



Kagisano No. 6



# Community Engagement in South African Higher Education

January 2010

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# Editorial

The South African Council on Higher Education (CHE) is an independent statutory body responsible for advising the Minister of Higher Education and Training on all higher education policy issues, and for quality assurance in higher education and training.

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Community engagement is one of three core responsibilities of higher education, alongside research and teaching. In South Africa, despite clear policy mandates that community engagement is an important task, it has been neglected. Universities are involved in many activities structured around research, teaching and outreach that entail engagement with a wide range of communities, but these activities are uncoordinated and are the result of individual initiative, rather than of strategically planned, systematic endeavours.

The Council on Higher Education has been part of an ongoing conversation in the sector, about community engagement: what it is, what forms it takes, and how it is best undertaken. This volume is a contribution to those debates. It is the result of a colloquium which the CHE hosted in Pretoria in March 2009. At this colloquium, Professor Martin Hall presented his discussion paper, and Professor Loyiso Nongxa and Professor Johan Muller responded. Those attending the colloquium were invited to extend the debate, and Dr Jerome Slamat and Ms Judith Favish contributed further papers. These papers are collected here.

Professor Hall, in his paper *Community engagement in South African higher education*, argues that the lack of progress in implementing community engagement relates to a lack of conceptual clarity, and reflects a need for a better theorised understanding of community engagement. He points to an “epistemological disjunction” between community engagement and the way in which knowledge

is structured and organised in the course of the more traditional knowledge work of universities, but argues that this need not be so. Hall goes on to suggest that community engagement be viewed “as part of a set of public goods emanating from higher education” and that this places community engagement in the *third sector* – “that part of civil society located between the family, the state and the market.”

Hall’s suggestion is, however, criticised by Professor Nongxa, who argues in the second paper, *An (engaged) response to Hall’s paper: Community engagement in South African higher education*, that the third sector is “another opaque concept that itself needs further definition.” Nongxa proposes instead the framing of community engagement as *social responsiveness*, an “easier, elegant and accessible” term that is more widely understood and accepted. He also questions Hall’s focus on policy makers’ concerns and lack of engagement with higher education practitioners, suggesting that well-intentioned policy imperatives will not take root in institutions unless they speak to the “academic soul” and are consistent with the academic endeavour. Change in higher education, he argues, needs to be driven from the inside.

Nongxa also suggests that our understanding of community engagement will be enriched by looking “longitudinally back in time for how traditions and fashions arise” and that is exactly what Professor Muller does in the third paper, *Engagements with engagement: a response to Martin Hall*. He sketches the trajectory of the idea of engagement in South African higher education from the mid-1980s to the late 2000s, showing how it has changed, and illustrating the “indissolubly contextual nature of engagement.” Muller argues that universities should do what they do best – contribute powerful knowledge through established research activities. Active researchers, he points out, are likely to be “engaged in the public domain in one way or the other” and that such, more promising, engagements should be used to develop “a typology of engagement best practices that might suit the diversity of institutional and developmental contexts to be found in contemporary South Africa.”

The approach that Muller suggests is well illustrated by Ms Favish, who gives an account of how the University of Cape Town derived its understanding of social responsiveness, using a bottom-up approach. Her paper, *Towards developing a common discourse and a policy framework for social responsiveness at the University of Cape Town*, gives an account of the process followed, documenting “portraits of practice” of existing engagements between the university and other communities. Using colloquia and publishing a series of social responsiveness reports, Favish and her colleagues engaged the institution in a process of conceptualising social responsiveness. This process culminated in a conceptual framework which “acknowledges the interconnectedness between social engagement and the other core activities of the university” without being exclusionary.

Dr Slamat echoes Nongxa’s concerns about the value of the third sector in the final paper *Community engagement as scholarship: a response to Hall*, calling the third sector an “equally obscure concept” and pointing out that all four of Hall’s recommendations are premised on this idea. Slamat believes that a common definition for community engagement is possible, but that it should not be the starting point. Rather it is “something to work towards through a deliberative process.” He believes that community engagement needs to overcome its association with the “legislation that initiated the restructuring of higher education” and that this is best done by focusing on how community engagement can advance scholarship. He argues that “community engagement should help the university to perform its core functions in a more meaningful way.”

The views expressed overlap and intersect in interesting ways. The terms community engagement and social responsiveness are both used by these authors and there is wide disagreement about the need to define terms. Hall seeks a common definition of terms, Nongxa thinks such a quest is unnecessary and Muller suggests that it is impossible. Slamat thinks a common definition might be possible, but not as a starting point, and Favish illustrates a practical way of arriving at a working definition. The authors find greater commonality in

discussing the centrality of knowledge generation to the work of universities, and the importance of understanding the relationship of community engagement to these activities.

The goal of the Council on Higher Education is to increase understanding of the role of universities, and the unique contributions that higher education makes to individuals and to society. It is hoped that this publication will assist in widening these debates to others in the sector and that this in time will facilitate the development of community engagement activities that enrich the work of universities, the experiences of students and the lives of a wide range of communities.

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# Community engagement in South African higher education

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## Introduction

The objective of this paper is to bring together perspectives on community engagement in South African Higher Education in order to assist the National Research Foundation (NRF) in drawing up a programme for funding research in this area, to inform the further development of the Council on Higher Education's (CHE) quality evaluation criteria for community engagement, and to contribute to the CHE's advice to the Minister of Education on the appropriate place of community engagement in the national Higher Education system.

In shaping this enquiry, there are immediately apparent questions of scope and definition, such as what is meant by community, forms of knowledge transfer, the role of service learning and the relationship between community engagement on the one hand, and public higher education in the context of the developmental state, on the other. But there is also a simpler, and more puzzling, question. Community engagement is one of the three founding principles (along with teaching and research) of the post-apartheid reconstruction of South African

Higher Education system, clearly captured in the 1997 White Paper on Higher Education. This was reviewed and affirmed as a priority in a series of comprehensive policy positions, and with a dedicated reporting criteria in the Higher Education Quality Committee's (HEQC) audit requirements for all Higher Education institutions. Why, then, is the imperative of community engagement regarded as radical, risqué and anything other than taken-for-granted? That community engagement is so regarded suggests an epistemological ambiguity in the knowledge project of our universities – an ambiguity, the literature suggests, common with other higher education systems. In order to meet the brief of provoking discussion, this paper will attempt to touch this nerve, so as to see what happens.

The paragraphs that follow are informed by – and have benefitted considerably from – the contributions made at a workshop convened jointly by the NRF and the CHE in August 2008. These perspectives often emerged collectively and a full list of participants is provided as Appendix A. In particular, the paper is informed by the presentation made to the workshop by Dr Lis Lange of the CHE. In considering how best to augment these and other contributions to the widening debate, it is necessary to explore the ways in which both *community* and *engagement* are understood.

Community can, and does, mean anything from a university's own staff and students and a *community of practice* to civic organisations, schools, townships, citizens at large and "the people" in general. Engagement is an equally challenging concept that, when interrogated, opens up a rich vein of inquiry into the nature of knowledge itself. Interpreting the brief in this way continues the lead taken in the August 2008 workshop, addresses the ambiguities that have rendered community engagement the orphan of South African Higher Education policy for more than a decade and opens doors for continuing debate.

## Community Engagement and the Construction of Knowledge

The appropriate starting point for considering South African Higher Education Policy is the White Paper of 1997, which informed the Higher Education Act of the same year (Ministry of Education, 1997). In essence, the 1997 White Paper sets out an agenda for the transformation of Higher Education from the segregated, inequitable and highly inefficient apartheid institutions, towards a single national system that serves both individual and collective needs. Along with teaching and research, community engagement is cast as one of the pillars of this system. Universities are called upon to "demonstrate social responsibility ... and their commitment to the common good by making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes". A key objective is to "promote and develop social responsibility and awareness amongst students of the role of higher education in social and economic development through community service programmes" (*ibid.*, p.10). This policy position was reaffirmed three years later in the Ministry of Education's National Plan for Higher Education which asserted the priority of enhancing "responsiveness to regional and national needs, for academic programmes, research, and community service" (Ministry of Education, 2001).

Appropriately, the Higher Education Quality Committee, itself established in terms of the 1997 Higher Education Act, identified "knowledge-based community service" as a basis for programme accreditation and quality assurance. In order to make this policy operational, the HEQC required specific reporting on community engagement against Criterion 18 in institutional audits (CHE, 2004).

Considered in the context of international policy and practice, South African policy is both clear and progressive. For example, in reviewing the assessment of civic engagement across state university systems in the United States in the late 1990s, Wellman (1999, p.7) concluded that:

*“despite all the attention to assessment and accountability, higher education’s civic education and service roles are not on the radar screen of these efforts. When civic contributions are assessed, something else – service learning, campus climate, diversity, student/faculty engagement, or “service” to the community, sometimes reported as faculty service to the institution – is measured. These assessments may provide some information about civic contributions, but only indirectly, and never about both the teaching and community service roles. Further, there are no “road maps” connecting institutional assessments with public accountability for the civic teaching and service roles. As a result, the responsibility to play a civic education and service role is generally missing from public policy discussions about the purpose and effectiveness of higher education.”*

Similarly, institutional audits conducted by Britain’s Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), while concerned with the quality of teaching and collaborative arrangements and in reporting in the public interest, have no explicit focus on civic or community engagement.<sup>1</sup>

But while South Africa’s post-1997 system of policy and quality assurance in this area can reasonably be claimed as consistent with expectations of good practice, there has been persistent dissatisfaction with outcomes. For example, Lazarus (2007) notes that in 1999, while most included the concept of community engagement in their mission statements, only one out of the then 36 Higher Education institutions operationalised it in their three-year rolling plans submitted to the Department of Education. This is borne out by the outcomes of the thirteen institutional audits completed by the HEQC between 2004 and 2008. Audit reports show that universities are at widely varying stages in conceptualising community engagement practice:

*“some institutions had done no more than conduct internal audits or compile inventories of ongoing community engagement activities. There were few databases available and no monitoring systems. Community engagement was sometimes driven by volunteerism, and foreign students were queuing up to come to South Africa to involve themselves in community engagement. The activities were generally decentralised, and it was difficult to find a Senate committee that was responsible for community engagement. This does not mean that there were no institutions with a more coherent and structured approach to community engagement, but those were in the minority. Where there were structures in place, they were trying to develop policies on, and criteria for, community engagement. There was minimal funding for community engagement, and the funding that was available generally fell within the realm of partnerships.”* (Lange in CHE, 2008)

Mouton and Wildschut (2007, p.7), reviewing service learning interventions across a range of institutions, concluded that service learning “has unfortunately resulted in a strong negative reaction at some institutions ... Institutions are generally reclaiming the contested concept and labelling service learning with their own terminology or saying that they will do service learning in their own way.”

An evident danger is to conclude, simplistically, that this gap between policy and practice is a consequence of the self-interest of inherently conservative institutions. More specifically in the South African context, where universities have faced unprecedented pressure for transformation and the entire public higher education system has been restructured, it might be claimed that resistance to community engagement (if there is indeed resistance) is an assertion of traditional values of the university set aside from society and its concerns. In the interests of deepening the discussion, though, it is worth suspending belief in such an explanation and to rather note the recurrent comment that the field of community engagement is under-theorised. Favish, for

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<sup>1</sup> Institutional audits are available at [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk).

example, argues that current concepts of engagement are inadequate because they fail to incorporate fully social, cultural, political and economic dimensions (Favish, 2003). Auf der Heyde (2005) notes the need for greater conceptual clarity as well as the development of a sufficient consensus about what community engagement is, enabling work in engagement to be evaluated alongside teaching and research. Singh (in CHE, 2007), summarising some of the issues raised at a landmark conference on aspects of community engagement held in 2006 noted that, despite the decade that had passed since the foundational White Paper, there was a clear need for conceptual work:

*“conceptual work has to be undertaken at two levels – in a very broad way at a national level, and at a much more context-specific level within the framework of individual institutions. But clearly, it must be done always as a conversation between the forging of some kind of a national enabling framework and how institutions are conceptualising a next level framework for themselves ... This conceptual work is not about setting narrow, tight, exclusionary definitions of what community engagement is, thus establishing an orthodoxy in relation to this issue. Rather, it is about setting some broad parameters for community engagement; it is about trying to establish a relationship between community engagement and the other two core functions; it is, very importantly, about signalling the place of community engagement in the social development agenda; and it is about indicating some of the possible models for community engagement.”*

Lange (CHE, 2008) comes to the same conclusion from her overview of institutional audit reports:

*“my sense from reading the documentation that institutions produced for the audit was that this area is a very under-theorised aspect of the role of universities. An engaged university is not necessarily the same as a socially responsive university that is attuned*

*to meeting particular skills needs. The conceptual continuum may exist on the surface, but there are more dissonances than one would imagine in the understanding of community engagement.”*

This conceptual work required of community engagement must start with an exploration of the ways in which knowledge is constructed within what, for convenience, can be called the traditional university – the clusters of formal disciplines that offer curricula leading to qualifications and organise the research enterprise – the delineation of the university as an organisational type (Clark, 1978; 1983; 2001). Why does this sort of knowledge work seem incompatible with community engagement?

For the moment, community engagement can be understood as a cluster of activities that includes service learning, problem-based teaching and research that addresses specific wants and needs, the pursuit of alternative forms of knowledge and challenges to established authorities that control and direct research systems and the allocation of qualifications (although this basket of concepts will need to be disaggregated later). Why has this kind of work remained outside the academy, despite a decade of clear public policy, and why does there appear to be resistance to its inclusion despite a number of incentives that include moral affirmation for contributing to social and economic justice? It is improbable that the reason for this disjuncture is a consequence of personalities, political preferences or narrow self-interest, since the formal university sector is too diverse in itself to explain continuing marginalisation for over a decade. A more likely explanation is an epistemological disjuncture in the way knowledge is structured and organised.

This epistemological disjuncture can be discovered in a cycle of debate that has followed on the publication of Muller’s *Reclaiming Knowledge* in 2000 – a collection of essays that originated in the same policy cauldron that generated the 1997 White Paper, which identified community engagement as a core purpose of higher education in South Africa (Muller, 2000). Muller’s essays offered a wide ranging critique

of educational policies that had favoured outcomes-based education, a de-emphasis on the role of curriculum and challenges to traditional locations of academic authority in education. The kernel of Muller's argument was that these policies – and critical pedagogy in general – were based on a misguided social constructivism and the denial of the legitimacy of the idea of objective knowledge. For Muller, as well as for Young (2005) and others, to argue that knowledge is socially constructed, is to fall into the slough of well-meaning relativism where critique is mistaken for knowledge and where there are no boundaries or structures that extend and deepen our understanding of the world. While the ends of social justice may appear to be served, there is in reality little real benefit to poor or marginalised communities.

The immediate problem with this argument, as Elana Michelson (2004, p.11) was quick to point out, is that this position misrepresents social constructivism by taking extremes of relativism as the theoretical norm:

*"far from arguing that objectivity must give way to a chaos of unverifiable truth claims, constructivists argue that what is usually taken for objectivity in Western knowledge practices is not objective or rigorous enough ... Because they fail to take researchers' own social locatedness into account, conventional Western knowledge-practices do not provide the objectivity to eliminate systematic biases shared by an entire community of inquiry. Far from abandoning any hope of understanding the material world, constructivism seeks to understand the relationship between materiality and our representations and perceptions of it."*

But despite this critique, the branding of all broadly constructivist approaches as impossibly relativist has continued into a second cycle of debate. In their 2007 paper, *Truth and Truthfulness in the Sociology of Educational Knowledge*, Young and Muller start with an aggressive association of social constructivism with "muck-raking journalism" and "moral self-righteousness". Their contention is that such positions

start with the assumption that, for their advocates, "identification with the powerless or with a particular disadvantaged group brings them automatically closer to the truth". For them, this can be seen as the discontinuity – or conflict – between "the formal, codified, theoretical and, at least potentially, universalising knowledge of the curriculum that students seek to acquire and teachers to transmit, and the informal, local, experiential and everyday knowledge that pupils (or students) bring to school" (Young & Muller, 2007, p.175).

Young and Muller's position comes from a specific standpoint – dismay at the consequences of leftist attacks on traditional, authoritarian and hierarchical school curricula (*ibid.*, p.181):

*"social constructivism provided teachers and students of education with a superficially attractive but ultimately contradictory set of intellectual tools. On the one hand it offered the possibility of intellectual emancipation and freedom through education – we, as teachers, students or workers have the epistemological right to develop theories and to criticise and challenge scientists, philosophers and other so-called experts and specialists. Furthermore, in some unspecified way, this so-called freedom was seen as contributing to changing the world. This emancipation from all authoritative forms of knowledge was linked by many to the possibility of achieving a more equal or just world, which for some (but not all) meant socialism. On the other hand by undermining any claims to objective knowledge or truth about anything, social constructivism, at least in some of the ways it was (and could legitimately) be interpreted, denies the possibility of any better understanding, let alone of any better world. For obvious reasons, however, this denial tended to be ignored by educational researchers, at least most of the time."*

But again, and as Balarin (2008) was this time quick to point out, it is a misrepresentation to brand social constructivism as invariably and unrelentingly relativist.

When Muller and Young's position is disentangled from their concerns about recent trends in school curriculum design in the UK and South Africa (an important but specific issue), their objection to the epistemological positions associated with practices of social engagement hinges on two rather different issues – how forms of knowledge are structured, and role and location of the authority that serves to validate the structure and content of knowledge. It is these questions of the structure of knowledge and the location of authority, rather than the red herring of relativism, that are the key to understanding the continuing marginalisation of social engagement in the academy.

Muller, with Young and others, advances a *social realism* that builds on Durkheim's distinction between sacred and profane forms of knowledge, and benefits from Bernstein's extensive and influential work on the structure and form of knowledge (Muller, 2000; Young, 2005; Young & Muller, 2007). The key concept from Durkheim's work is that truth is external to the social and subjective and therefore constitutes an outside pressure, and limitation, on the social construction of reality. Consequently, the boundary between the sacred domain of truth and the profane, everyday, way of knowing the world is critical to advancing knowledge. Bernstein adds to Durkheim's conceptualisation by defining different kinds of knowledge structures which, in turn, determine how sacred ways of knowing develop. In vertical, hierarchical knowledge structures, theorisation becomes increasingly sophisticated, and therefore increasingly useful in explanation, through stacks of ever more general propositions. At the same time, knowledge can be represented as horizontal structures, which are parallel sets of concepts which have limited interoperability. Knowledge develops in this horizontal plane through the development of new sets of concepts which constitute a "fresh perspective, a new set of questions, a new set of connections, and an apparently new problematic, and most importantly a new set of speakers" (Bernstein, 2000, p.162, cited in Young & Muller, 2007). The lack of mutual intelligibility between these horizontal structures

limits the degree of generalisation and abstraction that is possible, and therefore explanatory value.

Bernstein also elaborated the concept of grammaticality as the way in which theoretical statements, whether originating from horizontal or vertical knowledge structures, engage with their empirical domains. The stronger the grammaticality of a knowledge construct, the more it is able to engage with the world, the greater the explanatory value and the greater the degree of production of new knowledge. Here, Young and Muller part company with Bernstein: "for all its rigour and suggestiveness, this analysis merely starts the ball rolling, so to speak. What it provides is a survey of the range of variation, but even the charitable must admit that the poles remain clearer than the intermediate zones of the range" (Young & Muller, 2007, p.188-189). This is because the relationship between verticality and grammaticality is unclear and because of limitations in the concept of horizontal knowledge structures: "these progress", says Bernstein, "by developing parallel theoretical languages, that is, horizontally. It is not hard to see that, while this might account for how knowledge elaborates, it cannot account for how it grows" (Young & Muller 2007, p.190). To circumvent these problems, Young and Muller turn to Cassirer's work on symbolic forms of knowledge. Cassirer, they write, distinguishes between four forms of analysis. Firstly, is empirical classification of object-types in a basic typology (for example art or religion). Secondly, and at a greater level of abstraction, is the analysis of the structure and function of the basic categories. Thirdly, is the analysis of the ways in which these forms have varied across social contexts and through time. Finally, and at the highest level of abstraction, is the "analysis of act", which is the subjective experiences of cultural forms. Young and Muller put forward Cassirer's hierarchy of symbolic forms as the basis for a general theory of knowledge that preserves the unity of knowledge.

It is easy to see how the intellectual lineage of Durkheim, Cassirer and Bernstein, coupled with the representation of social constructivism as invariably relativist, would place the cluster of

activities and ways of knowing grouped as community engagement in the profane world, and as a threat to the sacred domain of structured and systematised understanding. However, the recourse to Cassirer immediately suggests the vulnerability of this position, for how is the basic symbolic typology of object-types to be constructed prior to the subjective engagement with cultural forms (Cassirer's fourth level of abstraction)?

Balarin, in responding to Young and Muller, has identified this as a problematic *foundationalism* (Balarin, 2008). However, the line of reasoning in the social realist position is anticipated in Latour's earlier work in science studies, which has had to confront a similar misrepresentation as relativist. Through his close and painstaking analysis of both contemporary scientific investigation and earlier, paradigmatic, discoveries, Latour shows how the subjective interventions, interactions and decisions of those involved in the "knowledge enterprise" are connected with objects (whether specimens, records, scientific papers or other constituents of the archive of knowledge) through systems of "circulating references". Through a close study of a fieldtrip, comprising a botanist, pedologist and geomorphologist, to study the border of the Amazon forest and the savannah in Brazil, Latour shows how the research exercise comprises a series of *transformations*. Thus the research site is mapped, soil samples taken, codified by the use of standards of colour and granularity, removed from the field to the laboratory and published, encouraging further questions that will prompt a return to the field, and the collection and codification of further samples:

*"knowledge, it seems, does not reside in the face-to-face confrontation of a mind with an object, any more than reference designates a thing by means of a sentence verified by that thing. On the contrary, at every stage we have recognised a common operator, which belongs to matter at one end, to form at the other, and which is separated from the stage that follows it by a gap that no resemblance could fill. The operators are linked in a series*

*that passes across the difference between things and words, and that redistributes these two obsolete fixtures of the philosophy of language: the earth becomes a cardboard cube, words become paper, colours become numbers, and so forth. An essential property of this chain is that it must remain reversible. The succession of stages must be traceable, allowing for travel in both directions. If the chain is interrupted at any point, it ceases to transport truth – ceases, that is, to produce, to construct, to trace, and to conduct it. The word 'reference' designates the quality of the chain in its entirety ... Truth value circulates here like electricity through a wire, so long as this circuit is not interrupted."* (Latour 1999, p.69)

Latour's work allows a reconceptualisation of the problem of community engagement without recourse to Cassirer's complex philosophy or undue concern with limitations in Bernstein's concepts of knowledge structures. Indeed, Durkheim the sociologist would perhaps have approved of Latour's close analyses of science at work, since his insistence on the significance of truth and of intact and reversible systems of reference establish clear boundaries between the sacred integrity of knowledge systems and the profane world in which these imperatives are not respected. And Muller, in his initial collection of essays, points to an alternative route that avoids the dichotomy between social constructivism and social realism that he and Young develop in their subsequent writing.

In discussing innovation, Muller distinguishes between episteme and techne, the "two necessary and complementary components of all knowledgeable activity: the coded innovative knowledge 'product' or result of the activity on the one hand and the tacitly embedded unarticulated knowledge which is the 'process' condition for its productive realisation on the other." All forms of practice have a tacit dimension, including, and perhaps especially, experimental and applied science. It is increasingly recognised that it is the training in research and problem-solving skills that has long-term market value, rather than rapidly obsolescent content knowledge. Muller argues that this should

move attention away from preoccupations such as the balance between pure versus applied research and rather “places the focus squarely on the institutional forms most congenial to stimulating productive interaction (learning by interacting) across the many interfaces that criss-cross the productive cycle” (Muller, 2000, p.32-33).

This distinction between tacit and codified forms of knowledge has been further developed in a series of papers by David and Foray, and by Von Hippel in innovation theory (David & Foray, 2003; Foray, 2004; Von Hippel, 2005). Tacit knowledge is localised, developmental and usually communicated by direct interaction. While forms of knowledge transmission such as apprenticeship, learning in the household and oral transmission in initiation processes are standard examples of tacit, or informal, knowledge transmission, so are science laboratories, seminars and the circulation of draft analyses. Indeed, one of the reasons for the obsession of the pharmaceutical industry with intellectual property rights and patent protection is to protect the long and complex pipeline which owes its vitality and commercial value to the nurturing of tacit knowledge. The key point is that there is nothing inherently “profane” about tacit knowledge, which is essential to the knowledge processes of the academy and is vital for innovation and creativity.

Codification, however, is essential if knowledge is to be generalised, generally shared and expressed in forms that have explanatory power (David & Foray, 2003, p.26):

*“codification consists in translating knowledge into symbolic representations so that it can be stored on a particular medium. This creates new cognitive potentialities that remain inconceivable so long as the knowledge is attached to individual human beings and, hence, only heard (when spoken) or seen (when put into practice) through interaction with those carriers. Inscribing (through writing, graphics, modelling, virtuality) makes it possible to examine and arrange knowledge in different ways and to isolate, classify and combine different components. This leads*

*to the creation of new knowledge objects such as lists, tables, formulae, etc. These are fundamentally important in that they open up new cognitive possibilities (classification, taxonomy, tree networks, simulation) that can provide a framework for the rapid production of new knowledge ... But they are only possible when people consider the matter of recording and, hence, the symbolic representation of their cognitive states.”*

Codification is essential because, without it, knowledge remains local and unavailable for general benefit. There is, for example, little practical value in a remedy for malaria if it remains known only to a few (whether a rural community or a group of laboratory scientists), and unrecorded in a form that can be interpreted in a pharmaceutical production line. In addition, codified knowledge has particular qualities that considerably magnify its social benefits. It is “partially non-excludable and non-rival”, meaning that it is difficult and expensive to control and may be used by many at no additional cost, and it gains in potential through being cumulative, resulting in “combinatorial explosions”. As a result, codified knowledge has what Foray has termed “quasi-infinite increasing returns” (Foray, 2004, p.15-17). To continue the example, a medical intervention to counter malaria, codified as a chemical formula that can be interpreted in a standard way and used to produce an effective and widely available drug can reduce morbidity, reduce health costs, increase labour productivity and break the poverty traps analysed by Sachs, Collier and others (Sachs et al., 2004; Collier, 2007).

An alternative boundary system, then, building on the work of Latour, Foray, David, Von Hippel and others, works from the ineluctable connection between localised, informal and tacit ways of knowing, and generalised, structured and codified knowledge structures. This approach insists that knowledge gains general efficacy through formalisation (Bernstein’s vertical structures, Young and Muller’s “powerful knowledge”). Its sacred status comes from the integrity of its system of circulating references (following Latour) and

not from its point of origin. Indeed, much (and perhaps all) codified knowledge depends on some prior community of practice sharing ideas, possibilities, rumours and a wealth of local experience. There is no inherent reason why such communities of practice should be located within the academy or any other specialised knowledge organisation and, indeed, recent work on innovations and open systems is showing that effective innovation often originates in unexpected places (Von Hippel, 2005; Chesbrough, 2006).

This leads into the question of authority, the second key issue revealed through looking at the social constructivist / social realist debates of the last decade. In his essay “What Knowledge Is Of Most Worth For The Millennial Citizen”, Muller (2000) argues that reliance on “expert systems” is essential as knowledge increasingly becomes the central form of productive capital. This leads to the assertion that academic expertise must be the arbiter of value in determining what counts as knowledge, and in protecting the boundaries of the sacred. Muller and Young have continued to defend this position. Thus “truth and knowledge are fundamentally social categories – theories and facts about the world based on the best evidence and the most powerful theories as rationally arrived at by ... the inner community of scientists who can legitimately contribute to the rational consensus” (Young & Muller 2008, p.519). In response, both Michelson and Balarin have criticised this approach as limiting. Michelson (2004, p.13-14) argues that, by taking the subjectivity of the “academic participant” out of the process of knowledge creation and dissemination, Muller:

*“ignores the entrenched power of conventional academic constructs of knowledge and their still-authoritative claims to objectivity and universality [and] avoids engaging with the historical context within which the constructivist position has emerged. The critique of Western, metropolitan, and masculinist knowledge practices has importantly focused on the ways in which such practices produced categories of greater and lesser human worth, typically around dualisms concerning moral virtue, free will, and rationality.”*

Similarly Balarin (2008, p.509): “the risk of such a conception is the development of a foundational form of knowledge that will very likely leave no space for the particular, for otherness and difference, and for the alternative conceptions of the world that can stem from the latter. It does, in other words, seem to overlook issues of power in the definition of knowledge, which the recourse to the community of specialists does not solve.”

However, with the misrepresentation of social constructivism out of the way and the alternative conception of knowledge as a tacit-to-codified continuum in place, recourse to the authority of an “inner community” of academics is both unnecessary and unnecessarily limiting. This is because one of the particular qualities of “powerful”, codified and structured knowledge is the systems of circulation that enhance its propensity for “combinatorial explosions”, in Foray’s felicitous phrase. Such “knowledge communities” are decentralised, open and increasingly enabled by advanced information technologies, comprising:

*“a system in which the principles of rapid disclosure of new knowledge are predominant, and in which a number of procedures facilitate and reinforce the circulation not only of codified knowledge but also of practical knowledge and research tools ... Systems of knowledge openness relate to public (or semipublic) spaces in which knowledge circulates. Such spaces can include areas in which exclusive property rights cannot be granted, either constitutionally (in the case of open science) or within the framework of organisations specially designed for the purpose (research networks where partners share their knowledge) and markets whose modi operandi are conducive to efficient knowledge dissemination.”* (Foray, 2004, p.165)

David and Foray (2003) show that the more effective knowledge communities transgress the boundaries of conventional organisations – such as universities – and include as particularly valuable members

those who are members of more than one knowledge community. Further refinement to our understanding of such systems comes from work by Burt (2005) and others on brokerage in networks, and by Chesbrough (2006) on open systems and innovation. In sum, it is not only unnecessary, but also counter-productive, to vest control over “sacred” knowledge to an “inner group” defined by academic status. Membership of contemporary knowledge communities is, rather, competency-based and depends on the ability to use the theories and concepts that a community of practice uses as its system of communication.

These clarifications allow the confusion of Mode 1 and Mode 2 forms of knowledge to be sorted out. The case for Mode 2 knowledge as problem oriented and interdisciplinary explorations that underpin a new “knowledge society” was made by Gibbons and his co-authors in their 1994 book, *The New Production of Knowledge* (Gibbons et al., 1994). Muller (2000, p.47) and others have appropriately criticised this model on the grounds that Mode 2 knowledge, if seen as the only form of legitimate knowledge, will be unstructured and devoid of boundaries and validation. Muller observes that this “overhomogenises the evolution of a phenomenon that probably happened much earlier and it overdichotomises it, presenting it as two discrete ideal types that probably never exist in their pure form in the real world”. Indeed, Gibbons’s prediction of the demise of universities and Mode 1 knowledge, and the prevalence of local forms of knowledge now reads as anachronistic. And Muller (2000, p.48) accepts the concept of problem-oriented, transdisciplinary knowledge as long as it is seen as building on the foundations of, and enabled by, structured, defined and bounded approaches: “Mode 1 could not disappear because Mode 2 competence depends on a prior disciplinary competence”. In Muller’s view it is irresponsible to argue that Mode 2 approaches to teaching and research should come first, or that they are more “progressive” or “democratic” because such policies will in effect undermine the quality of education and research.

Given this critique, it is instructive to look at Gibbons’s current

point of view, presented at the 2006 Council for Higher Education conference, in his paper *Community Engagement and Higher Education* (Gibbons, 2006). Here, Gibbons writes of a “Mode 2 society” in which the traditional autonomy of the university can no longer be defended. Instead of being confined within the traditional institution, “science” (which can be taken to mean structured knowledge creation) now takes place in open, exploratory networks. This requires what Gibbons calls *contextualisation*, a process that requires a move from “reliable knowledge” to the production of “socially robust knowledge” that is repeatedly tested in a range of environments. Gibbons employs the metaphor of the *agora* to describe this:

*“the sites of problem formulation and negotiation have moved from their previous institutional domains in government, industry and universities into the agora. The agora refers collectively to the public space in which ‘science and the public meet’, and in which the public ‘speaks back’ to science. It is the domain (in fact, many domains) in which contextualisation occurs. Neither state nor market, neither exclusively private nor exclusively public, the agora is the space in which societal and scientific problems are being framed and defined, and where ‘solutions’ are negotiated. It is the space, par excellence, for the production of socially robust knowledge.”* (CHE, 2007, p.24)

Is this the unstructured world that Muller fears? It is notable that Gibbons appears to have dropped his earlier insistence that Mode 2 knowledge must replace Mode 1 knowledge, and that the university as an institution will dissolve. The argument now is rather that the university must adapt in order to remain competitive. Further, Gibbons introduces concepts reminiscent of Bernstein’s knowledge structures and boundaries. “Contextualisation in the Mode 2 world”, he writes, “requires both ‘boundary objects’ and ‘transaction spaces’: typically, a boundary object is an analytic concept, which refers to

those scientific objects that both inhabit several intersecting social worlds and satisfy the informational requirements of each of them ... The idea of ‘transaction’ implies, first, that all partners bring something that can be exchanged or negotiated and, second, that they also have the resources (scientific as well as material) to be able to take something from other participants” (CHE, 2007, p.26-27). Gibbons argues that, in the Mode 2 world, translation across boundaries is replaced by dialogue at boundaries, prompting the search for a common language of research. This, at least partially, parallels Young and Muller’s critique of the limitations of Bernstein’s horizontal knowledge structures. While there would no doubt be intense debate about the utility of key concepts, the point here is that the old insistence that the structured and bounded world of Mode 1 knowledge must disappear seems to be dead and buried.

In summary for this section, it can now be seen that the gap between policy and practice in community engagement in South Africa, from the publication of the 1997 White Paper to the present, needs to be seen in the context of a confused and incomplete theorisation of the ways in which new knowledge is constructed. This has been complicated by the intersection of two political discourses, both originating in the maelstrom of the formation of the newly democratic state in the early 1990s. The one set of positions was concerned with the reform of schooling and, in particular, with fierce arguments about outcomes-based education and the valorisation of new forms of knowledge in school classrooms. The second was the challenge to the “ivory tower” characterisation of the university and the call to incorporate the community in the higher education enterprise. These two strands have been intertwined, and positions on the school curriculum used as a critique of community engagement by the university.

A persistent distraction has been a somewhat futile debate about whether or not social constructivism is or is not invariably relativist, a rhetoric that has masked two underlying, and more significant, theoretical issues – the structure of knowledge and the location of authority.

For the former, a broader theoretical consideration shows that the most useful way of understanding how knowledge is constructed is to see a continuum between tacit, localised knowledge, often passed on orally and confined to a small expert group, and codified and generalised knowledge forms that are recorded and can be transmitted and shared very widely. This approach does not require any concept of containment of knowledge within an organisation such as a university and there is no reason why tacit and localised knowledge originating outside the university should remain uncodified and therefore of low general utility, or why knowledge originating outside of its bastions should be of any particular threat to the continued existence of the university as an institution. Indeed, the opposite can be argued; unless the university participates in these broad, inter-institutional networks, it is likely to be marginalised and starved of resources. There is also no reason not to incorporate the role of actors, with political preferences, insights and prejudices, into the interpretation of such knowledge structures, as the painstaking and closely argued cases from science studies have shown – to do so in no way requires a denial of the importance of objective truth claims.

With regard to authority, it is clear that the expertise of highly qualified “inner communities” within the university plays a key role in the construction of new “powerful knowledge”. But there is no reason to reserve for such “inner communities” an exclusive authenticating role and, increasingly, the days of such authority have passed. This is because structured and codified knowledge, with its key properties of replicability, spill-over and combination, circulates within, and is developed by, sophisticated and widely-spread networks that constitute “knowledge communities”. The necessary boundaries of such communities are constituted through the specialisation and sophistication of their organising concepts and conventions of expression and, again, not by the fences that enclose the university campus.

From this perspective, it appears that advocates of community engagement may have marginalised themselves. By conflating the necessity of codifying and structuring knowledge with political conservatism and opposition to social justice and transformation they have been distracted from the task of considering how knowledge originating in communities outside the academy can be advanced from its localised and tacit origins to ordered, recorded and generalised forms that can have sustained and widespread value.

*others were more progressive. The question can be posed whether it is necessary to open or broaden the concept of community, since communities can be a form of democratisation, tolerance and pluralism. Does the community include those living on the doorstep of the institution or those further afield? The ‘community’ could be understood to mean everybody who is outside the institution (in other words, all stakeholders), including industry, the labour market, provincial and local government and NGOs. There are no clear answers to the question of who the community is.” (Lange in CHE, 2008)*

## Community and Engagement

Now that the epistemological possibilities have been opened, the meanings of community and engagement can be better considered. Most surveys of community engagement in South African higher education, as well as the accreditation and audit criteria used by the HEQC, proceed as if there is a no-nonsense understanding of what the term means. But, as the forgoing review has shown, there are layers of confusion and complexity in understanding how sources and forms of knowledge relate to one another; given this, it is improbable that matters are as simple as they may seem.

Firstly, community. In her overview of the outcome of the HEQC's institutional-level audits completed between 2004 and 2008, Lange concluded that it:

*“is a vexed question as to what communities are, who they are and where they are. One of the questions we have asked of institutions in the audits (all of which have a de facto or de jure community attached to them) has been: ‘Who is your community?’ Some institutions defined their communities in historical terms, and remained stuck in the community divisions of the apartheid era. Some defined their communities in conservative terms, while*

Naidoo's response to this issue is helpful here (Naidoo in CHE, 2008):

*“Rather than looking at a reductionist way of defining community”, he observed, “should we not engage with a broader definition of ‘community’, or ‘communities’? We talk of differences between institutions, but often forget that within an institution, different faculties define this concept in a way that is expedient to them, in terms of the way in which a particular grouping of disciplines engages with communities. We can have nice policies and structures in place, but institutions can end up ‘playing the community engagement game’ without contributing to reconstruction and development in the country. They may make the right gestures and appear to meet the criteria, but fall far short of the actual essence of reconstruction and development.”*

Community, then, can be taken as a cluster of households or an entire region, as an organisation ranging from a provincial government department to an NGO, as a school, clinic, hospital, church or mosque or as a part of the university itself. This suggests a double meaning. Obviously, communities are a loosely defined set of social organisations. But community also functions as an adjective, as a qualifier that indicates work that is socially beneficial. Understood

in this way and in the South African context, community work contributes to social or economic justice.

Secondly, engagement. As Kaniki pointed out at the August 2008 workshop (CHE, 2008), claims to engagement by higher education institutions can be very broad, embracing almost any form of linkage: “universities become involved in engagement with communities, sometimes without even having been invited by the communities ... How do you reconcile the view that universities can simply go into communities to offer help on issues that the universities believe they need, but of which they may not be aware.” This same sense of generality characterises working definitions of engagement used in the US. For example, the Committee on Institutional Cooperation has suggested that “engagement is the partnership of university knowledge and resources with those of the public and private sectors to enrich scholarship, research and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good” (Bloomfield, 2005, cited in Campus Compact, 2007). As De la Rey reported at the August 2008 workshop, the question of engagement has exercised both the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee. Such considerations lead to a re-examination of the fundamental purposes of a university, institutional autonomy and the relationship between engagement and national research strategies.<sup>2</sup>

It is, however, clear that engagement must be defined by some sort of partnership in which there is a mutual understanding of the objectives of specific projects. There are several models that set out specific processes for setting up such partnerships. One of these is the concept of the *learning region* championed by the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (Favish, 2003). A second is the Asset Based Community Development approach, which works

from the observation that all communities have assets, the assessment of which by members of the community can be the basis for identifying needs and therefore the terms of productive partnerships. Approaches such as these will provide more concrete ways of giving shape to engagement through partnership.

These considerations of the meanings of community and engagement make the working definition offered by the CHE’s 2006 conference seem provisional, and in need of further development. The conference’s working group concluded that “a community is a group of people who plan, work and learn together”. But, as has been shown, this could be overly limiting in serving the ends of social and economic justice. The working group continued in concluding that “community engagement is a process of creating a shared vision among the community (especially disadvantaged) and partners (local, provincial, national government, NGOs, higher education institutions, business, donors) in society, as equal partners, that results in a long-term collaborative programme of action with outcomes that benefit the whole community equitably” (CHE, 2007). However, since this concept of partnerships embraces both the private and the state sectors, it allows almost any type of mutual linkage.

In seeking to elaborate a working definition of community engagement, it is also necessary to deal with the problem of assumed intentions. This issue runs as a substratum through the cycles of debate about social constructivism and knowledge structures, reviewed earlier in this paper. Thus Muller (2000) sees the deleterious consequences of outcomes-based education as due in part to a reformist zeal on the part of both theorists and policy makers, who assume that an approach must be beneficial if it valorises the knowledge contributed from marginalised social groups. Similarly, Young and Muller (2008) criticise those whom they characterise as relativists for assuming that truth-value is contingent on political perspective. In response, both Michelson (2004) and Balarin (2008) criticise Muller and Young for advocating reactionary positions. But, as has been shown, the disposal of the issue of relativism also disposes of the assumed politics

<sup>2</sup> De la Rey, August 2008 Workshop.

of the advocacy of an interpretation, since there are ample means of evaluating the coherence and logic of a position without having to resort to accusation and counter-accusation of political intention. The same problem has been tackled from a different angle by Butin, who shows that assumptions that interventions are beneficial to their recipients derive from specific, and often unstated, concepts that are “modernist, liberal and radical individualistic notions of self, progress, knowledge and power. This is the latent teleology that individuals are autonomous change agents, that such agents can affect positive and sustained transformations, that such transformations are promoted by the more powerful for the less powerful, that this downward benevolence is consciously enacted, and that all individuals involved in such a transaction benefit from it” (Butin, 2003, p.1678). And, at the Council for Higher Education’s 2006 conference, Minister of Education Naledi Pandor raised a similar concern: “What we tend to have, and talk about, is a ‘community service’ notion, rather than a ‘community engagement’ one. In other words, it is a ‘needy’ definition of the community and a ‘giving’ or ‘able’ notion of the university, and I think we need to move to a different level and character of engagement” (CHE, 2007).

Another way of looking at this is to problematise the adjectival use of the term community. Because this use implies a generalised intention of doing good – of bringing benefits from those in the university who have privileges to those outside who do not – it has the consequence of confirming that the relationship is unequal and therefore that the partnership – the engagement – is also unequal. This may have the consequence of justifying and perpetuating the imbalance of power. When taking such a stance is a matter of individual choice, or is a position taken by a civil society group such as a church or a welfare organisation, it is of course a freedom of expression and action that is constitutionally protected. But when it is part of the justification or modus operandi for public higher education policy, it is a far less sound position.

A way of dealing with this is to replace concepts of intentionality

with the analytical distinction between private benefits and public goods (see for example Broome, 1999). Higher Education clearly benefits individuals, who gain qualifications which provide them with access to high status employment and, on average, higher lifetime earning than those without tertiary education. Universities also offer a range of private benefits to the corporate sector through industry-sponsored research, outputs in journals and books that provide commercial publishers with profits, and licences and patents that constitute intellectual property that may yield a financial return for its owners. At the same time, universities clearly benefit the public, both as individuals and collectively, through providing access to education, raising national competitiveness through skilling the workforce, and fuelling regional and national economic growth, combating poverty, marginalisation and unemployment. By means of the principles of institutional autonomy and academic freedom, universities are part of the democratic process, generating critique of centres of economic and political power and, hopefully, educating a critical citizenry.

From this perspective, what is understood and implied in the concept of community engagement can be understood as a part of a set of public goods emanating from higher education. This approach allows the objectives of community engagement to be understood within their context without recourse to a generalised notion of “doing good”. For South Africa, responding to the imperatives of the public good would include addressing inequality measured in terms such as the Gini coefficient and household income, contributing to redressing inequities in the provision of education and housing, public health provision and countering HIV/AIDS, providing access to legal resources and similar priorities. This would be the appropriate regional version of the *agora* that Gibbons has written about and, from the point of view of the state, a logical way of measuring part of the return on the investment of public funds in higher education.

Thinking in terms of public goods, conceptualised and offered in partnership with a range of civil society organisations

with the aim of contributing to generally accepted social and economic benefits as a form of return on the investment of public funds, places the work that is being considered here in what is generally, if rather loosely, seen as the third sector – that part of civil society located between the family, the state and the market (Anheier, 2007; Vaillancourt, 2008).<sup>3</sup> It may be that, in future, the term “community engagement” will prove to be of less use than an appropriately developed concept of a third sector of public policy engagement in South Africa.

## Service Learning

It must be clear by now that service learning can only be a small, if important, part of the third sector/community engagement role of public higher education institutions. It is therefore alarming that, through the years, terms such as service learning, community engagement, community service and the scholarship of engagement have been used interchangeably (Lazarus et al., 2008). This can only be confusing.

As with the debate about the epistemology of knowledge and outcomes-based education, a review of reports and surveys over the last decade shows that the concept of service learning and universities has emerged as a strand in the restructuring agenda that was given shape by the 1997 White Paper. A Ford Foundation grant to the Joint Education Trust (JET) enabled a survey and a report published in 1998 (Perold, 1998; Lazarus, 2007; Lazarus et al., 2008). This overview covered extra-curricular volunteer programmes, work study, community outreach, internships and placements that form part of a formal curriculum. These interventions were seen to fall into three domains: promoting citizenship, improving the lives of underprivileged communities, and infusing the academic curriculum with greater

relevance. The model adopted in the 1998 study saw service learning as taking place at the interface of these three domains, optimally as a combination of academic development, civic development and the provision of practical services. However, “the overwhelming majority of curriculum-related community service programmes surveyed set themselves two main aims: to provide students with practical experience in a development context and to serve disadvantaged communities. The goals of inculcating civic-mindedness and of producing an understanding of social change do manifest themselves, but do so unevenly ... The transformation agenda in South Africa, particularly the drive towards nation building and the redress of inequality, provides a strong motivation for developing community service programmes which include a civic component and which combine this with service delivery and academic training.” (Perold, 1998)

Community Higher Education Service Partnerships (CHESP) was established, again by means of a grant from the Ford Foundation, in order to advance service learning beyond the level of engagement revealed in the survey and with the objectives of supporting programmes incorporating community engagement as part of the core function of higher education, monitoring and evaluating such programmes and using the outcomes of the intervention to influence policy and practice (Lazarus et al., 2008). Over the following years, CHESP has been able to support the development and implementation of more than 250 accredited academic courses across almost 40 disciplines in ten Higher Education institutions. These courses, all of which include at least 20% of their notional learning hours in community-based settings, have reached some 10 000 students. This work has, in turn, produced a substantial body of information on which both research and policy development can be based (Lazarus, 2007; Lazarus et al., 2008). From 2005, CHESP began to develop a joint programme with the HEQC with the objective of further developing this aspect of community engagement as a core function of Higher Education in South Africa. This partnership has resulted in three publications and the

<sup>3</sup> See for example the Canadian Social Economy Hub, <http://www.socialeconomy-hub.ca/hub/>, and the International Society for Third Sector Research, [www.istr.org](http://www.istr.org).

joint conference with the CHE, held in 2006.<sup>4</sup>

An independent evaluation of the CHESP programme has revealed mixed results. While the courses developed and implemented as a result of the intervention clearly benefitted students, staff and the communities in which the service learning activities took place, course coordinators interviewed in the evaluation exercise talked of many difficulties and constraints and a lack of prioritisation of support and resources by university managers. The evaluators found that institutionalisation of service learning – one of the key objectives in the Ford Foundation grant – was uneven. While some universities marked up notable successes, in other cases the development of service learning was not sustained beyond the financial support provided by CHESP. The intervention “unfortunately resulted in a strong negative reaction at some institutions while at a few institutions service-learning modules are running according the CHESP model criteria. Institutions are generally reclaiming the contested concept and labelling service-learning with their own terminology or saying that they will do service-learning in their own way” (Mouton & Wildschut, 2007, p.6).

Given the extensive and significant support provided to almost half of South Africa’s public universities by the CHESP programme over more than five years, it is important to ask why the intervention has not resulted in a steep increase in service learning through extensive institutionalisation, as intended. As with the broader question of knowledge generated by community engagement, this cannot easily be attributed to individual preferences or to innate institutional conservatism. As the CHESP evaluation noted, there has been particular success in promoting service learning scholarship in South Africa. “Before 1998, very little scholarship on the specific area of Service Learning is found in academic journals in the country. Articles on experiential learning, co-operative education, action research,

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<sup>4</sup> Publications are “Good Practice Guide and Self-Evaluation Instrument for Managing the Quality of Service-learning”, “Service Learning in the Curriculum: A Resource for HEIs” and “Service Learning in the Disciplines: Lessons from the Field”.

community service and so on abounded, but no specific reference to service learning. Soon after the initial formation of CHESP in 2000, conference papers, reports and eventually journal articles started to appear ... More recently, a number of master’s and doctoral theses were added to this emerging field of scholarship. It is fair to say that had CHESP not supported scholars in various ways through financial support, by organising conferences and bringing international experts to the country and facilitating capacity-building workshops, very little of this would have happened and certainly not in such a short period of time” (Mouton & Wildschut, 2007, p.13-14).

As with the broader issue of knowledge production, this disjuncture in the impact of the CHESP programme points to an incompatibility between service learning and the general approach to curriculum design and pedagogy in universities. The CHESP programme was founded in the US approach to service learning, epitomised in the work of Campus Compact ([www.compact.org](http://www.compact.org)). Inevitably, the breadth of this rubric of service learning has raised a number of questions about the approach’s foundations. For example, Butin: “there is a troubling ambiguity concerning even basic principles and goals in the service-learning literature. Is service learning a pedagogical strategy for better comprehension of course content? A philosophical stance committed to the betterment of the local or global community? An institutionalised mechanism fostering students’ growth and self-awareness concerning issues of diversity, volunteerism, and civic responsibility? Or, as some critics note, a voyeuristic exploitation of the cultural other that masquerades as academically sanctioned servant leadership? ... what sustained community impact is achieved? Who benefits from the enactment (and publicity) of such processes? What actual learning is documented as a result of such a process? ... service learning has promoted much good will among those doing the actual service learning, but there is considerably less evidence that service learning has provided much benefit for the recipients” (Butin, 2003, p.1678).

With so many questions and a wealth of information, this is a

rich field for theorisation. In advancing a deeper understanding of service learning in the South African context, McMillan has carried out a close analysis of two detailed cases. Focusing on the interface between university students and community members, she has shown how service learning impacts on the nature of the curriculum. Because students in service learning contexts move outside the traditional boundaries of the university and – ideally – engage in a partnership with members of the community, the construction of the curriculum, and the associated pedagogy, has a duality, both providing for the needs of students and also for the needs of the community. Because of this, McMillan sees service learning as a “boundary zone” that challenges the nature of teaching and learning: “the concepts of ‘boundary zone’ and ‘third space’ both reflect the interface or zone between two communities of practice where joint activities occur in an activity system. While such spaces are generally places of challenge, contestation and playing out of power relations, they can also be potential sites for new learning opportunities and new knowledge ... Such zones represent a place free from pre-arranged (or familiar) routines or rigid patterns and are the places where each activity system or community of practice reflects its own structure, attitudes, beliefs, norms and roles, elements from both are always present in these zones ... Because of this, such zones can potentially allow for challenge and new insights” (McMillan, 2008, p.73).

In essence, McMillan’s theorised study of two cases confirms the pragmatic evaluation of the CHESP evaluation. Where service learning incorporates a genuine partnership with community, it is a site where “curriculum activists” challenge the mainstream assumptions and practices of their institutions. By definition, work in such “boundary zones” is marginalised. Where service learning falls short of the requirement that it is fully engaged (where it fails to meet the full set of criteria identified by Perold in her landmark 1998 report), it falls victim to the sorts of issues raised by Butin, or to a general suspicion of a lack of rigour or clear purpose.

In this last respect, it is interesting that service learning’s

intellectual roots lead back to Durkeim’s concerns with pragmatism and, as a result, share a lineage with the conceptual tussle between the social realists and the social constructivists, discussed previously in this paper. Discussions of service learning pedagogy invariably return to Kolb’s formulation of experiential learning, itself inspired by the educational philosophy of Durkheim’s nemesis, John Dewey (Kolb, 1984; Muller, 2000). This suggests that McMillan’s work in theorising radical interventions at the boundary needs to be matched by a theorisation of the mainstream curriculum and the values and limitations of experiential learning.<sup>5</sup> In her 1998 overview, Perold was careful to include both extra-curricula learning opportunities, including volunteerism, and also the strong and extensive traditions of learning through rendering service, deeply established in the Health Sciences and allied fields concerned with social development. These other modalities seem to have been given less attention in recent years, which may have contributed to the sense of marginalisation. Here, the collection of studies brought together in the 2006 volume, *Practice and Service Learning in Occupational Therapy* is an important resource for strengthening and broadening the understanding of this category of interventions (Lorenzo et al., 2006).

Favish (2003, p.7-8) has brought these issues together with the following caution: “the focus on service learning ... excludes a range of other ways in which higher education institutions can be socially responsive through other aspects of their core process of teaching and learning. For example, institutions can demonstrate their responsiveness through the introduction of new programmes, which may or may not include service learning; the revision of existing programmes to accommodate changing needs; the transfer of technology to community projects through education and training programmes and applied research projects. In developing countries with high

<sup>5</sup> See Cooper (2006) for an overview of theoretical approaches.

levels of unemployment it is problematic to exclude contributions to economic development which may contribute to job creation.”

## Evaluating Community Engagement

As with all other key policy directions reviewed in this paper, the processes and criteria for evaluating the work of Higher Education institutions in South Africa originated in the White Paper and Higher Education Act of 1997. This provided for the HEQC as a standing committee of the Council for Higher Education, charged with programme accreditation and institution-wide audits.

With regard to community engagement, the HEQC advises that, “where community engagement is discharged through a range of activities, including service learning, quality considerations for institutional engagement with the local and broader community should be formalised within an institution’s quality management policies and procedures. These arrangements should be linked to teaching and learning and research, where possible, and given effect through the allocation of adequate resources and institutional recognition” (CHE, 2004). More specifically, two of the nineteen audit criteria are particularly relevant to community engagement.

Criterion 1 requires that “the institution has a clearly stated mission and purpose with goals and priorities which are responsive to its local, national and international context and which provide for transformational issues. There are effective strategies in place for the realisation and monitoring of these goals and priorities. Human, financial and infrastructural resources are available to give effect to these goals and priorities”. The HEQC’s guidelines to institutions to meet this requirement include engagement with local, regional, national and international imperatives in order to establish the fitness of purpose of the institution, and adequate attention to transformational issues in the mission and goal-setting activities of

the institution, including issues of community engagement.

Criterion 18 is dedicated to community engagement, and specifies that “quality-related arrangements for community engagement are formalised and integrated with those for teaching and learning, where appropriate, and are adequately resourced and monitored”. The HEQC’s guidelines for meeting this requirement include the provision of policies and procedures for the quality management of community engagement, the integration of policies and procedures for community engagement with those for teaching and learning and research, adequate resources allocated to facilitate quality delivery in community engagement, and regular review of the effectiveness of quality-related arrangements for community engagement.

The concept of quality encapsulated in the HEQC audit process is regarded, at one and the same time, as a goal to be achieved and as a medium for the continuing transformation of Higher Education (Lange in CHE, 2008). More specifically, the HEQC has understood quality to comprise the fitness for purpose of a university in relation to its stated institutional mission, the effectiveness and efficiency with which the core functions of teaching, research and community engagement are provided, and the opportunities for transformation both for the individual and in more general effect. These aspects are understood to apply within an overall framework of the fitness of purpose of each university in contributing to national priorities.

Institutional audits conducted by the HEQC are intended to look at the totality of the university, in the ways in which each translates its mission and vision into conceptualisations and practices of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. This is captured in Criterion 1 and the requirement that there be “a clearly stated mission and purpose with goals and priorities which are responsive to its local, national and international context and which provide for transformational issues”. The specifics of community engagement are intended to be captured in responses to Criterion 18, which is admirably succinct in requiring simply that there is evidence of appropriate and effective community engagement, and that it is

integrated with teaching, learning and research. However, the audit guidelines at present offer no definition of community engagement which can, as a result, be interpreted in terms of the very broad rubric of Criterion 1: transformation, and responsiveness to whichever local, national and international priorities that the institution defines as its key purposes. While there may be a general understanding of what teaching and research is, the previous sections of this paper have shown that there is no such consensus as to the meaning of either “community” or “engagement”, or of how knowledge generated by such activities is to be understood or transmitted.

It is therefore not surprising that no clear patterns have emerged in the detailed responses to Criterion 18 in the institutional audits that the HEQC has conducted to date. Audit reports show a range of conceptualisations of community engagement. In most cases, a broad range of activities is reported, including both curricular and extra-curricular, sometimes incorporating research activities, and sometimes not. Most reported activities are ad hoc, although in a few cases community engagement is reported against a focus that connects with institutional mission and geographical location. Investment of resources is highly uneven. In some cases, community engagement was reported to be the responsibility of a designated person or committee, but in many cases such activities were decentralised and loosely coordinated, if at all. In some cases, community engagement reporting was part of the university’s information management system, but in many cases it was not. “Community” was understood in a wide range of ways: as a form of democratisation, tolerance and pluralism; all stakeholders outside the university; industry and the labour market; local and provincial government; as a place of origin and identity; as debt and accountability; and as anything “other” (Lange in CHE, 2008). Again, considering the ground that has been covered earlier in this paper, this diversity of responses is not surprising.

While a detailed analysis of all institutions’ responses to Criterion 18 (and its reading in relation to Criterion 1) remains to be carried out, this preliminary scan of the outcomes of the institutional audit

process does suggest that little of systematic value has been learned of the ways in which public higher education institutions are contributing to the public good as envisaged in the 1997 White Paper and subsequent policy directions. This is unsurprising for, as always, meaningful measurement depends on clearly defined and generally understood definitions of that which is to be measured. As Favish (2005) has observed:

*“whilst Criterion 1 contains a reference to the need for institutions to provide evidence of their ‘fitness of purpose’ measured on the basis of evidence of their engagement with local, regional, national and international imperatives (including national policy frameworks and objectives), the wording of the criterion emphasises the link with establishing the fitness of purpose of the institution rather than on the quality assurance arrangements for a wider notion of social responsiveness. This suggests that it could be possible to meet the requirements of the audit without having to conduct a serious evaluation of the role HE institutions play in society or without really interrogating how notions of responsiveness infuse planning and monitoring of the core activities of the institution. Detailed descriptions and evaluations of quality arrangements are only required in relation to community engagement. Institutions are not required to evaluate their quality arrangements for promoting active citizenship, a culture of human rights, and for addressing the diverse problems and demands of society through their core processes.”*

## The Way Forward

Understanding the ways in which public Higher Education institutions in South Africa contribute public goods to the third sector – the space between the major social and economic development functions of

the state on the one hand, and the market-directed private sector on the other – faces conceptual challenges regarding the ways in which knowledge is constituted and disseminated and the manner in which improvements in teaching coincide with the interests and objectives of those outside the university. These challenges have been outlined in the preceding sections of this review. All major responses have a point of recent origin in the policy debates of the newly-democratic state in the early 1990s and the Education White Paper of 1997, while also sharing intertwined lineages that track back to interpreters such as Bernstein and Kolb, and before them Durkheim and Dewey. Thus, while the past two decades of policy formulation and transformation in South Africa have been exceptional, it is important not to be overwhelmed by South African exceptionalism. Many of the issues of responsiveness in South African Higher Education have been shared in other countries, and it is valuable to look briefly at some of these wider debates.

The stage for an international perspective was appropriately set a decade ago by UNESCO's World Declaration on Higher Education for the Twenty-First Century. "Relevance in (or responsiveness of) higher education", the declaration stated:

*"should be assessed in terms of the fit between what society expects of institutions and what they do. This requires ethical standards, political impartiality, critical capacities and, at the same time, a better articulation with the problems of society and the world of work, basing long-term orientations on societal aims and needs, including respect for cultures and environmental protection ... Higher education should reinforce its role of service to society, especially its activities aimed at eliminating poverty, intolerance, violence, illiteracy, hunger, environmental degradation and disease. The concern is to provide access to both broad general education and targeted, career-specific education, which equip individuals to live in a variety of changing settings." (Unesco, 1998, p.8 cited in Favish, 2003)*

Similar themes have been developed by the United Nations, particularly in its advocacy of the Millennium Development Goals. Thus, the Task Force on Science, Technology and Innovation has mapped out an agenda for university engagement and provision of public benefits through access to new technologies. "Technology is a knowledge system, not simply physical technology and equipment. It relies heavily on modes of learning; adaptation to new technologies; educational systems; industrial policies and policies on science, technology and innovation; the nature and composition of the private sector; and the capabilities inherent in the public sphere" (UN Millennium Project, 2005, p.33). The Task Force saw a key role for universities:

*"Universities can contribute to development in several ways. They can undertake entrepreneurial activities that aim to improve regional or national economic and social performance. They can get involved with their communities, gaining direct knowledge about social needs, some of which could be addressed through R&D activities. They can conduct industrial R&D; create spin-off firms; participate in capital formation projects, such as technology parks and business incubator facilities; introduce entrepreneurial training and internships into their curricula; and encourage students to take research from the university to firms. Universities need to be transformed to play these roles. Eventually, new institutions need to be created that focus on business incubation and community development." (ibid., p.3)*

The 2006 conference on community engagement co-hosted by the CHE and CHESP was particularly valuable in setting the stage for international comparative analysis, in particular with developing economies with challenges broadly similar to South Africa's. Thus, in Mexico it has been recognised that higher education institutions face new challenges associated with providing learning opportunities far more generally. Arredondo and Fernández de la Garza described how the University of Veracruz has developed an institutional

strategy based on the notion that community engagement is a core academic function. Since 1997, the university has implemented a social outreach programme through the University Social Service Brigades that “comprise undergraduate students who have completed their academic studies and who must by law meet social service requirements; groups of five to seven students receive scholarships from the university and reside in the community for a year. These resident students come from all academic fields of the university and, to date, more than 25 academic fields have been represented in the project. The University Brigades experience has provided valuable guidelines for the strategy – adopted as an instrument of social policy by the Secretary of Education of Veracruz – to link the tasks of education and community work in the state of Veracruz” (Arredondo & Fernández de la Garza in CHE, 2007). In Ghana, the University for Development Studies was established in 1992 with a statutory responsibility “to blend the academic world with that of the community in order to provide constructive interaction between the two for the total development of the largely rural northern Ghana in particular and the country as a whole” (Kaburise in CHE, 2007). For India, Shah has reviewed innovative approaches that seek to integrate community development and education, countering caste, class and gender inequities (Shah in CHE, 2007).

This broader context includes a range of initiatives that may be valuable in deepening and refining the approach to third sector engagement in South Africa. For example, Columbia University’s Millennium Villages Project ([www.earthinstitute.columbia.edu/mvp/](http://www.earthinstitute.columbia.edu/mvp/)) is a bottom-up intervention in agriculture, nutrition and health, economics, energy, water, environment and information technology. Columbia University research staff and students are working with local communities and governments to apply a holistic package of interventions to help villages get out of extreme poverty. Starting in 2005 at the settlements of Sauri (Kenya) and Koraro (Ethiopia), the project has expanded to a further ten research villages in Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Tanzania and Uganda

(Sanchez, 2006; Sanchez et al., 2007). The principles structuring the Millennium Villages project include community empowerment through participation and leadership in design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation, interventions based on proven, science-based research (biophysical and socioeconomic) combined with the best local knowledge, building capacity and empowerment at the local level, and strengthening local institutions.

The wider question of engaged research has been discussed extensively under the aegis of Campus Compact (2007). Here the focus has been on the distinction between community-engaged enquiry and traditional research, the relationship between researcher and community partners, issues of recognition and reward, and measurement of impact. The conference found it useful to distinguish between purpose, process and product:

*“Engaged research must have an intentional public purpose and direct or indirect benefit to a community ... Process relates to the methods investigators use to pursue research with a public purpose. How ‘democratic’ or collaborative is their approach? What level of collaboration is sufficient or appropriate at each stage of the research: determining the research questions and research design; data gathering and analysis; the application of findings, etc.? ... Product relates to the range of possible outcomes of engaged research. Does the research lead not only to advances in knowledge but also improved life in communities? Who benefits and how? What publication and communication vehicles – academic, popular and/or community-specific – are used? Do the results lead to concrete action, changed practice, publications, and possibly new, related research? Are publications resulting from the research accessible to the public?” (Campus Compact, 2007, p.8-10)*

Participants in these discussions, which included some of the US’s leading research universities, also distinguished between engaged research and research on engagement:

*“research on engagement differs fundamentally from engaged research. Rather than a community-engaged approach to research, it is scholarly inquiry with a specific content focus: diverse forms of civic life, democratic citizenship, and community engagement, including that of faculty and students in schools, colleges, and universities. Increasingly, research universities are establishing interdisciplinary centers that sponsor and support this research ... A major impediment to elevating research on engagement within the research university context is that faculty who research civic and community engagement have difficulty validating their work in their respective fields and institutions. These are obstacles not unknown to scholars in other new, interdisciplinary fields, but they are formidable ... For research on engagement to be taken seriously at research universities, scholars must have strong peer-reviewed publication outlets for their scholarship.”* (Campus Compact, 2007, p.14)

These ongoing debates, and the progress they are showing in moving this aspect of public higher education forward, resonate with Singh's call, at the 2006 CHE/CHESP conference on community engagement in South Africa, for far more conceptual work.

The forgoing sections of this paper suggest ways in which some of the threads that comprise this rich field of enquiry can be delineated and drawn together. It is clear that there is no inherent reason for community engagement to be contrary to established values of discipline-based teaching and research in the academy. To the contrary, community engagement is proving to be fertile ground for re-vitalising such disciplines (as the example of Columbia University's Earth Institute, the work of the research universities that have come together under the aegis of Campus Compact and many other examples show). Equally, there is little mileage left in the scare that Mode 2 work invariably threatens the formal roots and structures of knowledge. While there was certainly a levelling rhetoric in the original formulation of the Mode 1/ Mode 2 distinction in the early

1990s, even the most ardent champions of the model have noted that, yet again, predictions of the imminent demise of the university as an institution were premature. Muller's case for a successionist approach – in which trans-disciplinary, problem-oriented enquiry builds on the strong foundations of the disciplines – is now generally accepted. Nor again is there any inherent reason why knowledge work generated and pursued outside the academy should not be systematic, structured and rigorous, and should not therefore meet the criteria of acceptability set by Bernstein and others, as Michelson recognised in rejecting the calumnies heaped on social constructivism.

While the terminology may vary, the distinction between local, tacit knowledge and widely shared and highly-codified knowledge systems, and the spectrum between these extremes, is now widely recognised. This means that knowledge originating in localised, face-to-face contexts outside the academy has particular potential to be formalised and widely shared, contributing to the “combinatorial explosions” that Foray pinpointed as a distinctive feature of the knowledge economy. It is, of course, precisely for this reason that there has been intense international interest in intellectual property rights in recent years, where the stakes can be very high (Drahos & Braithwaite, 2002). And while academics working within universities are key agents in this broad process of building and disseminating knowledge, they are by no means the only agents, and they work most effectively in loose, wide-ranging “knowledge communities” in which reputational value is claimed, contested, recognised and distributed through finely-tuned systems of peer review and citation. Authority – deciding what has value – resides in these networked systems and not in an institutionally-bounded group of experts. The boundaries of these networked knowledge systems, essential to their ability to develop “powerful knowledge”, are constructed from their sets of theories, concepts and procedures, and not by the walls enclosing the campus.

All of this suggests that the root problem with community engagement, accounting for more than a decade of lacklustre progress

in giving substance to the clarion call of the 1997 White Paper, may rest in its definition as the third key purpose of public higher education in South Africa. Thus the very act of differentiation, intended to give emphasis and prompt priority, has served to set community engagement apart from the long-understood processes of teaching and research. It may well be that the conceptual work, seen as imperative at the 2006 conference, may require the term community engagement to be abandoned. An alternative approach, mooted tentatively here, would be to think instead of the critical third sector located between the family, the state and the market. This model recognises the key private benefits that higher education gives to individuals, empowering them for a world ever more demanding in personal skills and qualifications (benefits to the family). It also recognises the key role of universities in the private, market sector (innovation and knowledge transfer to industry, professional and vocational education), and also in enabling the work of the state (labour force development, public policy innovations, partnerships for enhancing service delivery). But it focuses on the less well-defined public goods that universities can, and do, contribute through service learning, volunteerism, learning through rendering service, community participation in engaged and responsive research, and social enterprises.

This approach was tentatively indicated by Minister of Education Naledi Pandor, speaking at the 2006 conference: “I think for us, as South Africa, what we are really asking for is to see whether, as higher education, it is possible for our engagement to make a contribution to this increasing notion of a developmental state and to see what form of support we could give to its emergence, to its ability to address the challenges that our society faces. Thus, I begin by saying that the demand and call we make on higher education is not a political imposition; it is not a threat to autonomy – it is rather a partnership in addressing the challenges our country faces ...” (Pandor in CHE, 2007). And the workshop report from the same conference clearly sensed the potential:

*“community engagement as contributing to improving the quality of learning and teaching has not been contentious. What has been contentious is the place of community engagement in the university in terms of governance and resource allocation, and assessment of the quality of community engagement through research. In particular, there has been much contention about the efficacy of various research methodologies that have been deployed or that have emerged ... The challenge of integrating community engagement into the body of the university does, however, depend on the development of community-based research as a source of new ‘scientific’ knowledge, if community engagement is to find a consolidated home within modern universities. That is, community engagement has to be recognised as being a knowledge production activity, if it is to be treated as a core activity of the university – and thereby lead to an organic resolution of the challenges of mainstreaming with regard to governance, proper funding and full accreditation in terms of the usual academic metrics.”* (CHE, 2007)

Whatever the outcome of this conceptual work, evaluation systems need to be aligned unambiguously with that which they are intended to measure.<sup>6</sup> In this respect, the HEQC should perhaps be cautious of the new survey of community engagement that is currently being planned. While it is indeed the case that it is a decade since the last survey, by Perold and her colleagues, both the evaluation of CHESP and the results of the institutional audits conducted by the HEQC suggest that respondents to such surveys do not easily understand what community engagement is – not because of innate resistance, but because of the disjunctions outlined in this paper. Without a reconceptualisation, it seems likely that another survey of community engagement will yield little more than the earlier, rather gloomy, outcomes.

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<sup>6</sup> See Favish 2005 for a discussion of criteria for evaluating social responsiveness.

These considerations suggest five ways forward for the NRF and the HEQC.

Firstly, of course, is the imperative for promoting and supporting work on the conceptualisation of community engagement, understood as development of public goods in the “third space”. This was anticipated by Kaniki and others at the August 2008 Workshop: “a further aspect, which was often left in abeyance, was the actual knowledge production – in other words, the way in which knowledge is produced in the interaction with the community. We do not only need to enquire about community engagement, but to research how knowledge is produced through community engagement” (Kaniki in CHE, 2008). Kaniki has also pointed out that such projects relate directly to the founding principles of the NRF: “on the establishment of the NRF, part of the funding to researchers was intended to develop an understanding of how the research would be transferred to the community or the public, mostly in terms of knowledge-sharing and writing up the research” (*ibid.*).

Secondly, it will be of considerable value to map what universities are actually doing in third sector teaching and research. By avoiding the assumption that people know what community engagement means, and by rather mapping out what teachers and researchers are actually doing against the test of responsiveness to the challenges of community needs, it will be possible to get a more accurate understanding of the current return on investment in the higher education system in this area. It may well prove that, because of the confusions over the definition of community engagement, there has been substantial under-reporting.

Thirdly, is the area of institutional systems of incentives, rewards and network support. This set of issues is invariably identified in discussions of community-oriented teaching and research, and in the measurement of outputs of such work. If the focus is not aligned with institutional systems of appointment, reward and promotion, there will be strong, practical disincentives for engagement. De la Rey identified this as a key issue at the August 2008 workshop: “I would

like to endorse the importance for the NRF, in taking this through, to look at the relationship of the boundaries between teaching, learning and research, on the one hand, and community engagement on the other. Although the work can be written up in publications as a way of grappling with the tension in the institution, what you come to understand when moving from a neophyte to a senior academic is that the actual rewards in the institution are on the other side of the tension. Counting matters to managers of institutions in terms of the amount of funding that they receive. Therefore, we need develop a consensus perspective to bridge or address the tension, an aspect of which is how to make it measurable” (De la Rey in CHE, 2008). Research into institutional systems and organisational forms will enable a systematic understanding of the ways in which universities and other organisations can be better aligned with developmental needs.

Fourthly, there is a clear need for South African case studies of good practice that can serve both as exemplars and also to enable the development of theory and practice in engaged research and teaching. Auf der Heyde emphasised the significance of this sort of work at the August 2008 workshop: “Community Engagement, from a research point of view (if it is interpreted as a Mode 2 research activity), has the effect of extending the research portfolio of a university and enriching its research activities, giving it access to a wider range of problems that can be explored, and a wider type of engagement with a broader type of stakeholders” (Auf der Heyde in CHE, 2008; Auf der Heyde, 2005). However, this is not immediately apparent to the research community and institutional managers, and needs to be demonstrated empirically. Case study research, in general, is difficult to fund and sustain because its results fall outside the ambit of conventional journals, resulting in a self-fulfilling cycle in which such work is not recognised because it remains unpublished. The NRF has the opportunity to break this cycle through its funding policy.

Finally, it will be essential to develop revised and appropriate evaluative strategies to be used by the HEQC in programme accreditation and in the next manifestation of the national quality

assurance system for higher education. A persistent theme in this paper has been the problem of misalignment between the intentions behind the promotion of the public good, and the ways in which this is conceptualised, categorised and translated into evaluative criteria. The research agenda proposed here should enable more effective measurement and evaluation, and the development of a virtuous circle than connects incentives, measurements and resources in the interests of promoting engaged research and teaching.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are for the Council on Higher Education to consider as advice to the Minister of Education:

1. That the concept of community engagement, as set out in the 1997 White Paper for Higher Education, be revisited and revised in the light of subsequent experience. The objective of a new policy framework should be to align engagement with the third sector (that part of civil society located between the family, the state and the market) with universities' core functions of teaching and research.
2. Appropriate incentives should be provided through the state subsidy for teaching to ensure that the models of good practice for service learning developed through the CHESP Programme are established and resourced as integral parts of teaching and learning provision across the Higher Education sector.
3. The HEQC should be asked to review institutional and qualification audit criteria such that third sector engagement is evaluated as an integral and required part of teaching and research, rather than as separate criteria.
4. The NRF should be encouraged to make recurrent funding allocations for research about third sector engagement, for specific projects that have third sector engagement as the lead objective, and for case studies of good practice in third sector teaching and research.

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# An (engaged) response to Hall's paper: Community engagement in South African higher education

PROF LOYISO NONGXA

## Introduction

I will respond to the paper by Martin Hall as a discussant, contributing to the task that he has begun by engaging in a debate with the author over his train of thought and the approach that he has adopted in addressing the issue of 'community engagement'.

Broadly, my response will be structured along the following five problematics, which proceed from definition to implementation.

1. The attempt to tie down the complexity of community engagement seeks to advance which, and whose, purposes?
2. Into which dangers might the definitional endeavour lead us?
3. How should we appraise Hall's recommendations?
4. Can we consider an alternative conceptual frame?
5. Can we account for why universities respond as they do when considering injunctions like the call to community engagement?

## The purposes of the project

Hall summarises the purposes of his paper as being firstly to assist the National Research Foundation (NRF) in drawing up a programme to fund research into community engagement, secondly to inform the criteria used by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) to evaluate how community engagement finds effect in South African universities, and finally to contribute to the advice the Council Higher Education (CHE) might offer to the Minister of Education.

It is pertinent to consider for a moment why the NRF would be interested in developing a programme of research in community engagement. Possibly the answer lies in how one interprets the mandate of the NRF in terms of the NRF Act. Andrew Kaniki throws some light on this matter where he is quoted as having pointed out that such projects relate directly to the founding principles of the NRF: “On the establishment of the NRF, part of the funding to researchers was intended to develop an understanding of how research would be transferred to the community or the public, mostly of knowledge-sharing and writing up research” (Hall, 2009, p.30). A further clue into the motivation for the study on the part of the NRF is its concern that:

*“a major impediment to elevating research on engagement within the research university context is that faculty who research civic and community engagement have difficulty validating their work in their respective fields and institutions. These are obstacles not unknown to scholars in other new, interdisciplinary fields, but they are formidable ... For research on engagement to be taken seriously at universities, scholars must have strong peer-review publication outlets for their scholarship.”* (Ibid., p.27)

The way community engagement is situated in the academy (in terms of how it is integrated into its core intellectual purposes), is therefore a complex one.

It is perhaps for this reason that the leadership of the CHE and HEQC have, at various times, raised concerns about community engagement and called for further study. Mala Singh has called for conceptual work that “has to be undertaken at two levels ... this conceptual work is not about setting narrow, tight, exclusionary definitions of what community engagement is, thus establishing orthodoxy in relation to the issue” (Hall, 2009, p.7).

Looking more widely, Cheryl de la Rey has noted that “the question of engagement has exercised both the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee” (*ibid*, p.17). On this score, the case for the study into appropriate conceptual foundations for the notion seems persuasive. One of the roles of the CHE is to provide advice to the Minister on issues related to higher education in South Africa. At face value, one simply wonders – given the range of issues facing higher education, for example our dwindling resources, the ageing professoriate, the overstretched infrastructure, the inadequate financial assistance for needy students – how do we make the case that community engagement should be a priority for the sector?

Hall’s study creates some difficulties for the reader and possibly for the author as well. The biggest problem for the reader is that what seem to have spurred this investigation are the institutional responses to Criterion 18 in institutional audits. While the author has had access to these reports, the reader has not and thus cannot fully appreciate the nuances of the problem. There are extensive references to issues that came up at workshops in 2006 and 2008, but unfortunately the conference proceedings are not available to this respondent. In various places the author seems to build on these previous arguments and it is likely that these have framed the mandate that Hall fulfills in this paper. Indeed, the paper ends with recommendations that work within the broad frame of reference already established by the HEQC for community engagement. I make this point simply to consider the breadth of scope that might or might not have been available to Hall.

For example, one is struck by the absence (or near absence) of

the voice of practicing academics i.e. those currently working in our universities and who are at the chalk-face of the issues addressed in this study. The people whose views are repeated are almost exclusively those of non-practicing academics. This is not meant to devalue the views of the latter category of academics or to suggest that the opinions of practicing academics should carry more weight. The concern here would be whether a disproportionate focus on the views of one group would skew the approach to the study. The evaluation by the regulative authorities of the systems for managing community engagement within universities has found these systems wanting. But these management arrangements may not in fact be the best proxy to reflect the quality and variety of activities that could be classified as community engagement. Indeed, the evident inadequacy of the management systems might be the result of the complexity of these activities and indeed the elusive task of finding straightforward definitions that would enable these activities to be managed.

In the final analysis, it is academics at our institutions who are the practitioners in community engagement, in whatever way the latter is theorised and understood. Patient attentiveness to what they do and say may be the best way to come to grips with this realm of activity.

## The dangers of the definitional endeavour?

So one keeps wondering which problem exactly the author is trying to address or, indeed, whether there is a problem at all. One cannot help but come to the conclusion that the problem may be what Mala Singh warned against, the hazard of “setting narrow, tight, exclusionary definitions of what engagement is, thus establishing an orthodoxy in relation to this issue” (Hall, 2009, p.7). Unavoidably, the study

engages with definitions. However, these definitions are sometimes framed in a way that gives the impression that an end-goal has been established and that the definitional task is to arrive at that pre-set goal.<sup>1</sup> This runs the risk of “defining out” of the debate some inherited precepts and legacy practices. For example, the definition of community, according to Lange:

*“is a vexed question as to what communities are, who they are and where they are. ... Some institutions defined their communities in historical terms, and remain stuck in the community divisions of the apartheid era. Some defined their communities in conservative terms while some were more progressive.”* (Hall, 2009, p.17)

However, the reality of universities like Fort Hare, Limpopo, Venda, North West (Mafikeng) is that they are rural universities based in rural communities. Most rural communities in South Africa are constituted predominantly of people of African ancestry and one would be hugely concerned if rural universities did not identify such people as their communities. Does this mean that such universities would fall under the category of institutions that are “stuck in the community divisions of apartheid era”? Rural communities bear a disproportionate burden of societal problems: poverty, disease, dispossession and marginalisation. One would be concerned if rural universities were to identify different or new communities for

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<sup>1</sup> I am a little disconcerted by some of the rhetorical devices that Hall uses, especially as transitional devices between one part of his argument and another: One example: “It is easy to see that ....” when the point being made is not that easy to see. Another example is his claim that, “However, with the misrepresentation of social constructivism out of the way and the alternative conception of knowledge as a tacit-to-codified continuum in place, recourse to the authority of an inner community of academics is both unnecessary and unnecessarily limiting” (Hall, 2009, p.14). Is this issue really out of the way? Does this mean Hall has finally resolved the “tussle between the social realists and the social constructivists” and the associated critical issues about intellectual authority? The debate is a fierce and complex one and something tells me that this is not the end of the “tussle”. It left me wondering about the discursive continuity of the paper.

themselves. This is an extreme example, but underlying Dr Lange's comment is a veiled criticism of "conservative" universities and there are no prizes for guessing correctly who they are.

The concern here is that there may be an inadvertent but implicit imperative to exclude certain activities from qualifying as community engagement activities. Hall cites Kaniki's concern:

*"How do you reconcile the view that universities can simply go into communities to offer help on issues that the universities believe they need, but for which they may not be aware? (Hall, 2009, p.17)*

But I can think of many examples of issues where this would make a lot of sense and, whether or not these qualify as community engagement projects, I would still strongly encourage my institution to continue with such activities, circumspectly of course. Universities *are* centres of expert knowledge, and this knowledge can be deployed in contexts where such knowledge may not previously have been salient. At a workshop convened to receive Martin Hall's paper, a further illustration of this "confusion" around community engagement was given. Universities had been requested to give examples of activities they were involved in which contribute to poverty alleviation. We were told that many different responses had been received. I find this hardly surprising: South African universities are diverse across many dimensions, in terms of histories, locations, contexts, missions, goals – the national goal is for a differentiated but unitary higher education system. Further, this complex institutional landscape conducts a wealth of relationships of infinite variety with the society in which it is embedded. Our definitional gaze (if indeed we should invest in a definitional project at all) will need to look cross-sectionally across the (virtually endless) breadth of activities, as well as longitudinally back in time for how traditions and fashions arise, and are sustained or not.

## Recommendations

Let me turn to the recommendations developed by Hall.

### Recommendation 1:

This calls for a replacement of the concept and practice of community engagement with the need to "align engagement with the third sector ... with universities' core functions of teaching and research" (Hall, 2009, p.31). Hall's proposal to address the definitional problem associated with community engagement is thus to introduce into the debate the notion of the *third sector*. This seems to replace one definitional problematic with another opaque concept that itself needs further definition and which could lead to other interpretive debates. I'm not sure the concept of the third sector helps us out of either our present definitional impasse, or the need for some future resolution that would serve regulative purposes. It seems to me that we need a different approach to tackling the definitional problem. I suggest one below.

### Recommendation 2:

From the point of view that the Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET) uses subsidy funding as a steering mechanism, this recommendation simply suggests that the DoHET should steer the sector towards ensuring "that the models of good practice for service learning developed through the CHESP Programme are established and resourced as integral parts of teaching and learning provision across the Higher Education sector" (*ibid.*, p.31). But what, I wonder, is the rationale for incentivising a particular teaching and learning methodology? Why not incentivise other teaching and learning methodologies, e.g. e-learning? The following comments deepen one's perplexity:

*"The evaluators [of the CHESP programme] found that the institutionalisation of service learning – one of the key objectives in the Ford Foundation grant – was uneven. While some universities marked up notable successes, in other cases the development of service learning was not sustained beyond the financial support provided by CHESP [my emphasis]. ... Given the extensive and significant support given to almost half of South Africa's public universities by the CHESP programme over more than five years, it is important to ask why the intervention has not resulted in a steep increase in service learning through extensive institutionalisation, as intended."*

(Hall, 2009, p. 21)

This raises important questions about the efficacy of resourcing as a change management measure. I will return to this point later in this section, and develop it further in the final section.

### Recommendation 3:

It is not clear to someone unfamiliar with the importance of items being stand-alone criteria in the HEQC-framework, what significance one should attach to this recommendation. Put simply, what difference will it make if third sector engagement is evaluated as an integral and required part of teaching and research rather than a separate criterion? Hall does not shed any light on this issue. It is worth noting that Hall correctly points out that:

*"the audit guidelines at present offer no definition of community engagement which can, as a result, be interpreted in terms of the very broad rubric of Criterion 1: transformation, and responsiveness to whichever local, national and international priorities that the institution defines as its key purpose."* (ibid., p.24)

How does one begin to define where the third sector begins and ends or, more challenging, which social and economic activities do or don't have an impact on one or another dimension of the third sector?

### Recommendation 4:

The author recommends to the NRF that it should make resources available for a study of the third sector. In an environment of dwindling resources one wonders why the NRF would prioritise the study of this concept over many areas associated with poverty and marginalisation that researchers in South Africa are currently working in but for which they struggle to secure resources. Currently, we believe that the NRF can only afford to support a fraction of what is asked for or required by the research community in South Africa. This recommendation reminds one of ring-fenced funding which was made available for an investigation into Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) that was under-utilised and ultimately had to be re-directed. Are there no lessons to be learnt from the IKS precedent?

In summary, two of the recommendations call for additional state resources to bolster two apparently "progressive" ideas. This has the intent to institutionalise service learning and prioritise research directed towards the third sector concept. It seems to be assumed that this is all that is required to influence the behaviour of the members of the South African academic profession.

Are such behaviours directed by policy or earmarked funding (as the various measures and policies cited by Hall would wish)? There is a wide research-based literature that suggests that such directives have limited impact unless they resonate strongly with the internal purposes, values and intellectual capital of the various fields of study. Academia turns out to be relatively "waterproof" to exogenous directives;<sup>2</sup> instead the trajectory of academic enquiry tends to be conditioned by an internal and organic intellectual logic – and mostly

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<sup>2</sup> Quite often this is unintentional: academics just do what academics do.

this logic addresses issues in the empirical world (whether these can be classed as community engagement issues or not). University management and administrative systems provide the environment in which academic work happens, but has relatively little purchase on the cognitive wellsprings of fields of study.

## An alternative definitional frame

Given the definitional difficulties noted above, I now want to suggest another term that we could use instead of community engagement. This proposal is prompted by a quote attributed to the (former) Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor:

*“What we tend to have, and talk about, is a ‘community service’ notion, rather than a ‘community engagement’ one. In other words, it is a ‘needy’ definition of the community and a ‘giving’ or ‘able’ notion of the university, and I think we need to move to a different level and character of engagement”* (Hall, 2009, p.19).

Hall himself notes the White Paper’s injunction:

*“Universities are called upon to ‘demonstrate social responsibility ... and their commitment to the common good by making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes’. A key objective is to promote and develop social responsibility and awareness amongst students of the role of higher education in social and economic development through community service programmes”* (Ibid., p.6).

It seems to me that an easier and more elegant approach to making community engagement better understood is to build it into the notion of *social responsiveness*. There are a number of good reasons for

this. Social responsiveness is addressed and emphasised in the White Paper (Ministry of Education, 1997), as well as the National Plan for Higher Education (Ministry of Education, 2001) as a national imperative. We also believe that it is defined in a language that is easy to understand – particularly since it is a more adumbrating notion: it opens up the terrain to all of society. The term also resonates with wider imperatives for development, understood internationally:

*“Relevance in (or responsiveness of) higher education should be assessed in terms of the fit between what society expects of institutions and what they do. ... Higher education should reinforce its role of service to society, especially its activities aimed at eliminating poverty, intolerance, violence, illiteracy, hunger, environmental degradation and disease.”* (UNESCO 1998, p 24) [my emphasis]

For example, Hall continues to point out that similar themes have been developed by the United Nations and goes on to quote from the agenda mapped out by the Task Force on Science, Technology and Innovation:

*“Universities can contribute to development in several ways. They can undertake entrepreneurial activities that aim to improve regional or national economic and social performance. They can get involved with their communities, gaining direct knowledge about social needs, some of which could be addressed through R&D activities.”* (Hall, 2009, p. 26)

In a nutshell, there seems to be an easier, elegant and accessible manner to approach and enrich debates around community engagement which deepens our understanding of the concept of community engagement by invoking the notion of social responsiveness. Developing and implementing research and teaching programmes that respond to this wider social responsiveness project seem more

likely to address the broader social and economic contexts in which distressed communities are located – in other words a systemic view rather than micro-level interventions. Not to be obtuse: the intent, of course, behind notions of community engagement is that intellectual enquiry be brought to bear on conditions of human distress in any or all of its forms, ultimately with the intent of relieving or eliminating it. The question is: which dimensions of intellectual enquiry are responsive to social distress and which not? Or, from another angle, which forms of enquiry have an *impact* (for better or for worse) on human distress?

## Why do universities respond as they do?

The final consideration – and perhaps the most important one – is the implicit theory of change that underlies Hall's four recommendations. Change is to be effected through the following four broad measures. These are firstly to replace in policy texts the target of engagement from community to the third sector; secondly to ring-fence some of the state subsidy afforded to universities to make further efforts to embed service learning into an already unreceptive environment; thirdly to insert the replacement notion of third sector into the wording of the teaching and research criteria used for institutional audits; and finally for the NRF to make ring-fenced research funding available for projects that might claim a third sector association.

It is assumed, then, that adjustments to the wording of policy texts, and diversion of resources within our existing teaching and research affordances will produce changes in academic practices in the desired directions.

There is no doubt that the impulse for higher education to contribute (more than it already does?) to alleviating poverty is a well-intentioned goal that we all share. But why is it that “progressive” projects such as this, that have been introduced in South African

higher education, have struggled to take institutional root in the forms that the policy discourses suggest? It seems to me that this is a foundational question for those attempting to promote change. But rather than Hall's enquiry into the “epistemological ambiguity” of the matter, I would like to suggest that (at least) part of the answer may lie elsewhere.

My contention is that it is to be found in our poor collective understanding of the academic profession in the 21st Century. It seems to me that why these reforms are introduced and fail requires a better understanding of contemporary South African academia. A serious and high-level study of the profession needs to be conducted into its purposes in society and its capacity to respond to these purposes, both old and new. Some considerations are outlined below, and they range from external contextual conditions, the inherent internal characteristics of the academy, and the relationship between the external and the internal.

What has been the impact of globalisation on the South African professoriate and (a different point) the impact of the plethora of policy developments in South African higher education system since 1994? Both have entailed (in my view) necessary and desirable re-orientations – although these should be seen as complementary to the foundational purposes and pursuits that constitute the bedrock of the academy. But these have come at a time of a global fashion for the retreat of traditional sources of funding and the transfer of the responsibility for funding to academic staff who now search for money in a competitive and limited environment. The re-orientations and the resource squeeze find effect in burgeoning workloads arising from widened participation, transformative imperatives and internationalisation. A key trend has been the casualisation of academic work, a frugality that erodes the heart of intellectual quality.

Internationally, the sharpened differentiation in institutional niche identities has not been sufficiently reflected locally in political or strategic will, slowing the more incisive effectiveness that this differentiation should achieve in South Africa. The contemporary

university requires increasingly professional management to guide it through what has become a dramatically more complex environment, entailing "managerial" costs and widening the administrative burden on academics. The resource squeeze, and its entailments, without doubt plays a role in limiting appetite for even those initiatives that appeal to the academic soul.

To take this latter point further, the academic souls are attracted to academic life because it provides them with the space and freedom to pursue and play with ideas that appeal to their respective intellectual talents. This commitment to the "life of the mind" is profound, characterising the fundamental life-choices of these individuals, and is thus passionately defended. If this commitment is seen to be compromised through the imposition of ideas that are not consistent with the academic endeavour, then it should not be surprising that certain ideas fail to flourish. Many well-intentioned policy initiatives spawned in the regulatory sphere have run aground on this reef. A sensitivity to this doubtless informs the disclaimer offered by the former Minister of Education: "Thus I begin by saying that the demand and call we make on higher education is not a political imposition; it is not a threat to autonomy."

Even in the world of ideas, there are contending criteria for which ones should command attention. Hall has pointed to the debate between the social constructivists and the social realists as one platform upon which such contests are staged. The definition of what constitutes a "progressive" project, and the modalities of its implementation, are in fierce contention, and without doubt this is one of the issues that complicate the matter of community engagement. As Hall has noted, "advocates of 'progressive' ideas may have marginalised themselves" (Hall, 2009, p.16). People who would describe themselves as progressive, may be tempted to label those who might challenge them as social or academic conservatives, while in fact the critique of the latter may be well founded. This may contribute to the circumspection with which zealous reformers are received, especially if their ideas seem not be supported by credible evidence.

In conclusion, the task of trying to define the relationship between the academy and broader society is a complex and fraught one. The central thrust of my argument above is that the attempt from the regulative sphere to achieve such definitions, for regulative purposes, may be frustrated by its own precepts and assumptions. Rather than working from outside, let us invest in a study of the South African professoriate, not necessarily only for the reasons that have prompted this study. Essentially, I'm arguing that the relationship between the university and broader society is obviously one of critical concern in all its dimensions but that the issue of community engagement – however it is defined and advanced – can only make any sense when viewed in the bigger picture.

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# Engagements with engagement: a response to Martin Hall

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## Introduction

In a refreshingly candid introduction to a recent volume on university engagement and “relevance”, Alan Scott and Alan Harding (2007, p.2) comment that in the new competitive higher education climate, two themes have become an insistent refrain in the rhetoric of institutional self-promotion: “relevance” and “scale”:

*“Whether they consider themselves ‘world class’ and in possession of an ‘international reputation’ ... or as essentially ‘national’ or ‘civic’ institutions with fewer international credentials... most claim to produce eminently useful knowledge that can be utilised by a huge range of ‘communities’, but is especially valuable to those living, metaphorically speaking, on the university’s doorstep.”*

So it is in South Africa too: our universities would have us believe that they have the answers to the pressing problems of the communities they serve. In this way, they seek to legitimate themselves

to an ever wider set of ever more diverse, and unfortunately, sceptical constituencies. “Communities” are, in practice, more or less anything that is in the university’s external environment, and “relevance” can be anything from engaging in policy on national priorities, regional engagements with development projects, to local engagement with poor communities, new links with firms, and disseminating results of research. For Martin Hall, this messiness and lack of definition stands in need of some theoretical corrective, which he then sets out to provide. Less ambitiously, I shall argue that “community engagement” is an irreducibly contextual activity, depending variously on the mission and strengths of the university, the state of regional development of the area in which it is sited, and the ingenuity of the academics concerned, not to mention the diversity of views and interests of the local “communities”. Above all, I hope to show that highly contextual spaces like “community engagement” are weakly bounded sites of practice and highly susceptible to rhetorical fashion. By their nature, they will be hard to pin down within a single frame without distorting their historically adaptive character. Whether this conclusion is a debilitating one for national regulating bodies like the NRF and the HEQC or, on the contrary, presents them with an exciting window of opportunity, is a question I will return to in my concluding comments.

There is much in Martin Hall’s elegant survey to agree with. I agree that the idea of “engagement” should be re-visited; I agree that “engagement” should be integrated with teaching and research and not seen as a separate category; and I also agree that there is nothing in the ideal of engagement inherently contrary to disciplinary business as usual. In passing, I should note that he errs in supposing that there is anything in the social realism I espouse that is incompatible with community engagement. Hall notes that my ideas on knowledge and its publics came out of the “policy cauldron” that generated the White Paper of 1997, which is partly so, but only partly. I find it instructive to go a little further back in time in order to make better sense of where we are now with this complex, under-specified notion

of university “community engagement”. I propose to go back to the mid-1980s and examine a different context of engagement as a starting point, because, as we will see, engagement meant something quite different in the 1980s when I first became engaged; it changed again in the 1990s; and again in the 2000s. In fact, as I will show, there is more than one legitimate kind of engagement, and these kinds change as the context changes. The indissolubly contextual nature of engagement also makes it impossible to nail down prescriptively once and for all what worthwhile engagement can be for all kinds of higher education institution; it is a dimension of fitness *for* purpose, not *of* purpose; it will depend on the kind of academic institution and its academic mission.

In what follows, I will briefly sketch what I see as the genealogy of “community engagement” in the South African academy. It does not claim to be a history, only a schematic trajectory, and it will be partial. Nevertheless, hopefully it can indicate in what ways “engagement” as a value has been taken up by the academy, and perhaps offer some pointers as to where it might go in future.

## A partisan history of the idea of engagement in the South Africa academy, mid-1980s to the late-2000s

### Phase 1: Engaged with the struggle

In the mid-1980s, I found myself at the University of Witwatersrand (Wits), which was a politically turbulent place to be, to put it mildly. The debate around what we as academics should be doing was fierce, and the debate was conducted at the institutional level (how should the university be more responsive to “the community”?) and at the

individual level (how to be committed and helpful without becoming unwittingly intrusive?). As to the former, a group of “concerned” academics at Wits, of which I was one, conducted a survey of what Wits should be doing (called the Perspectives on Wits, or POW study), which led in turn to a series of Senate Special Lectures (Wits, 1986). Events overtook us, and when the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC)<sup>1</sup> approached Wits to hold its inaugural conference there, it seemed natural to lend a hand. This led by several steps to the establishment of an Education Policy Unit (EPU) at Wits as a joint university/community venture, to pursue education policy alternatives for a new state after apartheid. I became its first director. In short order, EPUs were established at the then University of Natal and the University of the Western Cape<sup>2</sup> as well.

No-one knew which way things should go: the university pulled towards criteria like publishing and peer review (although in truth not too hard); the NECC sought, naturally enough in the circumstances, ammunition for the education struggle. The former pulled to the long term, the latter to the short term. We tried to work around this, but all too frequently felt “on the edge”, as the title of one of our papers at the time had it (Muller, 1991).

We weren’t the only ones feeling the tension. In 1988, a workshop was held at Wits University examining how other cognate bodies dealt with the tensions. Nearly 30 engaged organisations attended (Hofmeyr & Muller, 1988)<sup>3</sup>, and we discovered a relatively large

<sup>1</sup> To newcomers to the recent history of South African higher education, this capsule summary may be too brief to be helpful. I refer the interested reader to Muller (1987).

<sup>2</sup> Incidentally, the general secretary of the NECC, Ihron Rensburg is today rector of the University of Johannesburg; the second director of the EPU at the University of Western Cape, Saleem Badat, is today rector of Rhodes University; the second director of the EPU at Natal University, Blade Nzimande, is today Secretary General of the South African Communist Party and Minister of Higher Education and Training: which helps to underline the blurred line between higher education and the political domain.

<sup>3</sup> These ranged from ones that have endured to today, like the Sociology of Work Programme started by Eddie Webster, and the Centre for Applied Legal Studies, both at Wits; the Urban Foundation and the South African Institute of Race

number of others in a similar boat.

The upside was that we were all clear what the socio-political project was: the trick was how to contribute optimally in a context that was savagely opposed to it. It was clear to me that what the NECC needed and would need was “powerful knowledge” – conceptually and empirically robust knowledge. But there were several impediments to its satisfactory production:

1. Short-termism and instrumentalism: there was a short-term, insistent and on-going need for ammunition for the day-to-day negotiations with the state, which, together with its implied instrumentalism, militated against longer-term projects where the use was not immediately apparent or demonstrable;
2. There was a severe shortage of people qualified to produce powerful educational knowledge. The universities had turned out activists skilled in critique, but not in advanced statistics or economics of education. This shortcoming, together with short-termism and instrumentalism, had the consequence that when the NECC and the ANC came to power, they were simply not supported by an existing indigenous body of powerful knowledge that made it possible to govern from a strong informed knowledge base;
3. Engaged organisations in their nature tended to produce specialised knowledge which, because it required a relatively long apprenticeship to master, meant that very few community interlocutors had what Collins and Evans (2007) call “interactional expertise”, that is, enough background knowledge to converse with complete confidence about its implications. This is the heart of what Hall refers to as the “boundary problem”, a much discussed problem in the social studies of science. Hall, following Gibbons, recommends as a solution the establishment of *agora* – public spaces where matters of common concern could be discussed by diverse constituencies. But Gibbons’ *agora* are mainly spaces for

the commerce of expert peers (see below), and while we engaged academics and the educational communities we worked with were in a sense peers “in the struggle”, we weren’t all peers when it came to the intricacies of specialised knowledge. The upshot was that we found it extremely difficult to construct transaction zones to produce mutual intelligibility, and in the tug between specialised knowledge and politics, it was politics that invariably won. It must be said though that common ground could be, and was, found in certain special cases: the case of the National Education Policy Initiative (NEPI) being one. But this was not an everyday occurrence, nor one easily achieved.

4. Just because engagement was for impeccably good reasons doesn’t mean it can’t produce misleading knowledge, or that it is somehow spared the essential rigours of powerful knowledge validation because it is “relevant” and its heart is in the right place. The danger here is that commitment can bleed into acceding to political imperatives – another dimension of the triumph of the short term in periods of intense social and political turmoil.

These problems notwithstanding, it is worth concluding this section by underlining the positive features of this mode of engagement, difficult as it was to maintain. At its best it attempted to *connect an intellectual project to a socio-political project*, and it attempted to bridge these by helping to bring powerful knowledge to bear on political policy and strategy. As we will see, not all models of engagement identify a clear socio-political project, and the intellectual project driving them is also frequently not clear. In hindsight, this phase represented a heroic, if sometimes quixotic, effort under particularly difficult circumstances, which started off on the right foot, even if it did not follow through as strongly as it started. Sad to say, this was all too often because the high level expertise was simply not there among those who were most keen to serve.

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Relations; bodies prominent at the time but no longer active, like the Detainees Parents’ Support Committee and the International Labour Research and Information Group.

## Phase 2: In service to the community

“Community engagement” as a constitutive idea, in the form enthusiastically promoted by the American foundations Kellogg and Ford in particular (see for example Kellogg Commission, 1999), has an elective affinity with the nineteenth century land-grant ideal of “service to the community” (Lohmann, 2004), but also with American volunteerism, as exemplified by the Peace Corps. Much of the discourse of “service learning” was thus brought to South Africa by well-meaning grant-making officers of these American foundations, though without much conspicuous success, at least by their own assessment. As Dick Fehnel, Ford Foundation’s point man in South Africa at the time, commented:

*“One strand of grant money sought to bring higher education and the labour market closer together by introducing practices initiated by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) elsewhere in the world and to address the education and training needs of South Africa’s working adults. Working with the Joint Education Trust (JET), Ford supported a variety of CAEL-type activities (including Community Higher Education Service Partnerships, CHESP, JM) but to date, none has really caught on.”* (Fehnel, 2007, p.160)

The reasons for this are not really hard to find. Since at least the Peace Corps, it has been clear that the real beneficiaries of this service ideal all too often end up being the benefit-bringers. As the Mouton and Wildschut (2007) evaluation of CHESP says, in South Africa’s “service decade”, roughly up to the mid-2000s, it became clear that it was the students and their tutors who were getting most out of the CHESP initiative. What “the community” was getting was far less clear. In a couple of cases, the service learning was discontinued for this very reason, and Hall’s own university at the time, the University of Cape Town, dropped out of the project. A subsidiary reason for the less than optimal outcome was possibly also that the benefit-

bringers, at least in the case of the universities, were mostly students with a less than firm grip on the knowledge they sought to “serve” the community with: one might say that the “dosage” of service provided by students could not match that which could be provided by dedicated professionals.

I do not minimise the benefits to students, and to staff: these benefits are well known in good programmes of most of the professions, like law, medicine, teacher education and social work. But it will always be harder to envisage how students in the more academic courses of study, such as history and chemistry, might serve the same function, except in a teaching capacity, as Mouton and Wildschut point out in their evaluation. The point here is that it is not easy to imagine a general requirement for “service” to be of the same applicability across the range of the disciplines.

The CHESP students thus all too often ended up having a *weak benefit* to the community because the “knowledge dosage” they could deliver was weak. This does not mean that the knowledge areas weren’t strong, especially in the medical and ecology fields, but that

- the purveyors, as 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> year students, were not in control of their knowledge base; and
- they had a weak grip on who the community was they were supposed to be serving.

In other words, “service learning” as a form of community engagement always has to struggle with the fact that students are neophytes, not adepts, and with the fact that all too often exactly who the community recipients are, or should be, is hazy to them.

## Phase 3: Engaged with Mode 2 Society

The discourse was, by the middle years of the first decade of the new millennium, already shifting. “Service learning” as a left-leaning ideal of service deriving from American down-home republicanism

was slowly but surely being nudged aside by the glitzier language of “new knowledge production” emanating from the latest intellectual fashion, “globalisation” and its discursive twin, the “knowledge society”. This is strikingly illustrated for me by the title and substance of the keynote given by Michael Gibbons at the CHE /JET conference held to showcase the CHESP work in 2006. Gibbons was then head of the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) and at the time vigorously advocating the virtues of “Mode 2” as the panacea for Africa’s universities (Gibbons, 1998).

Gibbons’ keynote, first written as an ACU document in 2001, carried the title “Engagement as a core value in Mode 2 society”. It is immediately apparent that both “engagement” and “community” have undergone a radical transformation. In a globalisation register such as this, not only the local but also the national disappears. All Gibbons’s examples of “engaged communities” are transnational single-issue networks; networks moreover populated mainly by techno-scientists – deep vein thrombosis (DVT) medical researchers; muscular dystrophy medical geneticists; the trans-disciplinary web of scientists that is the Human Genome Mapping Project (HGMP); and the sub-tribes of physicists working on cutting-edge nuclear physics. It is true that DVT and muscular dystrophy patients participated in the early stages of the respective investigations, but one gathers from the descriptions given that big science soon took over. Any sense here of “community” as local, deserving or socially excluded, is gone. We can admit that the two medical examples incorporate the interests of sufferers and thus evince a commendable contextual awareness, but as Gibbons and his co-authors will now concede, a lot of good research was ever thus (Nowotny et al., 2003).

What the experiential service learning advocates at the conference made of this is hard to fathom. Probably, like respondent George Subotsky (2006), they were torn between admiration for the global theory pyrotechnics and feelings of dismay at the loss of a sense of “community”. Some of them certainly lost no time in following this trend, not because of any intellectual vacillation among its proponents,

although Mouton and Wildschut (2007, p.29) do comment in their evaluation that the research work coming from these quarters was not strong<sup>4</sup>, but rather because the extremely contextual nature of “engagement” will always render it peculiarly vulnerable to just such passing fashions. For the most adroit, the new language offered conceptual resources to add to the usual ones of Vygotskian, social practice, activity and the like (see for example, McMillan, 2009). But such free borrowing raises the issue of appropriacy. Take for example the term “trading zone”, translated by historian of microphysics Peter Galison from anthropology to account for the way that theorists, experimentalists and instrument-makers evolved a form of common pidgin or creole in which to communicate in the development of radar and particle detectors (Galison, 1997). The co-development of nanotechnology would be another example. In extending this usage, Gibbons wished to apply it more broadly to “transaction spaces”, “across both disciplinary and institutional boundaries” (Gibbons, 2006). Key to the concept, however, is that “all partners bring something that can be exchanged or negotiated and, second, that they also have the resources (scientific as well as material) to be able to take something from other participants” (*ibid.*). Is this condition satisfied in the service-learning transaction? It is hard to be sure, since that space is quite some distance from the highly specialised spaces of the techno-scientists. I will return to this in the final phase.

In a paradox worth pondering, Gibbons was first imported into South African policy-speak for reasons quite different to those of the service learners and engagement advocates. It is instructive briefly to examine this different line of descent from Phase 1, one that became influential in policy circles, and that was taken up, albeit far more cautiously, in the White Paper in 1997.

The policy activists of the 1980s that Nico Cloete and I had called

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<sup>4</sup> “The scholarship tends to be a-theoretical, very descriptive and sometimes bordering on the anecdotal and impressionistic.” They go on to cite the view of three external commentators to the effect that the work is largely “practice-driven” and often “weak and thin”.

“the white hands” after Polish anarchist Jan Makhaisky (Muller & Cloete, 1987), were particularly hard hit in the 1990s, in ways still not fully assimilated, by the loss of a coordinating and unifying social project to which to align their intellectual projects. In the policy vacuum that followed the NEPI exercise, a Task Team convened under the auspices of the Centre for Education Policy Development, made up from the rump of The Policy Forum of the University Democratic Union of South Africa (UDUSA), a prime mover in NEPI, drafted a proposal for a national commission into higher education. This was eventually accepted by the new administration, and the National Commission of Higher Education (NCHE) was launched in 1995. It was natural that a solid rump of the Policy Forum members should become involved in the Commission. The Ford Foundation, which had funded the Policy Forum and in the person of Dick Fehnel sat on the Task Team, lent some support to the NCHE along with the Kellogg and Mellon Foundations.

The Commission thus brought into alignment one line of post-1980s policy activism: there were many others, like the policy activists who went into government or private consultancy, or returned to academia. This NCHE group was still troubled by the dream of knowledge democratisation from the 1980s. This troubling thought was developed in two ways in the NCHE. The first established the discourse of “engagement” in the NCHE, which had ramifications for the “service learning” community and for the HEQC audit criterion 18 on the one hand, and for the Ford-funded CHESP initiative discussed above on the other. The second, more rooted in European rather than American notions of engagement and democracy, and therefore more congenial to the neo-Marxist roots of the UDUSA core, latched onto the Gibbons Mode 2 story, believing it had found the next step towards advancing the project of democratising knowledge<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>5</sup> I must admit I played a certain part in introducing the notion to the Commission (Muller, 1995), which in retrospect I regret and have tried to correct (Muller, 2000). Alas, the ground proved too receptive to its redemptive promise, though I do believe the following description, found on a Canadian website, rather overstates the case: “His (Michael Gibbons’s) work has been vigorously taken up by the South African

These two lines of descent became amalgamated in the NCHE deliberations and in their subsequent hybrid notion of engagement. The notion of engagement in both the lines, the US-derived “service” line and the European “Mode 2” line, was rather depoliticised, leaving those more politically inclined feeling either dissatisfied – the hard core development activists who sought clients in government – or deeply suspicious of the motives of the UDUSA core in the NCHE, at least partly because of their Ford links (Sehoole, 2002). For this latter view, “empowerment” as a political project had been dumped for a deracinated “engagement” and we were back where we started with the apartheid ivory towers of 1980s.

In the end, the Mode 2 progenitors did too little too late to distance themselves from epistemological populism and from being used by marginal academic constituencies in their battles for status and standing<sup>6</sup>. Small wonder that the idea caught on, as Nowotny and her co-authors say, everywhere but amongst the mainstream scientific community it was directed at.

Nevertheless, its over-statements and under-substantiations notwithstanding, what the Mode 2 story did have going for it was a focus on the knowledge project, and an incipient if not explicit social or explanatory theory. This was not apparent in the high-flown rhetoric of its progenitors, but rather in other versions of the “knowledge” focus that brought it back to the political and economic realms, and began to suggest a way of re-connecting the knowledge project with the social project.

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authorities who have adopted the notion of Mode 2 research as a guiding concept during the current, and ongoing, transformation of the South African higher education system.” ([www.oufaweb.ualberta.ca/kusp/pdfs](http://www.oufaweb.ualberta.ca/kusp/pdfs). Retrieved 23 June 2009).

<sup>6</sup> Nowotny, Scott & Gibbons (2003: 180) ruefully note: “If nurse researchers pounced on ‘Mode 2’ to reduce their subordination to medical research, or if global accountancy companies placed ‘Mode 2’ at the heart of newly established ‘Centres of Business Knowledge’ – both of which are actual examples – who were we, the authors, to complain? We had fallen into our own post-modern trap.”

## Phase 4: Engagement with development

“Development” is a tricky concept, fraught with debate and disagreement. For some it means narrowly “economic development”, for others, the term has a wider national and political provenance. Both of these are important and will be examined below, but before that, I wish to deal with a longstanding prejudice regarding academia, namely that academics do something called academic work which has, by its very nature, nothing to do with how society develops or wishes to develop. This pervasive misconception identifies science, or expert knowledge, with what academics alone do. Indeed, Martin Hall in his paper attributes this view to me, and sets out to debunk it, falling in the process into the opposite error – namely, that because academics are not necessarily the only purveyors of expert knowledge, there is, ipso facto, no real difference between expert knowledge and everyday commonsense (“the ineluctable connection between localised informal and tacit ways of knowing, and generalised, structured and codified knowledge structures”). To go this way is to veer back towards the populism Nowotny and her co-authors are now distancing themselves from, and to deflect attention from the prior misconception, where a far more interesting development merits our attention.

In his enlightening recent book, Steven Shapin (2008) shows how the vocation of doing science in the USA has shifted. Universities are no longer necessarily the preferred place to live the Scientific Good Life, and scientists increasingly know, even if their Humanities colleagues do not, that opportunities to do the really innovative cutting-edge research are increasingly to be found in industrial labs, especially those connected to biotech, hi-tech and techno-scientific endeavours, where researchers find the intellectual space and freedom to do the work that is increasingly being crowded out by the chores of writing endless grant proposals, and looking after increasing cohorts of graduate students. Those that stay in academia also increasingly work with their colleagues in the NGO and commercial world. They do this not because of some kind of “boundary weakening”, but because it is in these arenas that the true vocation of knowledge

work can be better pursued. “In the best, though of course not all of these environments”, says Shapin, “immediate utility is not the first requirement, as Humanities apprehensions might expect”. Scientific entrepreneurship like all good science is more often than not about having fun, and if money becomes part of the equation, then it should be seen as that which makes affordable the hedonism, rather than the asceticism, that is nowadays associated with scientific innovation.

Put like this, and with all the qualifications admitted about South Africa’s developmental status, it should be clear that what is happening here is not that the “sacred” has become “profane”, or has even become hybridised; rather, the “sacred” has spread from its privileged site in the university in modernity, and has established itself also in previously unlikely places. Or to put that another way, research active universities, by this account, need no urging to venture out of the private groves of academe into the public domain. Nor, for that matter, do research active academics need prompting to engage with the public domain. In a large statistical study of French academics, Pablo Jensen and his collaborators (2008) show that it is the most prolific researchers who engage most actively with the public domain: engagement and academic success go together. It seems the “ivory tower” has these days little more substance than the unicorn.

But has the nature of the “sacred” not been affected in this shift? Is the vocation of science not changing with its expanding location? About this there is still much debate. Not everyone is as upbeat as Shapin is about the prospects for science traditionally conceived. In a recent UNESCO publication edited by Meek, Teichler & Kearney (2009, p.20), Marie-Louise Kearney worries about a potential exclusive “focus on application-driven project funding or on problem-oriented research cooperation to the exclusion of basic, ‘blue skies’ research” and goes on to warn that “The familiar catch words of relevance and utility need to be treated with caution. Relevance is vital, but truly useful knowledge can be discovered in various ways”. In other words, will “relevance” crowd out basic research? Close watchers of contemporary knowledge production like Gibbons and

Shapin are not nearly as concerned as others are who worry from afar. Nevertheless, the debate tends to get stuck in the either-or dichotomy of basic or applied. An interesting alternative is provided by the longitudinal empirical and analytical work of David Cooper (2009), which draws together a number of strands that herald the emergence of the “development” discourse of engagement.

Cooper first introduces the idea that if we think in very long wave cycles, we can discern, also in South Africa, that the world entered a “third capitalist industrial revolution” in the 1970s, led by ICT, biotechnology, fibre optic technology, material science, nanotechnology and the like. Symbiotically coupled to this he notes, along with Etzkowitz and Leydsdorff, the emergence in the 1980s of what they call a “third university mission” (the first two being teaching and research), namely, a mission to contribute to the socio-economic development of society. What this has meant in practical terms is a huge growth in industry and government funding for university-based research. What kind of research Cooper set out to discover.

He chose eleven university-based research groups, collecting data from them three times in a seven-year period. Although he chose all but one of the groups on the basis of their applied orientation, he was surprised to find that not only were they doing applied research, but that a good proportion of their work could far better be regarded as “use-inspired basic research”, after Donald Stokes. Moreover, he also came to see that what industry and government bodies sought from university-based research centres was either use-inspired basic, or even just basic, research; from universities of technology, orthodox applied research. Cooper concludes that the emerging national system of innovation requires, and will increasingly demand from research-based universities, the fundamental good ideas which in-house R&D operations cannot supply. This applies equally to government and industry, and probably to community groups too.

Cooper’s account helps explain why “development”, both national and regional, has increasingly entered the vocabulary of politicians and higher education policy makers. A recent World Bank report

(Yusuf et al., 2008) makes the case for African higher education to help “accelerate” growth, and a project of the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) is pursuing university–firm linkages in sub-Saharan Africa (HSRC, 2009). We should not imagine that this form of engagement with the world outside the university will always be smooth, or produce virtuous effects. In addition to the ever-present fears about the smothering effects on fundamental research, the Higher Education Research and Advocacy Network in Africa (HERANA), investigating higher education–development linkages in eight African countries, is finding a worrying trend. In universities where what they call the “academic core” is relative small, and consequently with only a small number of research active staff, donor project funding tends to draw the African scholars out of the university instead of providing means for strengthening the academic core inside the institution. The result seems to be a persistent de-institutionalisation in the very places where the institution is in need of shoring up. This should act as a general warning: external networks are good, but only if they do not prosper at the expense of the nurturing institution.

Cooper worries that while university links to government and industry (the so-called “triple helix”) are intensifying, the civic domain of civil society appears to be the poor cousin, a node that has not received the attention it perhaps deserves since the struggle engagements of Phase 1. He notes too, as does Hall, that “engagement” with “communities” is beginning to receive attention worldwide, on the back of the new development discourse, and voices the hope that “regional development” will provide the space for a broader set of constituencies to be included in the new networks.

The development discourse and the diverse and appropriate roles universities might play in it has yet to be fully articulated. Nevertheless we can see in it the promise of the elaboration of a social project (“development”) being linked to an intellectual project (academic research). Time will tell whether the presently hard-nosed tenor of development can fruitfully accommodate

the social conscience and the greater concern for the “public good” that the advocates of community engagement are urging.

## Some concluding comments

I think we can accept that “engagement” with the world outside academe is no longer something that requires extended debate. In different forms at different times, it is something that has always happened. With the advent of the “second academic revolution”, especially in institutions that are strong in the disciplines that underpin what Cooper calls the new “regime of technology”, engagement is a fait accompli and virtually normalised. Avoiding perverse effects should be the concern. Yet the idea of “engagement” remains underspecified, and by default an economic rationale (“engagement for innovation”) dominates. I agree with Hall that the notion stands in need of conceptual elaboration as well as of empirical investigation that sets out to establish when, and in what terms, we can establish successful instances of it over and above the obvious ones of technological breakthrough and the like. Above all, I think it unhelpful to chastise academics with the moral imperative to “engage”. Where it is not happening, there is probably a good reason for it – ranging from the appropriacy of the discipline in question, to whether or not the academic expertise exists to “engage” meaningfully. I agree too with the HSRC conclusion that strategies of engagement for a differentiated system should be developed. A typology of forms of engagement appropriate for different types of institutions would be illuminating.

The idea of “community” likewise remains unspecific and unhelpful. I agree with Cooper that elaborations around the idea of “regional development” may well provide the conceptual and financial space for a broader notion of engagement with communities beyond the existing “triple helix”. But which? Cooper suggests “civil

society”, Hall suggests the “third sector”, and a conference held in Newcastle, UK in June 2009 was titled “university engagement with socially excluded communities”. There are problems of under-specification with all of them.

Notwithstanding these reservations, the review above suggests the following:

1. Universities trade in powerful knowledge. Successful engagements are likely to be those that are based on knowledge that can make a difference to technological development, to regional or national policy development, and to solving problems of local communities.
2. Helpful powerful knowledge is not necessarily applied knowledge; use-inspired basic knowledge as well as fundamental knowledge is also what the outside publics, and development priorities, require from the specialised institution that is the university.
3. The most active researchers are likely to be the ones that are engaged in the public domain in one or other way. If academics are not engaged, it may well be that they are not research active either. In which case, university transformation should start here, not with intensified calls for engagement.
4. Engagement is ineluctably contextual, and historically specific: appropriate engagement cannot be prescribed in a template. This does not absolve us from the requirement to find ways of identifying it, providing funding for more rather than less-promising efforts, and finding robust ways to measure it. But it does mean that theory will only help us so far, and that although an inductive process of identifying successful engagement practice will be time consuming, it is probably the only sensible way to begin constructing a typology of engagement best practices that might suit the diversity of institutional and development contexts to be found in contemporary South Africa.

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## Towards developing a common discourse and a policy framework for social responsiveness

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### Introduction

This paper<sup>1</sup> describes how one university set about understanding the notion of social responsiveness and developed a framework which emphasises the interconnectedness between social responsiveness and the other core processes of the university. The first part of the paper describes the process of developing a common discourse about social responsiveness within the university. The second part develops this further by outlining how practices on the ground helped to inform a conceptual framework defining the linkages between social responsiveness and the other core processes of the university: research and teaching. Finally the paper concludes by arguing that national conceptual frameworks for guiding universities' engagement with

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is based on a paper submitted for a special issue of an on-line *Gateways International Journal of Community Research and Engagement* publication, a joint initiative of the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS) and the Center for Urban Research and Learning (CURL) at Loyola University, Chicago due to be published in October 2009.

societal needs should be wide enough to accommodate different institutional perspectives on the ways in which institutions seek to contribute to development challenges facing the country.

In 2004, the University of Cape Town (UCT) launched its first annual report on social responsiveness at the university. As a public institution receiving considerable funding from the public purse, it was deemed appropriate that the university should report annually on how the university was addressing major development challenges facing the country, in line with the agenda set out for the transformation of Higher Education outlined in the White Paper of 1997 (Ministry of Education, 1997).

The first report was based on a survey instrument which was sent to 148 heads of (academic) departments and research units – electronically and in hard copy. There was a 32% return rate. The survey instrument attempted to capture the manner in which staff was responding to social, economic, cultural and political development needs through their research, curriculum and choice of pedagogy.

The release of the report surfaced very divergent views among the senior leadership of the institution about the notion of social responsiveness and about the value of producing a dedicated social responsiveness report. Some members of the senior leadership argued that a focus on social responsiveness was necessary in order to monitor how UCT was addressing its commitment to playing an active developmental role in South Africa's cultural, economic, political, scientific and social environment (UCT, 1996), and to demonstrate UCT's accountability as a public institution to helping achieve national goals for transformation of higher education, outlined in the White Paper (Ministry of Education, 1997). Others felt that a focus on social responsiveness could have the effect of undermining the importance of basic research, or that it could reinforce a view, prevalent among certain stakeholders within the country, that research that doesn't have immediate impact cannot be regarded as relevant. They also argued that the use of the term *responsiveness* could result in a narrow instrumentalist view of the role of the university in society rather than

thinking about how the university promotes the wider public good through public debate and producing critical and analytical thinkers required for building a solid democracy.

Among people sympathetic to the idea of producing an annual report, there were different views about whether social responsiveness should be linked to efforts to promote social justice or whether it should also include contributions to various dimensions of development, such as cultural, economic, environmental and political (UCT, 2003).

A seminar was organised soon after the release of the report to debate these different views. This helped to allay some concerns, particularly those related to the need to avoid a narrow instrumentalist approach to social responsiveness, and fears about undervaluing basic research. Members of the Social Responsiveness Working Group (SRWG) stressed that policy critique should be regarded as a critical component of social responsiveness and that there was no intention to undervalue basic research. Indeed participants in the seminar recognised that good applied or strategic research generally depends on prior disciplinary competence (Hall, 2009, p.14).

In planning the next Social Responsiveness report, the SRWG decided to modify the approach and to present the annual report in the form of descriptive case profiles, or *portraits of practice*. This approach was retained for the following three reports. The intention was to stimulate debate within the university community about different forms of responsiveness and their relationship with teaching and research, and to use the portraits of practice as the basis for developing a conceptual framework for responsiveness that would be appropriate for the UCT context. This approach accords with Singh's view, that attempts to define the third role of universities should be based on conversations at institutional level and should not entail "setting narrow, tight, exclusionary definitions of what community engagement is: it should rather be about establishing relationships between community engagement and the other two core functions" (*ibid.*, p.7).

In identifying the case profiles for the 2005 report, the working group, which was responsible for overseeing the production of the report, used the following working definition of social responsiveness: “Scholarly-based activities that have projected and defined outcomes that match or contribute to developmental objectives or policies defined by civil society, local, provincial or national government, international agencies or industry” (UCT, 2005, p.4). Data for the cases was collected in the form of in-depth interviews with individuals or unit/centre/project heads.

## Towards defining social responsiveness

Hall’s comments on the notion of community illustrate the difficulties involved in seeking to identify a university’s community.

*“Community, then, can be taken as a cluster of households or an entire region, as an organisation ranging from a provincial government department to an NGO, as a school, clinic, hospital, church or mosque or as a part of the university itself ... [Or communities can be defined as] a loosely defined set of social organisations. But community also functions as an adjective, as a qualifier that indicates work that is socially beneficial. Understood in this way and in the South African context, community work contributes to social or economic justice.”* (Hall, 2009, p.17)

The analysis of the cases in the first report confirmed the difficulty of identifying a single community for the university as a whole, given that members of the university were working with a very wide range of external constituencies at local, provincial, national and sectoral levels. Indeed, as Goddard suggests, the cases confirmed that

“territoriality is an extremely complex and problematic concept for Higher Education Institutions [because] universities operate within multiple and overlapping territories and usually manage a portfolio of activities ranging from the global to the local” (Chatterton & Goddard, 2000, p.478).

Since 2006, the SRWG has organised three colloquia to reflect on issues that surfaced in the Social Responsiveness Reports. The discussions in the first two colloquia focused on the definition of social responsiveness and the links between social responsiveness and the other core processes at the university.

Analysis of the contributions in these two colloquia suggested that there was consensus about using a broad definition of social responsiveness, which would embody links between activities involving academic staff, external constituencies and intentional public benefit. The notion of public benefit was preferred to the notion of “community engagement” because it covered the wide range of contributions being made to social, economic, cultural, political, and environmental development, and the variety of external constituencies with whom UCT had established partnerships.

There was strong support for retaining the term social responsiveness, given the perceived need to counter the considerable effort being placed on positioning the university as a world-class, research-led institution, by emphasising the importance of a historically white institution needing to respond to its local, regional and national context in its research and teaching. This position was formally endorsed in 2006, when Senate approved a definition of social responsiveness that stipulates that social responsiveness must have an intentional public purpose or benefit (UCT, 2006). Defining social responsiveness in relation to the notion of public benefit accords with Hall’s view that it is preferable to think of the third leg of universities in terms of “public goods, conceptualised and offered in partnership with a range of [external constituencies] with the aim of contributing to generally accepted social and economic [and cultural and environmental] benefits as a form of return on the investment

of public funds" (Hall, 2009, p.19). However, it is in conflict with Hall's notion of limiting consideration of activities that promote the public good to those involving "that part of civil society located between the family, the state and market" (*ibid.*, p.19) as much of UCT's social responsiveness involves engagement with various levels of government.

Hall suggests that an examination of universities' contributions to addressing inequality is critical to thinking about the mission of a public university in contemporary South African society, because poverty and growing inequalities can be regarded as the biggest challenges facing the new democracy. "A necessary condition for the continued reproduction of the defining aspects of the public university is addressing inequality and its consequences" (Hall, 2006, p.2).

While Senate affirmed its commitment to promoting social justice, it recognised that contributions to various dimensions of development were important. This accords with the World Declaration on Higher Education which states that, the "relevance in (or responsiveness of) higher education should be assessed in terms of the fit between what society expects of institutions and what they do. This requires ethical standards, political impartiality, critical capacities and, at the same time, a better articulation with the problems of society and the world of work, basing long-term orientations on societal aims and needs, including respect for cultures and environmental protection. ... Higher education should reinforce its role of service to society, especially its activities aimed at eliminating poverty, intolerance, violence, illiteracy, hunger, environmental degradation and disease." (UNESCO, 1998, p.8).

## Defining the link between social responsiveness and the other core activities of the university

The second challenge for the SRWG, in its efforts to build consensus on campus about a framework for social responsiveness, related to the widespread misconception that social responsiveness referred to activities that had no relationship with research and teaching, the core processes of the university. Hall suggests that the widespread marginalisation of social responsiveness, especially in research-intensive universities, may be due to an "epistemological disjuncture in the way knowledge is structured and organised" and contestations about the role and location of the authority that serves to validate the structure and content of knowledge (Hall, 2009, p.8). Counteracting this marginalisation, he suggests, entails an openness to different epistemologies and a recognition of the value of social responsiveness in the knowledge generation project. This accords with emerging international trends in conceptualising civic engagement.

For example, in 2005 a conference on Research Universities and Civic Engagement was co-convened by Campus Compact and the Jonathan M. Tisch College of Citizenship and Public Service at Tufts University in the USA. One of the aims of the conference was to examine how research universities could "entertain and adopt new forms of scholarship – those that link the intellectual assets of higher education institutions to solving public problems and issues". It was recognised that achieving this goal would "necessitate the creation of a new epistemology that ... would imply a kind of action research with norms of its own, which will conflict with the norms of technical rationality – the prevailing epistemology built into research universities ... and that new forms of pedagogy and teaching will also be required" (Gibson, 2006, p.5).

This approach resonated with challenges being made to higher education in South Africa to demonstrate what they were doing to

challenge dominant epistemologies and generate knowledge about the third world from a third-world perspective (Mbeki et al., 2005). Such an orientation would, among other things, require the “conscious elucidation of an African perspective as a distinctive conceptual and analytical lens, which in turn provides a mental position or plane of projection from which the ‘present’ is viewed, reviewed or judged, or from which propositions for new vision or directions are made” (Odora Hoppers, 2006, p.49).

Gibbons has posited the notion of the *agora* which comprises “problem-generating and problem-solving environments” (Gibbons, 2006, p.11), populated by academics and other “publics” designed to generate “socially robust knowledge,” i.e. knowledge that will be demonstrably reliable in a broader range of contexts and not just in specific laboratory conditions (Gibbons, 2006). This process usually involves a process of “interaction between experts and others, each of whom may inhabit different worlds to interact effectively in transforming an issue or problem into a set of research activities” (Gibbons, 2006, p.14). Gibbons describes the issue around which they engage as a *boundary object* and the space where engagement happens as a *transactional space* involving two-way interaction or communication. Often, because the discussions are around problems, the solution involves interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary work (Gibbons, 2006). Writers, such as Nyden and Gibbons, argue that socially engaged research necessitates some form of community involvement in determining the research questions and interpreting the data.

For Nyden, collaborative university-community research typically involves partnerships in all stages of the research and dissemination of results, including conceptualisation of the issues to be studied, design of the methodology, collection of data, data analysis, report writing, and dissemination of research results (Nyden, 2005).

Several of the case profiles in the reports illustrate knowledge application, dissemination and generation through working in partnerships with external constituencies.

The portrait of the African Religious Health Assets Programme (ARHAP), located in the Department of Religious Studies, describes the use of transactional spaces involving multiple stakeholders to generate knowledge about factors impacting on the treatment of HIV/AIDS. The background to this initiative was the contestations on the ground in South Africa about the distribution of antiretrovirals (ARVs) which suggested that it is not enough to simply provide ARVs. Various etymologies of disease appeared to be at work and differing constructs of bodies, health and illness are involved, many of them imbued with religious images, symbols and understandings of the world. So, in working in a grounded way with communities, ARHAP tried to generate “theories [which were] shaped as much by the way people actually think and work and live on the ground, as they are by prior learning” (UCT, 2006, p.11). ARHAP’s approach is located in the body of work known as Asset Based Community Development, or capability-focused approaches, which recognises the need to take seriously the assets that people on the ground have and build on these, rather than working from a deficit model, which is the usual approach of traditional research. As Cochrane of ARHAP says:

*“It is the collaboration between researchers, practitioners and local communities that generates the necessary set of new and different perspectives to create new knowledge. Academics are necessarily involved in discourses that are quite technical as a result of being influenced by particular theoretical backgrounds. But on the ground it is necessary to relate the discourse and the way it is constructed to the discourses that people use on the ground. As a result there may be a need for trans-cultural interpretation.”* (UCT, 2006, p.11)

Other cases illustrate the potential of the application of technology to improving the quality of people’s lives which is indicative of a much wider notion of innovation than has been described in northern literature on innovation to date. The case on Cell-Life describes how

IT experts worked together with engineers and health professionals to design a medical management system to support patients on antiretroviral treatment by merging cell phone technology with the Internet and database systems. The PALSA PLUS Project, based in the UCT Lung Institute, which was started in an attempt to address the spectrum of commonly seen lung diseases through the use of a common, guideline approach to diagnosis and treatment in a primary care setting, culminated in the establishment of a Knowledge Translation Unit to promote the integration of research findings into clinical practice, so as to strengthen health services and improve patient outcomes.

Several cases illustrated how academics are attempting to develop socially responsive graduates through enhancing the relevance of the curriculum as a result of knowledge gained through engagement with external constituencies.

The portrait of the post-graduate programme in Disability Studies in the Faculty of Health Sciences illustrates how the research community of disabled and non-disabled academics, activists, policy-makers and practitioners, “coalesce in an *agora* using participatory and action-oriented research to generate the knowledge base of a curriculum for postgraduate programmes at the university and inform policy processes. Key principles guiding the design of the course included finding an African voice for disability driven by needs identified by the Disability Rights Movement” (Favish & McMillan, 2009, p.174).

This approach recognises that the university does not necessarily know best what to include in a curriculum, and that input from stakeholders is critical to the success of the programme. It is also based on the premise that transformation cannot successfully occur through decision-making by those with power, and that genuine transformation involves shared decision-making through the establishment of transactional spaces (Gibbons, 2006). This collaboration helped to ensure that the curriculum and forms of assessment were designed in such a way that graduates would exit with the competencies they would need to promote the rights of the disabled by ensuring a strong

focus on advocacy related skills (Favish & McMillan, 2009).

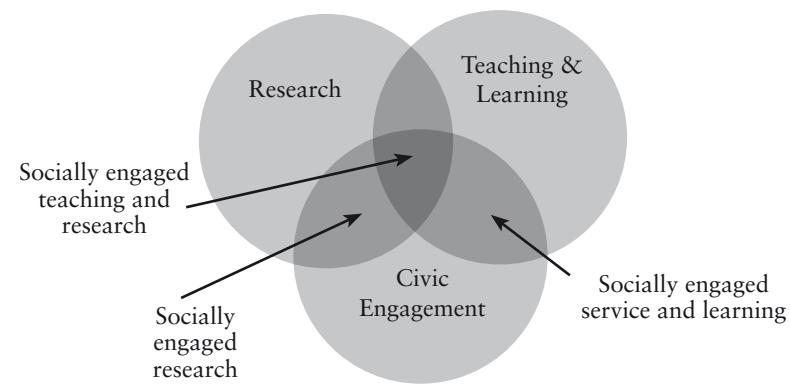
The brief extracts from several portraits above illustrate “how engagement with outside constituencies can work to not only build an appreciation for local knowledge, but that it can also enhance more academic, university-based forms of knowledge. Through this, the curriculum can begin to challenge hegemonic forms of knowledge thereby facilitating new forms of learning and understanding for students” (Favish & McMillan, 2009, p.175).

The portraits, in our view, lend credence to Hall’s contention that “there is no inherent reason why such communities of practice should not be located within the academy or any other specialised knowledge organisation and, indeed, recent work on innovations and open systems is showing that effective innovation often originates in unexpected places” (Hall, 2009, p.13).

## Finalising the policy framework on social responsiveness

The policy was approved by Senate and Council at the end of 2008. The policy is underpinned by a conceptual framework, reflected in the diagram opposite, which acknowledges the interconnectedness between social engagement and the other core activities of the university: research and teaching as well as civic engagement that takes place outside the formal curriculum (UCT, 2008). The framework confirmed UCT’s desire not to define the concept of social responsiveness in a narrow or exclusionary way because it embraces the notion of the university playing an active developmental role in our cultural, economic, political, scientific and social environment (UCT, 2008).

### The interconnectedness between social engagement and other core university activities



UCT's current conceptual framework accordingly recognises the following major forms of social responsiveness:

#### Research-oriented forms of social responsiveness

Examples include:

- Applied research responsive to societal needs
- Dissemination of research results to the broader society
- Research informing public bodies, commissions and policy processes
- Academic staff knowledge and skills being used to address society needs through various ways of engaging with external constituencies and public commentary

#### Teaching and learning-oriented forms of responsiveness

Examples include:

- Design of the curriculum based on the desire to produce socially responsive graduates
- Making education available to the wider society through continuing

professional education and community-based education

- Social justice oriented experiential learning
- Enhancing the relevance of the curriculum for the South African context based on knowledge generated through social engagement.
- Development of new forms of pedagogy and the generation of new knowledge predicated on social engagement

#### Civic engagement

Examples include:

Student voluntary community service

- Compulsory community service linked to meeting Due Performance requirements

## Conclusion

In this paper we have described and discussed the processes used by one university in seeking to develop a conceptual framework for the third mission of universities. In particular, we have outlined the debates that have taken place within the university over the years and how the analysis of portraits of practice within the university have influenced the adoption of the term social responsiveness, rather than community engagement, and the development of a framework that emphasises the interconnectedness between social responsiveness and the other core processes of the university.

Finally, we have argued that the experiences at UCT confirm the value of formulating a national conceptual framework for guiding universities' engagement with societal needs that is wide enough to accommodate different institutional perspectives on the ways in which institutions seek to contribute to development challenges facing the country.

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# Community engagement as scholarship: a response to Hall

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## Introduction

I welcome Hall's article as an important contribution to stimulate deliberation about community engagement in higher education in South Africa. I agree with his critical engagement with Muller's collection (Muller, 2000). I think his choice of Muller is a good one, because Muller's position is probably widely held in academia, not only in South Africa. Also, Muller is specifically writing about community engagement in higher education in South Africa, albeit, as Hall points out, in the same vein as his critical engagement with social constructivism in the school curriculum. I also agree with Hall's choice to engage with the work of Gibbons and the complex possibilities that this choice opens up. Gibbons is internationally recognised, among others, for his introduction of the concepts of *Mode 1* and *Mode 2 Knowledge* in the field of knowledge production, but he also had a local involvement in the field of community engagement in higher education. He presented a paper (Gibbons, 2006) at the first national symposium on community engagement that was organised in cooperation between the CHESP initiative of JET Education Services

and the HEQC in Bantry Bay, Cape Town, 3-5 September 2006.

Although I welcome Hall's presentation and analysis of the problem of community engagement in South African higher education and generally support it, I have strong reservations about his proposed way out of the dilemma of insufficient conceptualisation of community engagement as well as his recommendations to the CHE and the Minister. In my critical engagement with Hall, I shall also draw on some of the comments that were made at the CHE Symposium on Community Engagement on 19 March 2009 that was published in the form of *Symposium Proceedings* (CHE, 2009).

## My reservations about Hall's article

Firstly, I am skeptical of Hall's recommendation that a new policy framework for community engagement in higher education should be aligned to the "third sector".

He defines the third sector as "that part of civil society located between the family, the state and the market" (Hall, 2009, p.19). This is an obscure definition, presented without sufficient argumentation. One of the central concerns of Hall's paper is that community engagement in higher education itself is at present an unclear concept, that it is under-theorised and that much conceptual work still needs to be done. Yet he seeks to clarify this unclear concept by the use of the equally obscure concept of the third sector. Nongxa (CHE, 2009, p.6) argued correctly that "using the third sector to define community engagement was not helpful because the third sector is itself defined in multiple ways, so we would still have an unclear definition."

The problem is that *all four* of Hall's recommendations to the CHE and to the Minister depend on this suggested alignment of community engagement with the "third sector". If this basic premise is insecure, the value of all of his recommendations seems to be in question.

Secondly, I do not think that Hall's alignment of community engagement with *public goods* exclusively is useful and that he substantiated sufficiently why he "cautioned that industry partnerships

should not be considered community engagement" (CHE, 2009, p.4).

Hall employs the analytical distinction between *private benefits* and *public goods* to support his attempt at conceptual clarification of community engagement. He then proceeds to make a case for the alignment of community engagement with the *public goods* part of the distinction.

I favour a definition of community engagement that does not exclude private benefits, both for the university and for groups that engage with the university, because such a position would allow for the entrepreneurial interactions that a contemporary, innovative university has with industry and with other affluent communities who are in a position to pay for the services a university can render. Also, it is never clear cut that those private benefits will remain private or whether it is part of a chain that could eventually lead to public goods. To link community engagement exclusively to public goods could have the negative potential of painting universities into a corner as development agencies delivering services for the community, who are then implicitly conceived of as poor and in need. It is important for universities to play their part in terms of the development of the South African society, especially to be actively involved in the eradication of poverty. I argue that such development and involvement can include entrepreneurial possibilities that have to be seized by universities. Why should community engagement be limited to public goods? Why should the active pursuit of engagement with industry or with affluent communities that can lead to private benefit for both the university and the communities concerned not be considered as community engagement? I think that it would be unduly limiting to restrict a definition of community engagement to public goods.

Thirdly, is the main problem that Hall identifies, namely *insufficient conceptualisation of "community" and "community engagement"*, as huge a problem as he makes it out to be?

Is "community" such a daunting concept for individual universities? Can the concept really mean anything to everybody within a particular context? Is it as arbitrary as Hall makes it?

Who is your community? This is not such a daunting question! The unfortunate history of this country is that many South African higher education institutions came into existence on the basis of race. Given this unfortunate state of affairs, the reality is that each South African institution has what has been called its "traditional" community, mostly defined in terms of race. Geography and race coincided because of the Group Areas Act. That is a historical fact, but this is not where it ends. Most institutions have redefined themselves in response to the changed political and higher education landscape, both those institutions that have merged and those that have not. Who else do they include in "their" community at the present moment, following their repositioning statements in response to a changed political and higher education landscape? This will obviously have a bearing on how they answer the question of who their community is.

I dare to argue that for any specific higher education institution it should not be such a daunting task to define its community. The following all shape an institution's definition of community: history, race, geography, repositioning statements, developed strengths and interest areas, regional challenges and their interpretation of reconstruction and development imperatives within the context of their own geographical areas. Every higher education institution will be able to tell who its community is and what it regards as its community engagement. Nongxa (CHE, 2009, p.6) argued that it "is not surprising that institutions respond differently"; in fact he would suggest that this is "appropriate" and also that "diversity in definitions was not really a problem" (CHE, 2009, p.10).

Hall's problem arises because he tries to formulate, as a starting point, a generalisable definition of *community* and *community engagement* for quality assurance purposes that will hold for all institutions. I shall argue later that, while it is not impossible to arrive at a shared definition, in the case of community engagement, it might be best not to start with general definitions, and that respect for difference might be appropriate, at least initially. Hall might retort that we are not starting now and that certain developments have been taking place over

the last decade relating to community engagement in higher education, most notably the JET-CHESP initiative. My response to this would be that those developments focused almost exclusively on service learning as a vehicle into community engagement and that not much serious conceptual and other work was done to develop and advance a comprehensive notion of community engagement in higher education.

Fourthly, and related to my point above, I want to argue that in order to define something, one must not only establish what it is, but also what it is not. This is a normal process in conceptual analysis: to get consensus on what is included and what is excluded by a concept and to delineate and isolate clearly what is meant by the given concept. What is needed for South African higher education institutions is also to decide carefully, each for themselves, given their particular circumstances, what they regard as not being community engagement. I, for example, think that serving on faculty and institutional committees should not be regarded as community engagement at my university, because we have drawn the boundaries around community engagement in a certain way. Neither do I think that serving on editorial boards is community engagement within my context. What community engagement is will become clear from deliberation about what it is not. It would be a useful exercise for higher education institutions to consider what they regard community engagement not to be, and also, importantly, to include in that consideration those historical pictures of what community engagement was, that continue to hold them captive.

## Looking at the problem in a different way

I want to start from a different place than Hall. I suspect that his project of finding a generalisable definition *as a starting point* to facilitate quality assurance of community engagement is too ambitious. I do not think that, to arrive at a shared conception of community

engagement is impossible, but would not want to regard it as a starting point, rather as something to work towards through a deliberative process. The problem is not that there is no definition of community engagement at South African higher education institutions; there are different definitions in different institutions. I, like Nongxa, do not think this is a problem. I think this is in order, as a starting point.

An alternative approach to start to define community engagement could be by referring to the notion of *practices* and their histories. *Scholarship* in a higher education context can be regarded as a practice with its own particular history and core activities. Historically the clear, uncontested core activities of scholarship in higher education are research and teaching. There might be ongoing debates about the methods and preferences in terms of research and teaching, but never about the status of research and teaching as core activities of the practice of scholarship in higher education.

It is important to note that historically, in the practice of scholarship in South Africa, there were already notions related to community engagement. If one looks at the founding, mission and vision statements of universities, there is bound to be a reference to the rootedness of the universities in particular communities as well as notions of service to particular communities. It seems as if, over time, the connectedness of South African universities with the communities of their founding statements became lost or looser; it might have to do with our messy apartheid past. It also seems as if, over time, the academic community became the primary community to whom universities and academics felt themselves accountable.

Historically, there were also notions of outreach, community service or extension in South African higher education institutions. What is important to note, is that these activities did not form part of the core business of universities. They were activities on the periphery of higher education, performed by well-meaning souls, not quite on a par with the main core functions of teaching and research. These were mostly philanthropic and voluntary activities and were mostly unrelated or poorly related to the core academic functions.

The Education White Paper 3: A Programme for Higher Education Transformation of 1997 changed all that. Among other things, it started a national conversation about the status of community engagement in higher education. I would argue that what is called for now, is not to define from scratch what community engagement means, but how its meaning and role in the practice of scholarship has changed, also in the light of expectations in the higher education legislation. I think the challenge should now be to redefine community engagement in such a way that it is integral to the practice of scholarship, i.e. a view of community engagement as scholarship.

## The way forward

It is very important to note that the impetus for rethinking the status of community engagement and its place in South African higher education institutions came from the outside, and as part of legislation that initiated the restructuring of higher education in South Africa. The danger is that practitioners in universities can view this move with distrust and argue that it is not part of their practice of scholarship to carry out the political mandates of others. They could possibly view it as an unfair imposition and therefore actively undermine it. They could argue that it is not part of their idea of scholarship, although what scholarship is, is not static. The last decades have seen various attempts at the redefinition of scholarship, most notably the Boyer Commission in the USA.

It thus becomes very important *how* the case for community engagement is managed, i.e. the strategy of redefining community engagement as scholarship is important. In the context of restructuring of school education, Andy Hargreaves (1994, p.57) distinguishes between *restructuring as bureaucratic control* and *restructuring as professional empowerment*. He describes the first type of restructuring as a case where practitioners are “controlled and regulated to implement the mandates of others”. Such a strategy

is bound to be resisted, especially in an academic environment. The second type, that he prefers, (as do I) refers to cases where practitioners are “supported, encouraged, and provided with newly structured opportunities to make improvements of their own” in partnership with other stakeholders. Although Hargreaves is writing in the context of school education, the basic idea could also be said to be applicable to higher education: a conscious choice for restructuring as professional empowerment seems to be the appropriate one. This would mean allowing for deliberation among practitioners to redefine community engagement in higher education. They do not have to deal with something entirely new. They need to redefine notions that have been there all the time: now not as a peripheral activity, but as something at the core of scholarship in a higher education context. This means that all types of opportunities need to be created, e.g. opportunities to reconnect with the communities in their founding, mission and vision statements; opportunities to redefine how practitioners interpret their task in relation to the communities referred to in those statements; opportunities to consider how community engagement can invigorate, enhance, deepen, contextualise and enrich pedagogy, including teaching, learning, curriculum and assessment; opportunities to consider how community engagement can contribute to research relevance and opportunities to consider the types of knowledge, outside of academic knowledge and how they can benefit the university and invigorate and excite its knowledge project.

Although community engagement, as a mandate, evolved out of the restructuring of higher education in South Africa, the CHE and the Ministry must seize the opportunity to realise the potential of restructuring it as professional empowerment. Therefore, I do not think it would be wise to search for a predetermined, generalised definition of what community engagement is for quality assurance purposes *as a starting point*. In my opinion, what is needed on a national scale is the type of process that UCT has followed internally, as reported by Favish (CHE, 2009, p.8-9), i.e. “to use a bottom-up approach to arrive at a definition”. They started by documenting

portraits of practice. Individual higher education institutions (with support, where necessary) will be able to document their community engagement initiatives and come to preliminary definitions for themselves. These threads can be pulled together through deliberation on a national scale at a later stage. We should allow our definition of what community engagement is to develop from the bottom up. We should be able to arrive at shared, rich accounts of what community engagement is, through deliberation.

A way to redefine the notion of community engagement as scholarship is to reconnect with those communities that are featured in the founding, mission and vision statements of universities, and by relating it to scholarship and how it can advance scholarship, i.e. to link it to elements internal to scholarship. On this route we can also connect with international conversations about the changing face of scholarship, e.g. Boyer's scholarship of engagement.

By taking the above strategy, we can realise the potential of restructuring as professional empowerment: community engagement as invigoration of scholarship and, ultimately, community engagement as scholarship. Community engagement should not reduce the university to a development agency, with an exclusive focus on rendering of service to perform its core functions in a more meaningful way, while simultaneously using its expertise to contribute meaningfully to the development challenges of our country.

## Recommendations

If I were to be asked to make recommendations to the CHE and to the Minister it would be the following simple ones:

1. Start off with recognition and respect for *difference* between higher education institutions with regard to their definitions of community and community engagement, but support them to do a proper *audit*

*and profiling* of all the activities that they define as community engagement within their institutions. This information could form a sound basis on which individual institutions enter into a national conversation about community engagement with others.

2. Facilitate a *national conversation* about community engagement in higher education and do not rush to conclusions or generalisable definitions. Allow for a bottom-up process. The contours of community engagement, with a distinctive South African flavour, will become clear in deliberation between higher education institutions and can then be used for quality assurance purposes. For such deliberation to take place, conferences, the commissioning of articles and publications about community engagement (possibly even a dedicated journal), a resource centre and facilitation of coordinating structures would seem necessary.
3. Stay close to the *core business* of a university and *incentivise* those obvious activities that promote scholarship. In terms of teaching and learning, experiential learning in community settings that also offers opportunities for service to communities (e.g. service learning), the offering of certain types of short courses to build desired skills in the citizenry, and voluntary service by students<sup>1</sup> as part of their total learning experience, would seem to be obvious areas where incentives could be considered. With regard to research, community-based research and research about pertinent social issues seem to be obvious candidates for incentives.
4. Put in place a *system of support, rewards and incentives*. As said, individual institutions could be supported to conduct an audit and profiling of their community engagement initiatives. In addition, the incentives mentioned in Point 3 could also be considered. Awards, competitions and profiling opportunities could be included in the programmes of conferences. The ultimate prize would be a national community interaction subsidy from the Department of Higher Education and Training according to a formula (that can be

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<sup>1</sup> With respect to student volunteerism, the National Youth Service is already providing attractive incentives to universities.

determined in deliberation) to reward higher education institutions for excellence in community engagement.

5. *Avoid useless binaries:* In the zeal to consolidate community engagement at higher education institutions, one should take care not to construct the binaries that are so common to restructuring processes, i.e. old views bad, new views good. The approach should not be, for example, to create the impression that foundational research is at odds with the applied research that is favoured from a community engagement perspective, and not to dismiss approaches to teaching and learning that are confined to the classroom or laboratories. We should not expect all teaching, learning and research to be community engagement compatible. In the end, we should be striving towards a vibrant, integrated view of scholarship in a higher education context that includes teaching and learning, research and community engagement.

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## **Ms. Judith Favish**

Judith Favish is Director: Institutional Planning at the University of Cape Town. In addition to responsibility for institutional information, institutional planning, academic planning, quality assurance, and promoting social responsiveness, she is the co-convener of a task team responsible for implementing a Memorandum of Understanding signed between four universities in the province and the provincial administration. Prior to this position, she was Director: Institutional Planning and Transformation at the Cape Technikon (2000-2003);

and before that Director of Policy and Planning in the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE). She holds a Postgraduate Diploma in Policy, Leadership and Management in Higher Education from the University of the Western Cape, and an MA in Adult and Continuing Education from the University of Warwick (UK). Since 2005, she has been a member of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) Executive Committee and Board, and sits on the Governing Board of the Children's Institute at the University of Cape Town. She was previously a member of the Boards of the Learning Cape, the Centre for Extended Learning, and the National Board for Further Education and Training.

## **Dr Jerome Slamat**

Jerome Slamat is Senior Director: Community Interaction at Stellenbosch University (SU). He was previously Coordinator: International Fundraising at the Stellenbosch Foundation, the fundraising arm of SU (2004-2006) and before that occupied various positions in the Western Cape Education Department (1985-1993 and 1996-2004). He also has in-depth knowledge and experience in international development work through his participation in an exchange programme with the Badische Landeskirche in Karlsruhe, Germany (1993-1996). He has a Doctor of Philosophy in Education Policy Studies. He is a co-founder and steering committee member of the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum, a national body that aims to advance and support community engagement at SA Higher Education Institutions. He was invited in 2009 by the National Research Foundation (NRF) to serve as a member of its panel on community engagement

# Appendix A:

## Workshop participants

CHE / NRF Workshop on Community Engagement  
22 August 2008, CSIR Convention Centre, Pretoria

### Participants

Auf der Heyde, Prof Thomas	DST
Bhengu, Theo	CHE
Bossenger, Tracy	NRF
Botha, Wilna	AfricaIgnite
Damonse, Beverley	SAASTA
Daniels, Prof Priscilla	UWC
De la Rey, Dr Cheryl	CHE
Du Toit, Lisa	DST
Hall, Prof Martin	UCT
Kaniki, Dr Andrew	NRF
Lange, Dr Lis	CHE
Lazarus, Dr Jo	CHESP
Lazarus, Prof Sandy	UWC
Mazibuko, Frank	NRF
Moolla, Dr Mahomed	Wits
Mosia, Dr Mamoeletsi	CSIR
Mosimege, Dr Mogege	NWU
Naidoo, Prof Tony	SUN
Nduna, Dr Joyce	Rhodes
Nevhutalu, Dr Prins	TUT
Rantloane, Sydney	TUT

CHE Symposium on Community Engagement  
19 March 2009, Pretoria Country Club, Pretoria

### Participants

Backhouse, Judy	CHE	Meyer-Adams, Ernestine	UJ
Bhengu, Theo	CHE	Mogotlane, Prof Andy	UP
De la Rey, Dr Cheryl	CHE	Moodley, Sagren	DST
Du Pré, Prof Roy	DUT	Muller, Prof Johan	UCT
Dwyer, Chantal	CHE	Netshandama, Prof Vhonani	Univen
Favish, Judy	UCT	Nongxa, Prof Loyiso	Wits
Fish, Patrick	HESA	Pyoos, Marjorie	DST
Hall, Prof Martin	Consultant	Qhobela, Dr Molapo	DoE
Havenga, Prof Peter	UNISA	Ralebipi, Prof Rocky	CUT
Hay, Prof Driekie	UFS	Rantloane, Sydney	TUT
Hendricks, Prof Denver	UP	Rowland, Dr William	CHE Council
Kaniki, Dr Andrew	NRF	Shubane, Hendrick	TUT
Lana, Prof Allan Femi	MUT	Slamat, Prof Jerome	SUN
Lategan, Prof Laetus	CUT	Swift, Prof Kerry	UJ
Maboso, Rudzani	DST	Tom, Dr Mvoyo	UFH
Mabizela, Dr Sizwe	Rhodes	Van Jaarsveld, Dr Albert	NRF
Manganyi, Prof Chabani	CHE Council	Van Niekerk, Prof Frikkie	NWU
Mazwi-Tanga, Prof Vuyisa	CPUT		
Mbhethane, Prof Xikombiso	Univen		

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