are:

- Identification of possibilities of third-stream funding for CE;
- Identification of capacity-building needs regarding accessing funds;
- Identification of ways to link academic valued outputs to CE activities;
- Identification of partnerships with external communities;



- Identification of collaborative research possibilities.

In the evaluation of Community Higher Education Service Partnership (CHESP), a national service learning initiative at several higher education institutions, Mouton and Wildschut (in Lazarus 2007) state that service learning scholarship tends to be a-theoretical, descriptive, anecdotal and impressionistic. They state that the field seems to be dominated by practitioners rather than by theoreticians. Thus there is a call for deeper theoretical and conceptual reflection on CE.

Other aspects for research include:

- Deconstruction of knowledge structures informing practice of academics;
- Challenging policies of their institutions regarding CE;
- The need to develop meta-narratives and new frameworks of meaning.

It still seems unclear what is being done in terms of the influence of CE on communities and the processes through which these are achieved. There is a need for academia to recognise, understand and respect multiple ways of knowing, interpretation and practice. Possible areas of research could be:

- The view that communities have of the university as a resource;
- Identification of communities appropriate for engagement by various disciplines;
- Identification of current assets and needs of target communities to ensure a match of activities;
- Identification of power and knowledge structures in communities;
- Identification of appropriate approaches to CE within various contexts;
- Monitoring and evaluation to ensure that partnerships remain relevant.

In conclusion: the scholarship of engagement and the community engagement brief of academics is the scholarship often most neglected in practice. Issues and challenges raised in this chapter illustrate the complexity of the CE debate. Cognisance of the dual pressures in the CE discourse in higher education keeps the agenda open for research on multiple levels. A broader definition of community may be required within the global era due to the opposing pressures of relevance and global competitiveness. The epistemology underpinning practice may influence academics in the integration of the scholarship of engagement with the other scholarships. In this way CE will be integrated into practice and not exist as an add-on. Dichotomies of autonomy and accountability have implications on various levels and if academic freedom with the

application of community engagement is encouraged and valued, there may be a positive acceptance of the imperative with resultant sustainability.

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