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Service Learning

in South Africa



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Chapter 1

An introduction to service learning in South Africa

NADINE PETERSEN AND RUKSANA OSMAN

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this chapter you should be able to do the following:

- Sketch the background to the integration of community engagement in South African higher education.
- Differentiate between service learning and other terms, such as **community engagement**, **community service**, **experiential learning** and **volunteerism**, used in higher education.
- Explain what a critical social and educational framework for service learning entails and how it can be integrated into the discipline-specific theories of your study field.
- Differentiate between service-oriented and module-oriented forms of service learning.
- List the challenges to adopting a critical framework for service learning in higher education and identify which apply to your discipline.
- Explain how the idea of service learning as an instance of 'border crossing' is relevant to your particular study area.

Introduction

social justice a term reflecting the idea that justice is social and collective; social justice strives for equality and solidarity in societies, the eradication of poverty, the respect for human rights and the recognition of human dignity regardless of background

- What is service learning about?
- What makes service learning different from work-integrated learning?
- Can lecturers not teach students about service, good citizenship and **social justice** through traditional approaches and pedagogies?
- What can students possibly gain by engaging with communities when this potentially puts them at risk?
- What is the role of the community in service learning?

These are important questions for you as a student in higher education in South Africa. Your responses to these questions will give you insight into your thinking about knowledge, about who has the power to produce knowledge and about how knowledge is produced and accepted as valid.

We, as researchers and lecturers in higher education, have learnt that students today find themselves in an ever-changing world where knowledge is produced in a variety of contexts and by different people. This requires of students to think critically and act caringly. It requires of students to be open to different forms of knowledge and to be alert to the fact that knowledge is produced in different ways. We find that, for students to respond ethically and academically to learning, they need to engage with others' thinking with a view to forming their own theories and taking in position themselves. We will explain that service learning, as a form of experiential learning, offers students a rich and dynamic pathway to do exactly this. Through this book, we aim to make an academic contribution to the study of service learning as an area of research and theory while giving practical guidelines to students and lecturers engaged in service learning at universities. This book thus explores service learning as practised in various disciplines in a number of higher education institutions in South Africa.

The book is divided into two parts, a 'theoretical' part and a part that looks at various 'cases' of service learning in South Africa. The first three chapters of the book offer a theoretical view of service learning. As many of you will be new to this kind of learning, Chapter 1 will start by describing the background of service learning in South African higher education; we will clarify some key terminology, provide a broad theoretical frame for thinking about service learning and explain how such a frame influences service-learning pedagogy. The second chapter explores current debates on service learning by varying the emphasis; we look at learning *service* and discuss how this approach to service learning can influence how we apply the concepts of citizenship and social justice in practice. The third chapter draws attention to both theoretical and practical approaches to successfully integrate the community voice into service learning.

The latter part of the book consists of a number of case studies; service learning is applied within the fields of teacher education (Chapter 4 and 8), social work (Chapter 5), the health sciences (Chapter 6), law (Chapter 7), and engineering, built environment and information technology (Chapter 9). We see how the disciplinary focus influences the conceptualisation of the service-learning course, key elements of the **curriculum** are discussed and the benefits of service learning to the various **stakeholders** are pointed out. Some cases draw on student data and you may find that you can identify with the viewpoints presented. The authors share lessons they have learnt and reflect critically on the practical implications for practice. While the discipline focus is keenly felt, each chapter also includes activities that allow for a transfer of skills to other fields of enquiry. In other words, students are encouraged and

curriculum set of interactions (explicit and implicit) designed to facilitate the processes of learning, development, and making meanings

stakeholder a party or organisations with a vested interest in a project; a party or organisation who will be affected by a project or who is in some way involved in it

community engagement term currently used in South Africa to denote higher education interactions with external interest groups, aimed at building and exchanging the knowledge, skills, expertise and resources required to develop and sustain society

community service service performed by an individual or an institution to benefit a local community

Higher Education Quality Committee:
The permanent committee established by the Council on Higher Education to perform its quality promotion and quality assurance functions in terms of the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997).

Further reading:
You can read more on community engagement as a strategy for transforming higher education institutions by referring to the Council on Higher Education (2010) Mitchell et al. (2005) and Osman & Petersen (2010).

guided to think about service learning both within their own study fields and across disciplines.

Let us begin our discussion of service learning by looking at how and why service learning has become part of the discourse on **community engagement** and higher education in South Africa.

Service learning in South African higher education

South Africa's policy framework includes a number of documents addressing the issue of community engagement, and by implication service learning, in higher education. For instance the Education White Paper 3: A programme for the transformation of higher education (South Africa, 1997:13–15) spells out both national-level goals and institutional-level goals and is driven by the desire promote and develop, through **community service** programmes students' social responsibility and awareness about the role of higher education in social and economic development. This document also requires states that our higher education institutions' academic expertise and infrastructure are national assets that should be retained in the country's restructuring process and must be made available for the common good.

South Africa's policy framework also includes the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997) which led to the establishment of the Higher Education Quality Committee in order to give effect to the goals of the White Paper 3. The Higher Education Quality Committee specifically requires academically based community engagement, with particular reference to service learning, linked to quality assurance and programme accreditation in higher education. The framework includes the ways in which community engagement is to be integrated with teaching and learning, and how this will be resourced and monitored. This ensures that community engagement is taken every bit as seriously as teaching and research at higher education institutions. The Higher Education Quality Committee even requires reporting on engagement with communities against particular criteria in institutional audits (Council on Higher Education, 2004). Thus, in higher education, community engagement is partly seen as an overarching strategy for transformation.

We have also remarked that higher education is expected to demonstrate a sense of social responsibility and commitment to the public good. In other words, there is the expectation that higher education institutions will be in service of society and its needs. Higher education institutions thus should produce graduates who can contribute to nation-building, the development of a more just and humane society (especially given the country's history of apartheid), and who will apply their knowledge

and skills to uplift society. In effect, universities should, through their lecturers, students and academic programmes, respond to the social, political, economic and cultural needs of society. This is where the idea of service learning as a specific form of academically based community engagement in higher education began.

A number of organisations were instrumental in promoting service learning in South African higher education, in raising awareness, building capacity and making grants available to support it. For example, the Joint Education Trust received a Ford Foundation grant to conduct a survey of community service in the higher education sector in 1997 and 1998. The term community service, the popular term in those years, was used as an umbrella term for various forms of outreach, **volunteerism**, research and development- or academic-based work conducted by higher education stakeholders in different types of communities. The survey revealed the following:

- Most institutions linked community service or community engagement directly with their missions.
- Very few institutions had policies regarding community service or community engagement within the institution itself.
- There was a very wide range of community service projects.
- Projects were generally initiated by academic staff and students, but were not recognised as a core function of the institutions.

A further grant from the Ford Foundation enabled the launch of the Community-Higher Education-Service Partnerships initiative in 1999. The main focus of this initiative was to assist higher education institutions in conceptualising and implementing service learning as a form of community engagement into academic programmes and curricula. For more than a decade now Community-Higher Education-Service Partnerships have worked towards grant-making, capacity-building, monitoring, evaluation, research, advocacy, resourcing and providing information services in order to promote service learning.

Another important development in service learning has been the launch of the South African higher education Community Engagement Forum in 2009. In terms of its mandate the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum plays an advocacy and facilitative role in the South African Higher Education arena with respect to community engagement and service learning for transformation and development. It also provides a national platform for debate to South African scholars, students and community members about practices, knowledge generation, monitoring and evaluation of community engagement initiatives. Currently all South African higher education institutions, public and private, have representation on the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum.

volunteerism the use of volunteers, especially to perform social or educational work in communities

Further reading:

You can read these reports in full in Perold & Omar (1997) and in Perold (1998).

Service learning as

term: In discussing the role the Community-Higher Education-Service Partnerships initiative played, Lazarus (2007) points out that the term service learning was relatively unknown in South African higher education until the late 1990s.

South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum:

The organisation is described on their Web site as 'representative of university staff responsible for a broad typology of community engagement expressions in higher education'. Consult <<http://sahecef.org>> to read more about their activities.

A clarification of terms: Service learning as a form of community engagement in South African higher education

Service learning is often confused with other related terms and it is thus important for us to spend some time clarifying terminology for the chapter and the rest of the book. We have already come across terms such as 'experiential learning', 'community engagement' and 'service learning', and it is important to know there are differences between the terms and what they are.

Service learning is at once a form of **curricularised** community engagement in higher education and a form of experiential learning. But not all experiential learning can be termed community engagement or service learning.

curricularise integrate into or make part of a curriculum

experiential learning refers to the process of learning through experience, action and doing. It is an educational approach where students have to engage in direct experience and reflect in a focused manner in order to gain knowledge and develop skills

Community engagement vs. experiential learning

Community engagement in higher education is generally considered to be an instance of using a university's teaching, learning and research competence to build mutually beneficial relationships with various communities in areas of discipline strength and community issues.

In order to distinguish between service learning as a form of *community engagement* and service learning as a form of *experiential learning* the following explanation may be useful:

Defining community engagement: You will find similar explanations in many community engagement policies of higher education institutions. You may find it useful to see how it is defined in your own institution's policies.

Service learning as community engagement vs. service learning as experiential learning

- As a form of community engagement service learning *combines* the academic curriculum of the discipline and the student with service to, or in, a community.
- As a form of experiential learning service learning asks students to learn *through* and *from their service experiences* in working with community members.

Further reading: Compare, for instance, the definitions of service learning in Bringle & Hatcher (1999) and Furco & Billig (2002).

Although there are many definitions of service learning we would like to adopt the following explanation we find covers all aspects of service learning we will discuss in this chapter:

- Service learning is a way of thinking about education and learning (a **philosophy**) with an accompanying teaching tool or strategy (a **pedagogy**) that asks students to learn and develop through active participation in service activities to meet defined issues in community organisations. There is reciprocity in the exchange between students and the community.
- The service students undertake is decided on in collaboration with the community.
- The service is integrated into students' academic curriculum and provides structured opportunities for them to think, talk, or write about their experiences (in other words reflect) during the service activity.
- Service learning aims at enhancing and extending what is taught in higher education so that students develop a sense of caring for others and a sense of more **critical citizenship**.

philosophy a particular system or set of beliefs reached through the use of reason and argument

pedagogy science of teaching; teaching methods

Student and community interaction: When we use the word 'reciprocity' we mean that there is mutual benefit in the relationship between the students and the community members. They each 'get something' out of interacting with each other.

critical citizenship the notion of critical citizenship strives to help us think critically about society and to act responsibly to bring about positive change

TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

Lecturers and academics sometimes define or explain terms in slightly different ways from one another.

- Look for other definitions and explanations of service learning in this book and other sources.
- Compare and contrast the explanation we have given above with the new definitions you have found.
- Which definition, or definitions, do you find the most useful for your context? Explain why.
- From your point of view, do people sometimes misuse the term service learning? Explain your answer.

Now that you have an understanding of what service learning is and how it fits into the context of community engagement in higher education, we want to explore the various models to describe this concept and the frameworks within which we think about it.

Choosing a paradigm or form of service learning in higher education

Our service-learning activities and the gains they yield for the participants are directly linked to the type of service learning we apply or the model with which we approach the activities.

paradigm theoretical model of thought orienting a person's reflection

charity giving to those in need, alms-giving, the help so given

Charity and philanthropy:

You can consult <www.lionsclubs.org> and <www.giftofthegivers.org> to read more about these two organisations and the valuable service they render. You can also consult the Web site of Inyathelo, the South African Institute for Advancement <www.inyathelo.org.za> or search the Internet to read more about philanthropy in South Africa.

Some authors in the field of service learning argue that there are two distinct forms or **paradigms** of service learning: a *charitable* or philanthropic form of service and a form of service learning oriented towards social change (Morton, 1995). Others argue that service learning operates on a continuum where the service objectives range from performing **charity** to bringing about social change and lecturers and students are able to move along this continuum as their understanding and their knowledge increase (Furco, 1996).

We are inclined to agree with the former view, that there are two distinct paradigms of service learning, and believe that lecturers and their students actively choose a particular form. The reason for distancing ourselves from the idea of a continuum of service learning is that it creates a space for service learning to become charitable service which we find incompatible with academic learning, with learning for a profession, or learning in a university setting. This issue is also taken up elsewhere in service-learning research, for example, Mahlamaholo and Matobako (2003) lament the often charitable focus of service activities from which the community voice is excluded. By this we are not saying that there is no need for charitable forms of service to others; organisations such as the Lions Clubs International and the Gift of the Givers to name but two in the South African context perform great and noble deeds of charity for communities in need. For instance, in areas hit by natural disasters an organisation such as Gift of the Givers will collect aid (blankets, medicine, water) and distribute it to the communities. They may also bring volunteers who offer medical or clean-up services. In a higher education context student bodies also do excellent work in volunteer campaigns. For instance, students raise money for various charities during rag or volunteer at orphanages as part of the outreach projects of their residences or day houses.

You may be wondering why we are concerned with a philanthropic or charitable frame for service learning in higher education. In South Africa there is a huge divide in society; there are very few who graduate with a university degree in relation to the general population and these graduates can be considered to belong to an 'elite' part of the population. As lecturers we do not want to widen this gap. In service learning we do not want you as students to go into communities with the idea that you are there to 'help' others; that the communities have problems which the 'experts' (university students and lecturers) are coming to 'fix', and definitely not with the idea that you are 'better' than community members because you are more educated or have particular scientific skills.

Thus, we believe that lecturers actively choose a particular form or model of service learning. This implies that, in choosing a particular form

of service learning, we are also making choices about **epistemology** and **ontology**. When we use the term 'epistemology' we are referring to the study of knowledge or a theory of knowledge. In other words, in a course focusing on this field of study, we would ask questions such as:

- How do we come to know this?
- How do we arrive at knowing what we know as students in our particular discipline?

Ontology refers to how we view ourselves in the world and in discussing it we would ask questions about our existence and origins. Think, for example, about how you view yourself as a student in higher education and studying a particular discipline (law, education or engineering, etc.) and how this has come about. McMillan deals extensively with this aspect in Chapter 2 of this book. She asks us to question who we are in relation to the world and to others while learning to serve and learning about service learning. This is further taken up by Daniels in Chapter 8 and we encourage you to explore it in depth with your lecturers.

We repeat that we have to actively choose between service learning as charity and service learning as social change. Social change refers to a process in which role players in society (individually or in groups) work with people who are closely affected by underlying social problems to find ways of addressing these problems. This can take place on local community level but can also be a national or international movement. Social change is closely aligned with a social justice agenda where the aim is to work towards a society in which individuals and groups are accorded equality in treatment and where there is a just share of opportunities and benefits in society. Thus, in this book on service learning, we make the choice for social change above the practice of **philanthropy** or rendering charitable service to others.

Let us take our exploration of charity vs. social change in service learning a little further. The use of service learning as a form of charity 'tames' this kind of learning as a potentially **transformative** critical pedagogy (Butin, 2005:1) so that it can no longer foster mindful and caring professionals. To our minds, a charitable paradigm creates what we would call a technical framework, conceptualisation and practice of service learning. In other words, service would become uncritical and formulaic; it becomes planning and working without thinking about a whole range of issues, such as the underlying causes for the need for your service. Manley, Buffy, Dube and Reed (2006:117) describe this kind of service learning as the 'soup kitchen model'.

epistemology the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods and with regard to how knowledge is validated

ontology deals with fundamental questions about existence; a systematic account of existence or the exploration of one's being

philanthropy practical goodwill towards people, especially charity on a large scale

transformative bringing about change

In a 'soup kitchen model' students enter the service relationship from a position of privilege where they remain in control, thereby endorsing, albeit sometimes unknowingly, unequal power relationships (Butin, 2003:8). The pedagogy of service learning is thus rendered purely technical or instrumental. Let us give an illustration of what we mean by this.

CASE STUDY

Take the situation where teacher education students offer tutoring services to learners at a school in the community they serve. An instrumental view of service will be when students provide a service which is no more than a means of improving the learners' test scores, without interrogating underlying issues for their need of tutoring. Students may fail to take factors such as the following into consideration: the physical resources of the school, the value the community attaches to schooling, the role of the teachers, whether parents are sufficiently literate to help their children, the availability of resources such as textbooks, the chores learners have to do after school like looking after younger siblings.

TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

Pick a school subject in which you could tutor a learner from your community and reflect on how to approach this service by asking yourself the following questions:

- What resources are necessary to teach the subject?
- Suppose these resources are unavailable, what could you possibly do to compensate for this?
- What questions would you ask the learner to get a full picture of learning needs?
- What questions would you ask your learner's parents in order to make decisions about your approach?
- What other information do you think you will need to help you in planning your tutoring approach?

For example:

You have good mathematical skills and have to focus on measuring angles. The school does not have protractors, but you use the photocopier in the university library to transfer an image of yours onto a transparency and cut it out for your learner's use. You can ask questions about what your learner likes or dislikes about mathematics. You can ask the parents what aspects of mathematics they use in their work that may make the reason for measuring angles relevant to their child.

In legal studies going beyond the technical and instrumental could include prompting students to think about how certain groups in society are not always given the same consideration as other groups with respect to the rule of law. Look at, for example, how homeless or **indigent** people or poverty-stricken communities are treated in comparison to more affluent individuals or communities. We believe that critical social and educational theories can help cultivate students who are aware of how society is shaped by social, political and cultural systems and how these systems affect them as professionals (teachers, lawyers, health workers, social workers, etc.). To our minds this is what Erasmus (2013:37) argues for in her assertion that community-based service learning plays a vital role in preparing students to be constructive professional participants committed to engage with local communities and other stakeholders in new and robust ways in order to serve the future needs of our country.

An instrumental or technical conception of service learning creates conditions under which we as higher education students could remain within a 'comfort zone' from where we safely practise the skills associated with our disciplines. Our learning may remain inadequate, insufficient and too one-sided to help us to prepare properly for the challenges of our fields. Moreover, it may prevent us from recognising hegemonic social structures and practices. Gramsci (1971) discusses the concept of **hegemony** and how power is maintained in society. It is through hegemonic relations that one group in society can promote a particular way of doing as if it is common sense or part of the natural order, and thus as if it cannot be questioned by other groups. In this way unequal structures are reinforced (intentionally or unintentionally) and people often do not even realise that they are being oppressed.

In advocating a form of service learning that has social change in mind, we are careful not to say that other forms of service learning are unacceptable for the field and for the growth of service learning in higher education. In putting together this book we realised that there is no one way of practising service learning in the variety of disciplines into which it is increasingly being integrated. Many lecturers new to service learning may also begin to operate somewhere between service learning as charity and service learning as social change and it would be remiss of us not to acknowledge that there appears to be a hybrid (blended or mixed) practice of service learning in South African higher education. This is normal in a movement so young and you may also see different forms of service learning reflected in the various chapters in this book.

However, like many of the authors you will read in the following chapters, we want to encourage you to think critically about the particular stance adopted in the service-learning practice or practices you will encounter by clearly explaining the range of possibilities to you and by using ourselves and the frames we use as examples. In situating

indigent poor

hegemony a situation where one group exercises social, cultural or political domination over another group, or over other groups; an unequal power relationship

ourselves within the camp of service learning as social change we are proposing seeing service learning as a transformative pedagogy. We would like you to think about how power and social injustice link up with higher education. Service learning can only be considered transformative if there is a fundamental shift away from conceptualisation and learning that are disconnected from the challenges of everyday issues in society. This is why Erasmus (2005), for example, argues for expanded frameworks and different methods for doing research in service learning in South Africa. Smith-Tolken (2011), who draws on the work of Barnett and Coates, also argues for a university curriculum that engages with non-academic communities to help develop students as individuals, as professionals and as citizens. We believe that it is incumbent upon you and your lecturers to think carefully about how your disciplinary focus is connected with the issues facing society (poverty, unemployment, HIV/Aids, etc.). So, as a student in a service-learning course in, for example, the health sciences, in law, in engineering, in social work or in education you will have to think about how these issues will affect you in your future professional role. We believe that service learning with an eye to social change can open up a space where students are not simply socialised into the dominant hegemonic practices of their disciplinary field.

TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

Answer the following questions relating to the concept of hegemony.

- Define the concept 'hegemony' in your own words.
- Can you think of a few hegemonic practices that operate in your disciplinary field?
- Discuss these issues with your lecturer and peers in the class. How have these practices come about and how are they perpetuated?
- Can you find ways of addressing some of these issues through service learning in order to counter their negative effects?

We also believe that service learning as social change has the potential to direct students' transformative learning experiences. However, this form of service learning, framed by critical educational and social theories, may be unsettling for lecturers and as such is still growing in the general service-learning literature. On this note, Cooks, Scharrer and Paredes (2004) indicate that service-learning scholarship on the whole does not focus on promoting a more critical pedagogy. For instance a critical view of service learning would ask of you to question the extent to which your service 'supports and undermines notions of teaching, learning, self and otherness' (Butin, 2003:8).

The idea of **othering** is a complex concept. Let us try to unpack it. Our South African society has a long history of particular groups of people othering different groups of people on the basis of aspects such as race and language. On a very simple level we can think about othering in the following way: when we decide where we belong we tend to identify with a group of people who are most like *us*, who ascribe to practices and ideas similar to ours, ideas that we are familiar with and that makes us feel good about ourselves. This familiarity can be based on race, gender, sexuality, language or even our country of origin. When we think of people whom we see as *other* this usually refers to those who are very different from us. We often tend to see weaknesses or faults in *them*, the others, to make us look better, or to place us on a higher level. Thus, othering often happens when a more powerful or influential group dominates and subjugates another group. In promoting a more critical stance for understanding what occurs in service learning we hope that as students you may begin to see that how you construct your identity (and that of others), is not neutral but is influenced by a host of intersecting issues, one of which is power.

othering the process of asserting positive identity by stigmatising what is different or 'other'; the process by which societies or groups excludes those they want to subordinate; viewing people as belonging to either the group referred to as *us* (people who are the same) or to the group referred to as *them* (people who are different)

TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

Reflect on the concept of othering by asking yourself these questions:

- Can you think of examples from your life where you have been party to othering?
- Do you consider yourself as belonging to a group or groups that are considered 'other' in society?
- On what basis did othering happen in the situations you have described?

It is sometimes hard for both lecturers and students in higher education to accept this form of teaching and learning, especially as service learning is very different from the kind of teaching and learning to which we are generally accustomed. Traditionally, the lecturer is viewed as the expert who helps students learn the disciplinary knowledge through lectures, tutorials, laboratory work and practica. Service learning can disrupt and destabilise these traditional roles of 'lecturer' and 'student'. Service learning makes us aware that the lecturer is not the only expert who has something to contribute to students' education. It also means that we, as students, must be open to see others, sometimes less formally educated community members, as knowledgeable enough to learn from through service exchanges. We must also be prepared to take an active stance in your own learning through service and experience. In fact, this kind of pedagogy with its critical stance calls into question the very notion of

service; it asks us to think about what it means for us as students when we 'serve' in service learning.

IN OTHER WORDS

Service learning also forces intensive and on-going deliberation about who is 'serving' and who is 'being served' in the service relationship.

This issue is taken up in great detail in Chapter 2 by McMillan, so we urge you to reflect critically on this aspect when you get to the next chapter and to perhaps come back to reread this section once you have done so.

The value of critical social and educational theories for service-learning practice

There are several ways in which critical social and educational theories can sharpen the practice of service learning in South Africa. Critical theories arose in response to theories which mainly focused on explaining the world as if knowledge could be derived from self-evident truths, that is, as if knowledge simply mirrored reality. **Critical social theories** provide a basis for social enquiry and are aimed at investigating what occurs below the surface in communities and societies. As part of this process these theories help to expose the ideas, beliefs and assumptions that keep us from understanding how the world we live in is shaped and works. Critical theories are aimed at more than just understanding, they also strive to change society.

Historically critical theory can be traced to the work of sociologists at the University of Frankfurt in Germany who referred to themselves as the Frankfurt School. These sociologists included Jurgen Habermas, Herbert Marcuse, Walter Benjamin, Max Horkheimer, and Theodor Adorno.

We can, however, also expand the category of critical theory to include many other theories besides social theories that explain and work towards transforming the factors that play a role in subjugating people. Some of these theories are postcolonial theory, critical language studies, race and ethnicity studies, feminism, and gender studies, to name a few. However, McLean (2006:8) contends that, despite the differences between critical theorists, 'there is a common dual commitment to critiquing current conditions and to propelling action towards future emancipation and social justice'. Slamet (2009), in turn, argues that struggle for a more just and free society is ongoing so that critical theories do not offer final solutions, but that they do offer opportunities for critique against existing unequal social relationships and can be a force for social change in this way.

critical social theory a type of social theory which aims to change society through uncovering the hidden assumptions keeping us from understanding the world; theory seeking to promote critical thinking as part of knowledge-making

IN BRIEF

One of the valuable contributions of critical theories to higher education is that it provides alternative lenses for lecturers to view the dominant processes and configurations in society generally and in higher education in particular. We are allowed to assess inequitable practices and structures that produce and maintain oppression in higher education and other institutions (such as, courts of law, hospitals) and structures (the operation and funding of civil societies and non-governmental organisations) in society at large.

The value of critical theories as frame for service learning is taken up by Doria Daniels in Chapter 8 and she explores the opportunity that a service-learning module creates to engage higher education students as active participants in their own education and in that of adult learners in the adult basic education and training band. Daniels works from within transformational theory as framework for her module. In other fields or disciplines critical enquiry could take a variety of different formats. For instance, in the context of health-care education this could mean that students will, through their service experiences, begin to interrogate the way in which health services are provided in rural and urban areas or to formal and informal settlements. They could question how resources may sometimes be allocated differently in these contexts, and examine the impact this has on the communities they are meant to serve. Theories that also bear specifically on the disciplinary area could also be used to focus attention effectively on these aspects.

Next, through critical social and educational theories as the frame for service learning we are made aware of the fact that we should question whether higher education could be seen as the main gatekeeper of socially valuable knowledge and we are allowed to explore how power operates in education, service and society. These theories allow us to evaluate the situation in higher education where a gatekeeper (teacher, professor, researcher) may decide what is desirable for students to learn and what is not. As such, critical theories do not only challenge the accepted definitions of knowledge, but also challenge the traditionally accepted discourses and practices in the various fields in higher education. This relates directly to recognising the role and place of indigenous knowledge, knowledge which is sometimes only accessible via community members, in the curriculum. In Chapter 3, the authors explain the different types of gatekeepers we will encounter in service situations and how we should approach them in gaining access to communities and the knowledge we need in our service-learning endeavours.

Further reading:

There are many writers and thinkers who deal with this in the literature and sometimes lecturers in a discipline will use one or more in combination with each other. You may already have been introduced to some of these theories in your particular discipline. A few of the writers we often refer to in the context of higher education are Apple (1995), Brookfield (1987, 2000), Carlson (1996), Freire (1970, 1972), Giroux (1992), Hooks (1994), Kincheloe and Steinberg (1996) and McClaren (1989). The critical work of Apple, for example, examines the relationship between culture and power in education and looks at the democratisation of educational policy and practice.

Taking in a critical stance in society and education means taking up the challenge to both critique and change unequal practices related to knowledge emerging from different contexts and practices. As a result we are challenged to go beyond a mere understanding of practices to changing them in a way that transforms the context in which they are situated. Together with Apple (1995) we should realise that higher education and the education of professionals in society are connected with the material realities of ordinary peoples' lives. Again we can refer to Chapter 8 which points out how students' attitudes change when they are encouraged to examine the material aspects of the lives of the community they serve and come to understand how it affects them. In an earlier chapter, Van Dyk and Du Plessis tell about how student social workers addressed the problem of refugee women being unable to attend English literacy classes aimed at integrating them more successfully into their new society. Once the students understood that the reason for the refugee women's absences was that these women did not have anyone to take care of their children during class time, they could address the problem of integration by doing recreational work with the children during these times.

In the next section we focus on some factors regarding the implementation of service learning in higher education.

Epistemological positioning and approaches to service learning in higher education

A clarification of underlying epistemological issues related to service learning is an important first step in theorising, implementing and researching this pedagogy in higher education, as it relates directly to the nature and form of service learning utilised. We will distinguish between two different types of service-learning modules or courses, namely, service-oriented and content-oriented modules and point out how these two types relate to knowledge issues.

Service-oriented service-learning modules

Morton (1996) distinguishes between two basic forms of service learning, namely service-oriented modules and content-oriented modules. Service-oriented modules are devised to engage students in service while supporting their reflection for learning from the service activity, thus recognising that students can transform their service experiences into usable knowledge through various forms of reflection (Morton, 1996). The underlying epistemological position here is thus the belief that students' experiences are central to their learning. This stance also acknowledges and validates the fact that students are *active* contributors

to their own learning and thus to the process of knowledge production. Chapter 3 by Du Plessis and Van Dyk looks at service learning in this way and they emphasise the fact that students should allow themselves to be guided by the knowledge and expertise from communities in the process of service learning learners. This then leads to a *sharing* of knowledge where both student and community experiences contribute to knowledge production. Or, in other words, there is a co-construction of the services offered by students to meet the needs of a particular community. This is very unlike traditional models of learning in which knowledge is learnt in the university context and then applied to a community setting. Service-oriented service-learning modules thus often require an epistemological shift for all partners. These shifts force us to scrutinise fundamental values, beliefs and practices about knowledge within higher education institutions, they challenge assumptions about who we are as lecturers, what we think is worth knowing and what part students play in their learning.

In service-oriented modules the politics of difference and the struggle over legitimate knowledge are foregrounded. As students and lecturers in higher education we must thus engage with issues of knowledge and power in our various disciplines.

TAKE NOTE

The academy or university is thus not only an environment which defines and constructs knowledge, but one which examines and engages with knowledge created in other sites of practice, such as in community settings where students offer their services. It creates the space to recognise and include knowledge generated outside the academic institution.

In many ways it creates a crossroad for different traditions of knowledge emerging from different contexts such as from within communities and from within various university disciplines. It allows us to appreciate the **contested** nature of knowledge and to realise that 'all knowledge is constructed and the knower is an intimate part of the known' (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986:137). This is why, in Chapter 3, Du Plessis and Van Dyk argue for a person-centred approach to engagement practices so that service learning can change from service to others or making decisions on behalf of others towards learning and serving together with all involved.

Such forms of service learning enable us to call into question **dichotomies** between theory and practice, academic and experiential, or universal and situated knowledge. This critical framing may be one way of overcoming the dichotomies that govern the lives of students and academics, or universities and communities, because it challenges us to

contested when there is debate or a difference of opinion over an issue it is contested

dichotomy a division into two parts that are usually contradictory or which oppose each other sharply

consider alternative ways of knowing, being and acting. McMillan takes this up in detail in Chapter 2 of this book when she draws on Barnett and Cole's notions of being, ontology and engagement in learning to serve.

Content-oriented service-learning modules

A second form of service learning is content-oriented modules. Such modules are mainly designed to help students reach discipline- and content-specific outcomes. In other words, service learning is used to assist students to reach set disciplinary or content outcomes. We feel that we should guard against this practice in implementing service learning.

Such an approach risks downgrading service learning to the level of yet another method of teaching in higher education. It then becomes simply another item on a menu of options alongside lecturing, case studies, demonstrations, and so forth. Lecturers who are accustomed to a deductive, content-based approach, may appropriate service learning purely as pedagogy for teaching disciplinary content better, without a clear understanding of service learning as an 'inductive, process-based' pedagogy (Morton, 1996:279) in which the voice and the experience of students are central to the process of learning or meaning-making. This is one of the challenges Stanton and Erasmus (2013) allude to in their description of the evolution of service learning in South Africa.

Such a conception and practice of service learning may make lecturers and students alike view learning as a simple process of implementing a set of skills or a recipe of ideas in another context, and the community will be seen as a laboratory in which to practise or apply disciplinary knowledge. While we are in agreement with many scholars that the main task of higher education is to educate students towards some form of career or academic knowledge, we question the extent to which learning discrete packages of neatly compartmentalised disciplinary content knowledge equips students for life, allow them to make a contribution to society or to develop into critical, responsible citizens.

If service learning is practised in this way, that is, simply as pedagogy for learning disciplinary content knowledge better, then it appears as though we are saying that education and academic knowledge and social problems are completely separate matters. This can, in fact, encourage students to extract from service-learning experiences only those aspects which are of value to the study of disciplinary content knowledge, without taking into consideration other issues that make an impact on the community and the service rendered. In turn, the notions of reciprocity in service learning and entering the community with a person-centred approach are then at risk of being sidelined or even ignored completely so that the value of service is diminished. In addition, your reflections on

your learning may be undervalued and the potential for students to learn from their own experiences may thus be diminished. It is important to remember that as students in service learning we do not learn by simply offering our service in communities; the real learning takes place when we reflect on those experiences. When you engage with the cases in this book, look carefully at how each discipline encourages students to reflect on their experiences in service learning. There are many models of reflection, and we do not prescribe any particular model in this book. However you are encouraged to explore how the cases may address this issue directly or indirectly and how they explain the different ways in which students are encouraged to think about or reflect on their service and their learning.

Because a purely content-oriented approach to service learning severs the connection between education and wider societal issues it could prevent students from becoming critical, transformative thinkers and agents. Service learning practised and theorised about in this manner, stops short of being liberatory; it is, in effect, a sanitised, neutral, value-free pedagogy and, in our view, this is contrary to the aims of early champions in the field of service learning.

Many of the ideas we have discussed above are also subjects for debate in education. In the following section we outline some of the areas of contestation and challenge and ask you to think about how these ideas affect students and lecturers in their particular discipline in higher education.

Possible challenges to a critical framework for service learning in higher education

Despite the advantages for critical educational theories for higher education, and their transformative influence on the pedagogy of service learning, there are a number of levels on which they are most likely to be met with resistance. These areas of resistance are probable reasons why these frameworks have been somewhat neglected in the service-learning literature. The levels include the following:

- Politics.
- Pedagogy and classroom practice.
- Student learning.

We will explain each of these below, but it must be taken into account that there is a closely bound relationship between each of the elements and that there may thus be overlaps in the discussions.

Essential reading:

Stanton, Giles & Cruz (1999) relate the stories of early champions for service learning. We encourage you strongly to read and engage with this text as it is a critical starting point for any educator, researcher, service-learning administrator or student new to service learning. The Higher Education Quality Committee service-learning guides are also invaluable reading in our South African context and they can be found on <<http://www.che.ac.za/documents>>. Look at *Service-learning in the curriculum: A resource for higher education institutions* (Bender et al., 2006), the Council on Higher Education (2010) and the Kagisano issue number 6: Community engagement in South African higher education. You can also refer to the special issues of journals such as *Education as Change* (2007) and *Acta Academica* (2005). They are available on the journal sites free of charge.

discourse term used to refer to practices which can produce, change or keep meanings in place

The level of politics

Firstly, it is on the level of politics that a critical framework for higher education and service learning is considered 'dangerous' (Butin, 2005). It is in this academic space that such a framework comes into direct confrontation with the dominant **discourses** (language, texts and interactions) and practices which operate in the broader higher education sphere. The history of higher education institutions, their division into distinct departments and disciplinary areas (faculties or schools) and the way in which power is distributed indicate that certain sectors, groups or individuals often enjoy more prestige and thus more knowledge and power than others (Moore, 1990). This is a perfect example of what we mean by gatekeeping in higher education. Inherent in this organisational arrangement is the fact that the power of transferring knowledge to others and judging the extent to which the recipients have mastered it also resides with certain groups of people, usually academics, and communities are often perceived by these groups of people as having very little to contribute. Of course this sentiment is stronger in some disciplines than in others.

Clearly, the infusion of service learning framed by critical theories into higher education has the potential to change prevailing discourses in the higher education sphere. It questions the legitimacy of the knowledge and power claims of traditional views of education. Service learning framed by critical theories dispels the view that lecturers only are knowledgeable about what students need to learn, but it creates the conditions for students to learn from each other as well as from members of the community where they serve. For example, in a health education context students who learn only about pharmaceutical remedies may be exposed to effective traditional herbal medicines passed down by many generations of caregivers in a particular community.

Most importantly, it removes students from the inferior position of operating mainly as users of knowledge and places them in the position where they become creators and co-creators of knowledge. It prompts students to become 'active agents in constructing new kinds of knowledge and relationships' (Hayes & Cuban, 1997:78). It thus allows participants (teachers, students and community members) the influence to define and produce knowledge according to the social, historical and cultural contexts in which they find themselves (Tierney, 1996). Service learning theorised and practised in this way is 'politically dangerous for faculty' as it may go against the grain of accepted practices in higher education (Butin, 2005:1). As this kind of learning operates in opposition to many prevailing pedagogical practices it may impact on the conventional ways in which academics get recognised for the work they do in higher education.

Further reading:

To learn more about the debates about knowledge creation, consult Dewey (1924), Moore (1990), Morton (1996) and Shor (1992).

Pedagogy and classroom practice

Butin (2005:2) maintains that service learning is 'pedagogically dangerous because it is a practical example of a "de-centred mode of teaching"'. This statement clearly operates on the level of pedagogy and classroom practice. Service learning which is based on critical theories implies a shift away from the traditional centre of education. In other words, service learning practised in this way may shift the boundaries that traditionally define who is powerful and knowledgeable and who is powerless and knowledge-less in the educational relationship. It challenges the dominance of 'teacher talk' and control over students, and how knowledge is portrayed in the prescribed syllabus. It opens up possibilities for others (students and communities alike) to have input in the syllabus and in the education of professionals. The service-learning course in health sciences described in Chapter 6 is an illustration of this shift in boundaries. The course was developed from the input of three partners: the community, the services and the academics. Through a collaborative process of identifying important issues and together determining an implementation strategy the academic partner, community partner and service partner were all involved in the development and facilitation of the module.

TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

Reread the sections dealing with the resistance to service learning on the levels of politics and pedagogy.

Then discuss the following questions in small groups before reporting back to the class as a whole:

- How do academics in your field of study regard communities and the possible contribution they can make to the field of study?
- How do you think communities can contribute to learning in your particular discipline?
- If you reflect on your service-learning experience, who are defined as powerful and knowledgeable enough to make decisions about the curriculum?
- What role are students assigned in your service-learning course with regard to decisions about the curriculum?

The higher education student's learning in service learning

Finally, it is at the level of learning itself that service learning unseats dominant beliefs among students and lecturers in academia.

An integral part of service learning is that students learn *through* and *from* experience. The format, structure and nature of learning from experience are of particular importance. One of the critiques in the service-learning literature is the danger of *individual* student reflection on the service experience which is seen as an inadequate and one-sided form of learning (Cooks et al. 2004). This warning comes from service-learning practitioners themselves who believe that this constrains, and may even prevent, students' critique of the inequitable relationships in the service activity, at the service site and in society in general.

The fact that individual reflection risks being unpolitical and uncritical is borne out by some of our early experiences in service learning. Such learning often does become a solitary, linear, highly structured process. Divorced from the *cooperative* nature and critical processes of learning in service learning, students are not challenged about their already established thinking patterns and are never really prompted to think beyond their initial viewpoints. Our example is drawn from a project where a student offered her services at a home for families affected by HIV and Aids. In her reflections the student represents herself as a 'good person' for whom 'HIV/Aids is associated with promiscuous sexual behaviour' (Reflective diary, 2005). The diary notes testify to a rather judgmental attitude towards those living with the disease and there seems to be little understanding of its wider social ramifications. Reflective interactions with other students looking at the disease in a different way would have prompted her to re-think her ideas. She may have deepened her own learning by considering how poverty, gender socialisation and power can play a role in HIV/Aids infections. This is why we urge you to examine the case studies in this book attentively. Assess how they encourage your reflections and what value or limitations there are to the methods used.

The way in which reflection activities are constructed directly influences how students learn in service learning. So, when reflection on experience is constricted by set boundaries, it risks remaining on a technical level (Taggart & Wilson, 1998). Technical level reflections mostly produce students who are concerned with meeting short-term goals, such as achieving lesson outcomes and acquiring skills without due consideration of the context. Examples of this kind of reflection include basic descriptions and a focus on behaviour, content and skills in the context where service is offered. This may prevent students from recognising and addressing the unequal power relations in their interactions as 'server' with the 'served' (Boyte in Cooks et al. 2004).

Robinson (2000:147) points out that adopting a more politicised or critical model of service learning provides transformational learning experiences when students intentionally think about others and the

conditions of their lives during the course of the service learning relationship. We believe that such a model will broaden and optimise the scale, scope and complexity of student learning from experience during service. We contend that more politicised and critical forms of reflections will allow students to realise how their learning is linked to community concerns. Such forms of reflection will counter the kind of learning that is about the mere acquisition of information 'isolated from the subject matter of life-experience', incapable of influencing the 'formation of a social disposition ... [thus] creating egoistic specialists' (Dewey, 1924:10).

Gamson (1997:11) makes the valid point that lecturers in higher education should be more aware of the benefit of learning in community groups where learning is often more 'problem-centred' and 'mission-oriented' than purely academic learning. What happens in a truly reciprocal service-learning context where there is awareness of the political issues at stake is that the requirements of the community together with the abilities and inclination of the student group determine the need for action and therefore establish the kinds of learning that will occur. What we are suggesting is an ideal, and you may find that in many of the cases in this book the authors will engage with this issue. However, it must be noted that not every service-learning course or project may be at the stage where real reciprocity happens, and this is also reflected in the discussions in this book. Some are only at the beginning stages of establishing reciprocity with community partners while others may already be working in a mutually beneficial way. Working towards reciprocity in service learning is like a particularly long road trip towards a destination and it should include careful planning and progress in manageable stages. It is often only through prolonged engagement with communities and the adoption of a suitable framework for service learning that we can begin to work together with the community in ways that are truly mutually reciprocal. We hope that the proposal for a particular framework enables you to grow towards reciprocity in your thinking and actions as a higher education student engaging in service learning.

Reciprocity can be achieved through reflection on experience moving towards a contextual level and eventually to a dialectical level (Taggart & Wilson, 1998). On a contextual level reflection from experience involves much more than simple reports and an emphasis on issues of content and skills in the service situation. Instead students begin to view the service relationship differently and are more able to confront their personal prejudices and world-views, examine the full circumstances of situations and question pedagogical practices (Taggart & Wilson, 1998).

dialectical relates to the enquiry into the existence or action of opposing social forces

On a **dialectical** level we are prompted to take cognisance of issues of 'equality, emancipation, caring and justice' (Taggart & Wilson, 1998:5) with respect to enacting their disciplinary curricula and planning and implementing service activities. More importantly, our reflecting on experience at a dialectical level enables us to explore and question the value of various knowledge systems in relation to one another, consider moral and ethical issues in teaching, learning and service, and, finally, to interrogate our assumptions about these issues (Taggart & Wilson, 1998).

We illustrate what dialectical level reflections may prompt with an example from a student's reflective notes in a service-learning course in entrepreneurship training.

CASE STUDY

Dialectical level reflection

A student with a commerce degree offered his services to a group of women at a sewing project located in inner city Johannesburg. The women had been retrenched from the formal garment industry, but their sewing skills helped them earn an income by being involved in this particular project. Below are some of the ideas he noted down in his reflection dairy in 2005.

The student described the women's 'reticence to trust him and work with him' when he first met them, but he also remarked that it was 'understandably so'. He described his interactions with two groups in detail and noted down that the women first saw him as an 'outsider'. He understood that this was part of the process of gaining their trust and acceptance. (It is striking that he did not expect to be accepted immediately on the merits of being a university student with a degree in commerce.) The women allowed him to make a presentation to them first and he felt he was being 'evaluated for the extent of his knowledge'.

The entrepreneurship consultancy acting in the capacity of service provider made it clear that they wanted him to steer clear of business issues in his interaction with the women and that he had to concentrate on a life skills training programme. Although he believed the women needed assistance with marketing more than anything else he tried to work within the guidelines of the consultant. Soon after the start of his service, though, the women specifically began asking questions related to business issues and because of his reluctance to disobey instructions he 'answered [their questions] with generalities'. This caused him concern and he wrote: 'I felt strongly that I was protecting the wrong people and not serving the right people'. Finally he let his services be determined by the requests of the women whom he felt to be the recipients of his service. He discussed his concerns and new plan of action with the service provider and was allowed to address issues such as 'types of markets, profit margins, quality control in maintaining orders and developing a good reputation in the market they were servicing' with the women.

TAKE TIME TO REFLECT

After you have read the case study above, answer the following questions.

- Discuss the concept of collaboration in service learning with reference to the case study.
- In what way does the case study illustrate that reflection in service learning can interrogate issues of 'equality, emancipation, caring and justice' as Taggart and Wilson (1998:5) claim it to do?
- Did reflection in this case study go beyond mere interrogation? Explain your answer.

With this we come to the issue of service learning as border crossing, which we will discuss in some detail.

Service learning as 'border crossing'

In this section we use the **metaphors** of 'borders' and 'border crossing' as applied to service learning as a **heuristic**, or thinking device, for projecting how educational theory and practice can be re-structured and re-characterised. In this section we draw on the work of Anzaldúa (1987) who describes herself with words that are generally associated with those on the border of society: '**Chicana**', '**tejana**', 'lesbian', 'dyke', 'feminist', 'writer', 'poet' and 'cultural theorist' in her work. The daughter of farm workers in the United States of America, she came to realise that Spanish speakers, like herself, existed on the margins in her country. This realisation led to her experimentation in writing, and she writes particularly about social justice issues. It is from her work that we borrow the metaphors of borders to illustrate some aspects of service learning:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish *us* from *them*. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip, along a steep edge. A **borderland** is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and the forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulato, the half-breed, the half-dead; in short those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the 'normal' (Anzaldúa, 1987:3).

Service learning is generally viewed to be able to reframe the borders or boundaries of the higher education classroom where learning traditionally occurs, to include the community where you enact your service. However, as we have already discussed, the kind of models and frameworks we advocate for service learning asks of you as students not only to cross the *physical* borders of the university classroom but also to

metaphor describing something in a way that is imaginatively but not literally applicable to it

heuristic a process or method allowing or assisting to discover

Chicana Mexican-American woman (Chicano is the male form)

Tejana Texan woman (*tejano* is the male form)

borderland the 'dictionary meanings' of the word are: the district near a border; a condition lying between two extremes; an area for debate

los atravesados those who traverse or cross over

Chicano and tejano:
The following citation describes the political and social fluidity of borders and identity in Anzaldúa's (1987:85) writing: 'When not copping out, when we know we are more than nothing, we call ourselves Mexican, referring to race and ancestry; *meztizo* when affirming both our Indian and Spanish (but we hardly ever own our Black ancestry); Chicano when referring to a politically aware people born and/or raised in the U.S.;... *tejanos* when we are Chicanos from Texas.'

cross *social* borders and borders of *identity* in your relationships with community members, and thus in your learning. It is an invitation to lecturers, students and community members to cross the borders of the traditional; to recognise and embrace a different type of learning in service learning, one in which thought, identity and culture are interwoven. It thus compels a broader conceptualisation of the process of learning and the situation in which learning occurs. It also focuses awareness on the non-linear, un-structured process of learning in service learning and highlights the tensions that arise in the uncertainty and intricacy of the emerging learning experiences. Lastly, it highlights the nature of learning as a process of engaging in critical thought and discussion about the construction of knowledge. We have already addressed some of these issues in earlier sections of this chapter.

Service learning framed by critical educational (and social) theories also asks lecturers, students and community members to see the links between the process of learning and the location in which it takes place. In the language of borders and border crossing, it is an invitation to us to cross the borders that want to confine our viewing of knowledge as static and bounded; a pre-determined body of information to be acquired. Instead, knowledge is recast as incomplete, in a state of flux, as contested terrain, continually being created and recreated by students as actors in response to new ideas and experience (Hayes & Cuban, 1997). It thus promotes the legitimacy of what Giroux (1993) refers to as 'border knowledge', that is, knowledge that falls outside of the norm, knowledge which is generated by those individuals considered to be on society's margins and most influenced by such issues as class, race, gender, sexual orientation, the spectre of HIV/Aids. As a result, it compels all of us to recognise the authority, authenticity and validity of border knowledge as a form of **cultural capital** worthy of exchange in higher education (McClaren, 1995:126). In other words, it asks us to become aware of the fact that sources and forms of knowledge that are generated outside the traditional academic forms, that is outside the context of textbooks and journal articles, can also be considered valid forms of knowledge. In addition, it teaches us that it is acceptable to draw on such knowledge as resources in our studies. In service learning courses students will often be assessed on how they interweave their service experiences with academic content knowledge in articulating what they have learnt.

This view of service learning as learning allowing border crossing ultimately requires of lecturers to cross often deeply entrenched boundaries in higher education. It necessitates an articulation of underlying epistemological positions and lecturers have to specify the purpose for utilising service learning. Next, it requires us to rethink the boundaries we create around the practice of service learning by locating it in solitary

cultural capital any non-financial asset, such as education or intellect, that may make it easier for individuals to advance in life beyond

disciplinary areas. Moreover, it also requires an interrogation of underlying issues of control in academia, both at the level of individual actions of academics and in terms of rating systems for disciplines. The power relations governing what disciplines are regarded as more academic or more scientific work and the authority of texts in particular disciplines must be recognised.

We contend that service learning framed by critical educational and social theories allow teachers and students, in interaction with community members (and other disciplinary experts) to create new borderlands (Anzaldúa, 1987 and Giroux, 1992) in which to think and learn. Both lecturers and students are prompted to view learning in these borderlands differently; it does not consist of transposing or applying existing knowledge to a new setting. Instead, we learn that in the borderland of service learning, our learning is essentially about interrogating traditionally accepted schemes of thinking, set interactions with others and how we define ourselves and others. Moreover, it is marked by the ability to 'compare the results of these interrogations with alternative ways of being and coming to know' (Giroux, 1993:75). Many lecturers in higher education applying service learning to their courses expressly want students to be able to recognise and understand the significance of border knowledge and its relationship to culture and identity. Physical, cultural and social borders, as well as borders of identity, thus have to be breached in service learning (by both lecturers and students). Service learning invites us to redefine who we as 'servers' are in relation to the 'served' and to help us recognise how boundaries continue to keep these two groups apart (Hayes & Cuban, 1997:76).

A more critical frame for service learning strives to disrupt the set patterns and borders sometimes associated with experiential curricula. It often happens that a lecturer starts off by setting rather clearly defined objectives for students' learning, followed by inputs of disciplinary knowledge. Students are then placed in the field with this framework in mind. A more critical framework for service learning should take cognisance of the fact that lecturers can no more structure the whole process than they can exercise complete control over students' learning. In other words, lecturers cannot fit students' experiences into a set place or fully anticipate what they will learn in their community engagements; they can at best help students to link what they learn through service learning with academic content.

When service learning is approached more critically there is a shift of borderlines regarding the conceptualisation of how learning from experience happens. It removes the autonomy of the lecturer as the sole person in determining and naming the formal theory, or texts, to be considered. The experience and voice of students become the key

Further reading:

Moore (1990) very aptly describes experiential learning curricula that try to blueprint, track out or structure students' experiences every step of the way.

factor in the creation of new knowledge. As students your experiences and voices become important sources of knowledge and are now regarded as 'additional text[s] of experience' that are just as valid as 'formal theory in course content' (Hayes & Cuban, 1997:77). These 'texts', arising from your experiences, are written during the progression of the module (Morton, 1996) and are then brought to the learning situation (including the classroom), as a 'resource' (Dewey, 1924:197) for interrogation and analysis, and possible integration with formal academic knowledge (Hayes & Cuban, 1997:77). Alternatively, your experiences could be regarded as a 'counter-text' to prevailing knowledge in prescribed published classroom texts (Pietrykowski in Hayes & Cuban, 1997:77). In other words, your experience may contradict what you have read in articles or textbooks and you may have to interrogate the differences between your experience in the community and textbook knowledge. Service learning thus promotes the legitimacy of 'border knowledge' as you are encouraged to view your service experiences as important and authentic as traditional **canons** of knowledge (Giroux, 1993:92). Borders of what is regarded as acceptable knowledge are thus expanded to include knowledge which cannot always be clearly defined and determined, or knowledge which is not written by authorities in a particular discipline.

canon in this context, texts, knowledge and theory regarded as authoritative and unquestionable

In closing this section, we would like you to be aware that you can also 'read' service experiences from a variety of viewpoints and compare these against what you have learnt in your formal academic classes (Morton, 1996). New borderlands which are in a 'constant state of transition' are created through varying experiences in service learning (Anzaldúa, 1987). As the types, contexts and circumstances of your service experiences change, your changing perspectives will provide you with enriched and expanded learning opportunities.

Conclusion

In this introductory chapter we started off by describing how service is a part of the policies in South African higher education and how it fits within the overarching frame of community engagement. We also clarified the term 'service learning' in relation to other terms in the field. We then suggested a broad theoretical framework for thinking about the practice of service learning and discussed positioning and approaches to service learning in higher education. In proposing a critical social and educational framework for service learning we presented arguments against the dominance of technical or instrumental approaches to the practice of service learning. To us, critical theory frameworks, from which service learning should draw, call into question the hierarchical and power-laden nature of the traditional educational process in which the lecturer defines the curriculum and the students learn the set

curriculum. Employing critical educational and social theories as lenses through which we view service learning can provide the impetus to move educational practitioners from simply criticising traditional approaches into action. Important elements of action would include addressing the issues of hierarchical relationships between students, teachers and community found within educational systems and institutions, and which are often critiqued by service learning scholars. Service learning has the potential to move the theorising of empowerment to 'concrete social interactions and application of theory' (Cooks et al. 2004:47). Much depends on what informs the thinking and positioning of lecturers and students in higher education and what role service learning plays in their thinking.

Thus, although service learning is considered to be a means of expanding the borders of traditional education and learning, academics who use service learning need to move beyond a superficial understanding of learning, knowledge and experience in higher education. It is for this reason that we emphasise the need for epistemological positioning and choosing a suitable approach to service learning in higher education. We presented two models for service learning (service-oriented and module-oriented) and presented arguments for choosing to locate ourselves in the camp of the service-oriented modules.

In a book of this nature which charts different disciplinary adoptions of service learning it is incumbent upon us to highlight possible challenges to a critical framework for service learning in higher education in which we have tried to address potential critiques. According to Butin (2005:9) it creates the space for learning to be the 'site of identity construction, destruction and reconstruction with profound consequences of how we view the definitions and boundaries of the teaching process'. In so doing, this form of service learning may encourage lecturers and students in higher education to address social injustice in education and in society. However, as this stance is often seen as against the grain of traditional university teaching many people may be disinclined to take up such a 'social activist bent' for service learning (Robinson, 2000:142). Lastly, we explained why we made use of the metaphor of border crossing in explaining student learning from experience. We placed particular emphasis on the format, structure and nature of learning from experience and integrated these ideas with the notion of borders and border crossing.

This chapter, together with the next two chapters, will serve as an orienting frame for the cases that follow. We encourage you to think about the ideas you have been exposed to in this chapter and read them in conjunction with all the others in the book and see if they can be applied to you and your studies in your discipline.

SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Here are some questions you can ask yourself after having read this chapter:

- Sketch the background to the integration of community engagement in South African higher education.
- Write short notes on how service learning differs from and relates to the terms community service, volunteerism, philanthropy and charity.
- Explain how experiential learning and service learning relate to one another.
- Differentiate between service-oriented and module-oriented forms of service learning.
- What are the gains of engaging in service on a dialectical level?
- List the challenges to adopting a critical framework for service learning in higher education and identify which apply to your discipline.
- Express your views on how the idea of service learning as 'border crossing' is relevant to you in your particular disciplinary area of study.

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