Exploring conceptual models for community engagement at higher education institutions in South Africa

GERDA BENDER

GERDA BENDER is a senior lecturer in the Department of Curriculum Studies, Faculty of Education, University of Pretoria. Dr. Bender's research focuses on curricular community engagement and Service-Learning in higher education at national, institutional and programme level. She is a member of a task team investigating the benchmark for community engagement in South African higher education institutions (HEIs); a member of the national team of the JET/CHESP Service-Learning Capacity-Building Programme.

Abstract

A critical conceptual analysis of the South African Higher Education context reflects the lack of a structural and functional framework for the conceptualisation of community engagement (CE) in higher education. The purpose of this article is to explore a framework and model for the conceptualisation of CE for a better understanding of community engagement at higher education institutions in South Africa. The research methodology was a qualitative conceptual analysis using purposive sampling. Textual data were analysed by means of interpretative content analysis in a mainly inductive fashion. A conceptual framework and the silo, intersecting and infusion (cross-cutting) models for CE are presented and the attributes of a community-engaged university stated.

The conceptual analysis of CE (curricular and research-related and non-curricular) contributes to the notion that engagement is a fundamentally dynamic and relational process (partnership); it "happens" at multiple levels of higher education institutions and in multiple sites in and over time; all human relationships and engagements involve a political and an ethical dimension; and engagement is a fundamentally educative practice.

Keywords: Community Engagement; social responsibility; conceptual framework and model; community-engaged university; infusion; partnership and collaboration.

Introduction

The notion of community service in South African higher education is not new but currently has a far more intense focus as a national policy option, the paradigm shift to community engagement and a criterion for auditing and scholarship development. Since the mid-1980s, discourse and practice regarding community service in higher education have shifted from the notion of "outreach" towards "community engagement". Community engagement implies a less paternalistic, more reciprocal and inclusive relationship between a community and a higher education institution (CHE, 2004). The promise of community engagement lies in its potential to

rejuvenate academia, redefine scholarship and involve society in a productive conversation about the role of higher education now and in the future. An exploration of and investigation into community engagement are required in the South African context. University-wide, institutionalised and sustained commitment to community engagement and research in this field is not only a necessity but also a priority if South African higher education is to go from good to great. The purpose of this article is to explore a framework and model for the conceptualisation of community engagement in South Africa, which could contribute to a better and more flexible structural and functional understanding of community engagement.

This article gives details of a holistic and systemic approach to community engagement by defining and clarifying the concepts of community, engagement and community engagement; by exploring three models for community engagement; and by defining the underlying philosophy and characteristics of an engaged university. This research study employs systems theory as a theoretical framework (Popp, 1996).

Methodological approach

A critical conceptual analysis of the South African higher education context indicates that there is a lack of a structural, functional framework and model for the conceptualisation of community engagement in higher education institutions in South Africa. What we need is clarity in our notions of what a university is and what its core social purposes, roles and responsibilities are. For this reason it is time to classify systematically the idea of "community engagement", in order to capture the different meanings of the concept.

The following research questions guided the research design of my qualitative analysis: How do academic staff conceptualise community engagement and related concepts in higher education institutions (HEIs)? What are the current models for community engagement at HEIs and what is a community-engaged university?

The basic assumptions or beliefs underlying my research are that conceptual structures are a way of representing knowledge. They can be used to capture knowledge as humans understand it. A conceptual model provides a working strategy, a scheme containing general, major concepts and their interrelations. It orients research to specific sets of research questions. A conceptual model cannot be assessed directly in an empirical sense, because it forms the basis of formulating empirically testable research questions and hypotheses. It can only be assessed in terms of its instrumental and heuristic value. Typically, this is done by assessing the research strategies, programmes and results that the conceptual model creates.

I used qualitative or non-frequency conceptual analysis as a methodology (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2000). The sampling plan, namely purposive sampling, included the relevant national and institutional policies related to community engagement, conference papers and proceedings, journal articles, related community engagement chapters in books by South African academics, relevant research and the annual reports, strategic plans and websites of universities involved in the projects of the Community – Higher Education – Service Partnerships (CHESP) initiative of JET Education Services (JET) (Lazarus, 2007). All of the textual data were analysed by means of interpretative (as opposed to superficial, empiricist) content analysis in a mostly inductive fashion (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As I realise that "analyzing qualitative data is an eclectic activity – there is no one 'right' way and data can be analyzed in more than one way" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, 461), I utilised crystallisation to ensure the credibility of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001).

Critical conceptual analysis of the National Higher Education Policy milieu, initiatives and documents relevant to community engagement in the South African context

Since the publication of White Paper 3 (Department of Education, 1997), perceptions of community service have changed from a view of community service as one of the three silos of higher education – along with learning/teaching and research – to a view of community service as an integral and necessary part of learning/teaching and research, infusing and enriching the latter two higher education functions with a sense of context, relevance and application. Accompanying this change in perception, there has been a shift in the terminology used by national higher education stakeholders, such as the Department of Education (DoE) and the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) – from "community service" (Department of Education, White Paper, 1997) and "academically based community service" (HEQC Founding Document, 2001) to "community engagement" including Service-Learning (HEQC Audit Criteria, 2004a; 2004b; 2004c). The currently changing perception is moving towards the notion of a "scholarship of engagement" (HEQC/JET, 2006a). However, community engagement has many names and little research has as yet been done on the scholarship of engagement in South Africa.

To date (2008) a number higher education institutions (HEIs) such as the University of the Free State (UFS), the universities of Pretoria (UP), Stellenbosch (SU), Cape Town (UCT), Rhodes (RU), KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), Johannesburg (UJ), Western Cape (UWC), Witwatersrand (WITS) and other universities have developed an understanding of the potential that community engagement holds for transforming higher education in relation to societal needs, and for producing graduates with a sense of civic responsibility and an ability to apply the theory of their disciplines to local development issues. Many volunteer and community outreach programmes are in operation, and some HEIs such as UFS, UP, UWC, SU, the Central University of Technology (CUT) and the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) have recognised that, if the primary function of higher education is to generate and disseminate knowledge, then Service-Learning in particular provides the context to inform and enrich both (JET, 2006).

Despite all the national documents and initiatives (HEQC, 2004a; 2004b; 2004c; HEQC/ JET, 2006a; JET, 2006; Lazarus, 2007; HEQC/JET, 2006b) in practice there is still a perception that community engagement and service are merely add-on, nice-to-have, philanthropic activities. There is also resistance to integrating community engagement as a core function in the academic field. Although we have the above-mentioned remarkable initiatives, trends and indicators spanning a decade, we still have confusion and a diversity of understandings of CE (Bender, 2007).

The CHE/HEQC and JET published two groundbreaking books and a DVD in 2006 with a view to assisting HEIs to implement Service-Learning (HEQC/JET, 2006a; 2006b). However, the contents are based on the research done by American scholars and in the context of USA higher education. This evokes critical analyses and reflective enquiry into the relevance of this conceptual and theoretical framework of CE and Service-Learning to the South African context and higher education. Could this be the reason for the confusion and diversity in the understanding or misunderstanding of CE, or the resistance by or marginalisation of academic staff involved in CE? Collaboration with the USA scholars and champions have enhanced the SA academic staff members' scholarship of engagement, critical reflective thinking and the urge to develop grounded theory and a conceptual framework for the South African context of HE.

Many university documents mention CE and Service-Learning in the same breath, but these two terms are not interchangeable. What are "community", "engagement", "community engagement" and "curricular community engagement" anyway? For nearly a decade we have grappled at higher education institutions with various concepts and terms relating to community

service and academic programmes that would best describe what we are actually doing and with a framework or model that seems appropriate to the HEI vision, mission, strategic thrusts, objectives and promoting the scholarship of engagement.

In September 2006 a conference on Community Engagement in Higher Education, hosted by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the Community – Higher Education – Service Partnerships (CHESP) initiative of JET Education Services (JET) was held in Cape Town, South Africa. This conference was a milestone in the community engagement movement in South Africa (HEQC/JET, 2007a; 2007b). At this conference Mala Singh, at that time the interim chief executive officer, Council on Higher Education (CHE) stated:

At a national level, we know that community engagement has been flagged in the White Paper (DoE, 1997) as a strategy for transforming higher education, and as a strategy to enable higher education institutions to demonstrate their social commitment and their sense of social responsibility. At the HEQC, we have put community engagement into our audit and accreditation requirements, in this way creating the basis for a more systematic and institution-wide approach to community engagement. … one of the most strategic issues that we will have to confront will be that of how to embed community engagement in the work that is already underway within universities – to rethink mission, to transform curricula, and to re-conceptualise research strategies. And for that, we are going to need very wise leadership, both at national and institutional levels (Singh in HEQC/JET, 2007a, 100).

One of the key recommendations emanating from the conference is noted here and has guided the research for this article: A rigorous conceptual framework for community engagement is required, which articulates the key concepts and issues related to community engagement and serves as a useful guide to informing effective community engagement practices at HEIs (HEQC/JET, 2007a; 2007b). This framework should reflect the primary focus of the institution – choices relevant to its unique context, vision, mission, strategic plans and objectives. I wish to add it should be relevant and blend with the institutional culture and promote the scholarship of engagement.

Institutional culture and community engagement

Universities increasingly seek ways to be more relevant, to bring their knowledge base to bear on social, cultural and economic problems, and to offer leadership in society consistent with their core values of openness, integrity and inclusion. Politicians and educational critics seek evidence that public universities are able to elevate their research to inform their teaching missions and fuel their historical commitment to helping to meet the needs of society.

Audits and accreditation criteria, and national policies and commissions, collectively challenge higher education to refocus its scholarship agenda so that students are placed at the forefront; to elevate the status of teaching and to elevate CE far above the current conception of public service, that emphasises a one-way transfer of university expertise to the public; and to strengthen the commitment of South African higher education to the public. National councils and committees require political, directive and bureaucratic responsiveness but what about the "institutional culture" and the "cultural embeddedness of institutional practices"? Do institutions still bear their "birthmarks in terms of dominant traditions, symbols and patterns of behaviour that remain distinctive despite the broader changes sweeping the higher education landscape"? (Jansen, 2004). Have these deep-rooted beliefs and behaviours begun to change? What has to change? What are the historical barriers inside academia that hamper community engagement? Perhaps the most important and most challenging components of contemporary university culture are the historically created hierarchical ranking of the three main historically established activities of a university, namely teaching, research and community engagement. The false

separation among these components and activities must ultimately change if the academic world is to emerge – or re-emerge – as a socially relevant institution in broader society.

Like other organisations, education institutions have epistemologies. They have traditional concepts about what counts as legitimate knowledge and how you know what you claim to know. These theories of knowledge need not be consciously espoused by individuals (although they may be), because they are built into institutional structures and practices. The research university is an institution built around a particular view of knowledge (Schön, 1995).

Another aspect of established university culture and structure which poses a challenge to CE is a university's relative isolation from the surrounding communities. Perceptions of the university as an ivory tower, literally "above" and "over" the surrounding communities, contribute to this isolation (Fourie, 2003). Visible barriers divide university property from its community: high and elaborate concrete walls or wrought-iron fences with gates that close and lock, long stairways and broad lawns surrounding the campus. Such obvious exclusionary measures may exacerbate neighbourhood resentment, ironically making security more necessary and connections to the people in a community and their issues and concerns more difficult. The culture of academia, embedded in institutional structures and beliefs, is in many ways opposed to the vision that academics support. It would be a grave mistake, however, to assume that a university will change in the ways we as community engagement theorists and practitioners (scholars) believe it ought to change just because of this belief. Instead, it is necessary to examine carefully the culture in which the universities are embedded and ask how that culture is ready to change so that it can integrate CE in the curriculum. We know how we would like the institution to change, but is the institution ready or willing to change so that it becomes a community-engaged university? Although people are always prepared to accept some degree of change, they will be more willing to support and work with change that they view as acceptable, profitable, desirable and most important, if funding is available.

The scholarship of engagement encompasses the wide range of work that academics do in partnership with communities – through their teaching (e.g. Service-Learning, practice-based learning), research (e.g. community-based participatory research), community-responsive clinical care (e.g. community-oriented primary care, academic public health practice) and service (e.g. community service, outreach, advocacy) (Calleson, Jordan & Seifer 2005). Teaching and research can be translated into, and indeed form an integral part of, community engagement in many disciplines, for example, through Service-Learning. Academic staff members are involved in a range of community activities, not all of which should be considered as scholarship.

At many institutions, especially at research universities, changing the definition of scholarship has been more difficult. The desire to accommodate a broader view of scholarship often conflicts with traditional notions that "real" scholarship is measured primarily by the publication of books and articles in peer-reviewed journals.

Scholarship is the defining institutional characteristic of higher education, when higher education is conceptualised as a community of scholars. If engaged research, learning and teaching are to be valued in higher education as well as by society, such activities must provide the kind of evidence that illustrates accountability. Exemplars of engaged learning and teaching, and research, anchored in scholarship, are required from SA HEIs and should be showcased and disseminated.

JET's research indicates that in South Africa there may be a range of purposes for developing a culture of service in higher education institutions, none of them mutually exclusive (Perold, 1998, 34): to inculcate a sense of civic-mindedness in students and make them aware of their responsibility for contributing to society; to assist in nation-building by enabling students to gain a closer understanding of the life experience of people in different communities; to link academic study and research to issues of development so as to influence students' values and attitudes, and sensitise students to societal needs and the contribution that individuals can

make to society; to enable students and academic staff to acquire skills and to experience particular types of learning in a community-based context, particularly in a context of poverty or under-development; to enable students to "repay" a debt they owe to society, because of the government's use of public funds to cover the real costs of each student's higher education (Perold, 1998, 34).

A conceptual framework and models for community engagement at HEIs in South Africa

Community engagement is a term that is currently in flux and also in fashion. The initial conceptual analysis and policy review for this article has thrown up many claims about what community engagement is and involves – some old and some new. I note that, in some cases, pre-existing practices such as experiential education, community service, community development, community-based education, clinical practicals, community outreach and even Service-Learning have simply been renamed community engagement. This shift in terminology may or may not have precipitated a substantial change in the ways of seeing, being and acting associated with these pre-existing practices, yet the degree to which the term community engagement is being used is still significant as a measure of the diffusion – and perhaps confusion – relating to my topic area.

My first point to note in defining community engagement is that different theorists and practitioners of community engagement propose different definitions and interpretations of their contexts, processes, frameworks and strategies – many of them permissible, but none fully definitive. In the literature and above-mentioned documents and initiatives, there are several predominant "approaches" to the way that a university engages with a community. The main difference between the various kinds of understanding or approaches is the degree of "engagement infusion" in a university: in other words, the degree to which community engagement features as a core activity across all areas of the HEI. There are also differences in the extent to which community engagement is seen as something that has to be actively designed and fostered, and the extent to which it is seen as something that "just happens anyway" in all aspects of university life.

Defining community or communities; engagement and community engagement

"Communities" refer to those specific, local, collective interest groups that participate, or could potentially participate, in the community service activities of a higher education institution. They are regarded as partners who have a full say in the identification of service needs and development challenges. They also participate in defining the community service and development outcomes (and/or learning outcomes); identify the relevant assets at their disposal; evaluate the impact of community service; and contribute substantially to the mutual search for sustainable solutions to challenges and service needs (HEQC/JET, 2006a). In the South African context, the members of such communities are generally the disadvantaged, materially poor residents of under-serviced urban, peri-urban or rural areas. In many instances these communities may be accessed most efficiently through service sector organisations, such as government or state departments, as well as non-governmental, community-based or faith-based organisations (HEQC/ JET, 2006b, 16).

Engagement suggests a different sort of relationship, one where there is a "governance" or "university" system and a "community" system. In order to build the collaborative relationships on which a complex activity such as community planning depends, the university system has to understand fully the dynamics of the communities with which it seeks to work, and be prepared to adapt and develop structures and processes to make them accessible and relevant to these

communities. In this way, the term engagement warns us against making assumptions about communities: it calls for a dialogue. It also implies that the development of the relationship itself will have to be the focus of attention: the "university" will have to engage with communities as well as asking communities to engage with it.

The HEQC gives the following definition of community engagement (CE), which is used as a basic reference in most HEIs in South Africa. Community engagement refers to the

> … initiatives and processes through which the expertise of the institution in the areas of teaching and research are applied to address issues relevant to its community. CE typically finds expression in a variety of forms, ranging from informal and relatively unstructured activities to formal and structured academic programmes addressed at particular community needs (service-learning programmes) and some projects might be conducive towards the creation of a better environment for Community Engagement and others might be directly related to teaching, learning and research (HEQC, 2004a, 19 & 26).

The definition does not seek to constrain other definitions of engagement, but rather to acknowledge the full range of engagement activities pursued by South African universities.

Conceptual models for community engagement in higher education

During the historic conference on Community Engagement in Higher Education, September 2006, mentioned above, the more than 200 nominated delegates from all the public (23) and numerous private (7) HEIs in South Africa, local councillors, local government officials, business leaders and representatives of non-governmental organisations discussed in concurrent workshops the conceptualisation and implementation of community engagement in South African HEIs (HEQC/JET, 2007a).

The following is a brief summary of the qualitative data and conceptual analysis of the HEQC/JET conference proceedings, generated by the concurrent workshops (HEQC/JET, 2007a). All of the textual data were analysed by means of interpretative content analysis in a mainly inductive fashion (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Every HEI would have to ensure that it could distinguish between the different paradigms and approaches to CE and make informed and deliberate choices about formulating its CE vision, mission, strategies and objectives. I have added my understanding as an academic staff member with 20 years of curriculum-related community engagement experiences at a research university (an insider) and, based on the conceptual analysis discussed under the methodological approach, to the three possible models that were identified:

The Silo model

The HEI has three roles – teaching and learning, research, and community service – and pursues each relatively independently of the others. This approach to community engagement sees community engagement as a separate and predominantly voluntary activity for academics, in much the same way that "service" is currently viewed in HEIs in SA. Service, as opposed to engagement, is the traditional category of community-oriented activities in universities (see Figure 1). "Service" in this sense may include professional service, university service and civic or community service. Service, along with teaching and research, is currently not a key performance indicator for the selection and promotion of staff in SA universities. Numerous studies have indicated that community service is regarded as the most inferior of the three performance areas (Burton, 1998). A common example of separate community service-oriented activities in SA universities is the community health, law or dental clinic run by the students and staff of a university. In this silo model, community service and engagement is generally confined to community outreach and student/staff volunteerism. This is the most traditional notion of CE

and it usually does not perceive the potential that CE has as a scholarly activity in terms of its contribution to teaching and learning, and research (HEQC/JET, 2007a) *(philanthropic approach)*.
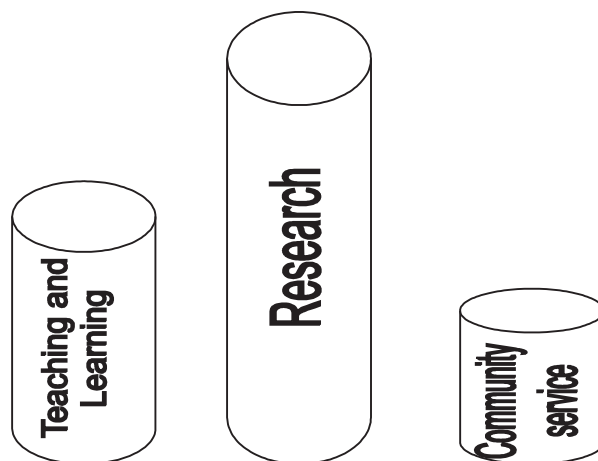

Figure 1: The Silo model of CE

The Intersecting model

The HEI has three roles – teaching and learning, research, and community engagement – and acknowledges that there is some intersection between them, which may be illustrated by a Venn diagram (see Figure 2). Where these roles intersect, there will be Service-Learning and some form of community-based research. Where there is no intersection, community outreach and volunteerism continue as separate activities (HEQC/JET, 2007a).

This approach to community engagement frames community engagement as an irreducible and unavoidable element of the existing activities of a university. This conceptualisation of community engagement assumes that all research and teaching ultimately involves engagement with the community, whether direct or indirect, and whether the impact is social, economic or cultural. This model may include, for example, teaching and research activities, programmes to promote more equitable access to existing university programmes, active alumni programmes or student services. Scholarly publications, research reports, media coverage and public forums are also modes of engaging with communities, which could be seen as a natural extension of the core work of universities in teaching and research.

The distinguishing feature of this intersectional model of engagement in universities is that it does not require or presuppose a radical shift in the core functions and activities of universities. It assumes, instead, that universities are *always* and *already* engaging with communities in various ways. To the extent that education is a fundamentally social and relational practice, which is embedded in communities, I agree with this view. I note, however, that although at least some form of engagement is inevitable in contemporary contexts of teaching/learning, research and service, the degree to which social responsibility in engagement is consciously perceived and actively nurtured does vary considerably. Although we can see some forms of engagement in this model (such as the teacher-student relationship, involvement with stakeholders in the community; educator-student empowerment programmes) as a natural extension or element of the university's traditional engagement activities in teaching/learning, research and service, there are now calls for other forms of community engagement that require significant shifts in the university's traditional roles and activities.
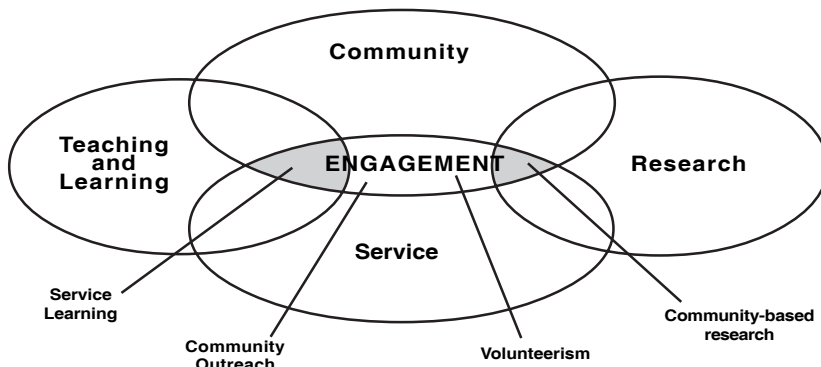
Figure 2: The Intersecting model of CE
(Adapted from Bringle, Games and Malloy, 1999)

The continuing imperatives to pursue industry-oriented "strategic basic research", "applied research", and "commercialisation" agendas, for example, have already transformed the nature of academic work significantly and, in particular, the extent and nature of internal-external relations in South African universities. In what are called the "Mode 2" models of knowledge creation (Gibbons, 2006) and diffusion, there is not only an increasing diversity in the location of research activities but also "an increasing focus on interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary research; an increasing focus on problems, rather than techniques; greater emphasis on collaborative work and communication; and greater emphasis on more diverse and informal modes of communication" (Houghton, Steele & Henty, 2003, x). These shifts in the nature and purposes of academic work have already substantially changed the way that academics and other university staff members engage with external others. Current calls for academics to develop or enhance community engagement practices such as "engaged teaching and learning" (through, for example, Service-Learning programmes) and community service, place increasing pressure on academics to be responsive to external needs and interests, but this time ostensibly with the aim of producing direct social and cultural (as opposed to only economic) outcomes.

The Infusion (cross-cutting) model

The HEI has two fundamental roles – teaching and learning, and research – and defines CE as a fundamental idea and perspective infused in and integrated with teaching and learning, and research. In this model, CE is informed by and conversely informs teaching and learning, and research. Teaching and learning, and research, are enriched in the context of CE; and CE in turn is enriched through the knowledge base of teaching and learning, and research *(scholarship of engagement)* (HEQC/JET, 2007a).

This third model of community engagement is referred to as the "community-engaged university". This approach regards community engagement and service as the central overriding goal of higher education, arguing that it should be embedded within all teaching, learning and research functions. This vision of community engagement requires complete infusion across all structures, policies, priorities, and so on. Community engagement is not regarded as a mere by-product or beneficial extra, and it is not relegated to a separate range of identifiable activities. Advocates of the engaged university argue that community service and engagement should be embraced and promoted as a means of improving the quality and relevance of teaching and learning, and research (see Figure 3).
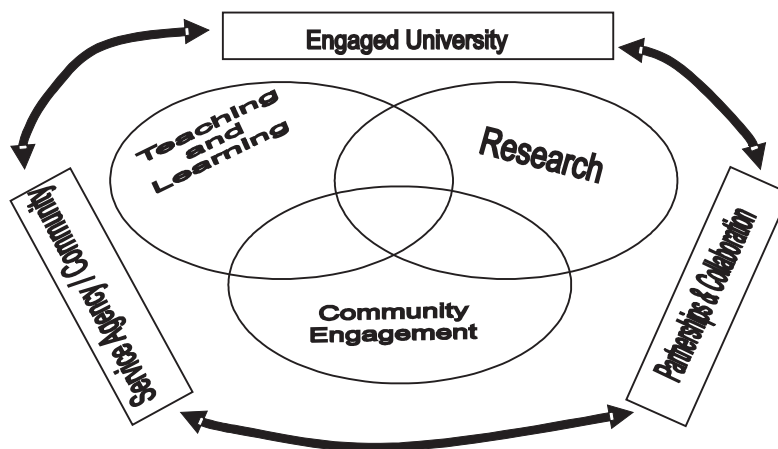
Figure 3: The Infusion (cross-cutting) model of CE

Critical analysis of the community engagement models

All three models of community engagement outlined above, fall under the general rubric of community engagement in this article. Perhaps what stands out most clearly in each of the models of community engagement discussed above, however, is that each one involves different kinds and levels of power flows and different levels of responsibility between universities and communities in the neighbourhood and region. Furthermore, each model of community engagement also assumes different levels of community participation in, and responsibility for, decision making in policy, service and governance processes in universities, and vice versa. Although each of the three models of community engagement detail different levels of university-community engagement, and different levels of what I call "engagement infusion", I note that they are all, in fact, "university-centric" models of community engagement, i.e. they come from an inside-outward perspective.

The three models of CE can be summarised as follows: Firstly, the university has three roles – teaching and learning, research, and CE – and pursues each of these relatively independently of the others. Generally, CE in this model is confined to community outreach and student/staff volunteerism (Silo model); secondly, the university has three roles – teaching and learning, research and CE – and acknowledges that there is some intersection between the three roles, and where there is an intersection it innovates service-learning while community outreach and volunteerism continue as separate activities (Intersection model); and thirdly, the university has two fundamental roles – teaching and learning, and research – and defines CE as a fundamental idea and perspective, which must inform and animate and be integrated with most of its teaching and learning, and research activities (Cross-cutting model) (HEQC/JET, 2007a).

It might be wise not to give an ideal or orthodox status to any of these models. Instead, it might be more advisable to provide for a multiplicity of approaches, in which each HEI, for whatever reasons, could adopt whatever model it deemed appropriate in relation to its vision, mission, strategic thrusts and objectives, values, paradigms for CE and context (HEQC/JET, 2007a). It is possible that a university could begin with a particular model and gravitate over time to another model.

At the HEQC/JET Conference on Community Engagement in Higher Education (2006), Mala Singh commented on the CE models by positing that the conceptual framework and models

... are 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. (HEQC/JET, 2007, 100)

Community engagement involves a change management process for the university and for the community, and the challenges and problems of such change management should not be underestimated. In order to pursue community engagement, an institution needs the support of its leadership and senior management, and requires academic backing, mechanisms for integrating community engagement into university and faculty structures, and champions and drivers and, most important of all, funding.

The question has to be posed whether a university can engage in high-quality community engagement, such as the infusion (cross-cutting) model of CE, if there are shortcomings in the quality of its teaching and learning and research, or institutional weaknesses which compromise effectiveness and efficiency.

Discussion: The community-engaged university

Engagement is the partnership between a university's knowledge and resources with those of the public, service and private sectors so as to enrich scholarship, research and innovation; enhance the curriculum and be curriculum responsive, enhance learning and teaching; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic (social) responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good.

An innovative and more responsive CE model is required for higher education, such as the infusion or cross-cutting model. The development of partnerships is pivotal to this "new" model. Partnerships and collaborative approaches to exchanging knowledge and sharing resources with a mutually beneficial outcome should be the basis for the establishment of CE programmes and projects. As Brukhardt *et al*. (2004, 9) suggest: "Partnerships are the currency of engagement – the medium of exchange between university and community and the measurement of an institution's level of commitment to working collaboratively."

Universities have been involved in community service and outreach for some time, with experts applying their knowledge to problems they see in the community. The university's role has been to use research to identify solutions and then impart that new information to the community. However, the new responsive (infusion or cross-cutting) model requires real and ongoing engagement with a strong emphasis on co-operative development, collaboration and mutual benefit – reciprocity. The infusion model has an intentional balance between teaching, research and engagement activities. Outcomes are articulated for teaching/learning and research, which are responsive to emerging issues. However, the new responsive model requires a commitment to ongoing engagement with a strong emphasis on co-operative, collaborative development and mutual benefit.

This infusion model acknowledges that the university does more than merely prepare students for employment, it also prepares them to be responsible citizens as demonstrated through civic engagement and social responsibility. The infusion model could be seen as challenging the traditional view of excellence in universities by undertaking ground-breaking research and making scientific discoveries. Importance is given to active, reflective and integrated learning among undergraduates, and there is also an emphasis on performance and accountability. The outcomes prescribed for teaching/learning and research are responsive to emerging economic, social, environmental and cultural issues.

This study contributed to the knowledge base on defining a community-engaged university. The findings of this study suggest that to classify a university as a community-engaged university, the following are key indicators although they are not complete: community engagement is reflected in the institution's mission and strategic plans; the institution has a policy environment that supports community engagement; the curriculum contains a variety of ways for students to engage with the community (curriculum-related community engagement); the development of partnerships among communities, HEIs and the service sectors is pivotal. The Community, Higher Education and Service Partnership (CHESP) model identifies three partners forming a triad: the service agency or provider, the community and the HEI (Lazarus, 2001, 1). The service agency and community are involved in and with the campus in "continuous, purposeful and authentic ways". More indicators include the following: individuals throughout the university play leadership roles in engagement; the institutional culture and approach to scholarship includes interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary work; the engagement work is, in a scholarly manner, researched, publicised and celebrated (research-related community engagement); and engagement activities are "held to a high standard of excellence and are rigorously evaluated" (quality management).

Concluding comments

Two factors appear to be critical to the greater and more effective further development of community engagement in South African higher education. One critical factor is a conceptual framework for community engagement in higher education. Through an interrogation and articulation of the key concepts and critical issues internal and external to higher education, such a conceptual framework could usefully inform conceptualisations of community engagement in higher education institutions and also serve as a useful guide for informing effective community engagement practices. The purpose of this article was to contribute to the development of such a conceptual framework and model, as conceptual frameworks are bereft of budgets and practicalities. A limitation of this article is the lack of practical exemplars or case studies of universities representing the different models of community engagement. Research in the context of community engagement has been a contentious area in the university; it is not my intention at this stage or within the scope of this article to evaluate or classify higher educations into a silo, intersecting or infusion model of CE. This is a call for future papers and articles.

Another critical factor is the adequate and sustainable funding of community engagement. As an academic I can only refer discreetly to this in the article. Community engagement is all too often an unfunded mandate and indeed, much of the purpose of community engagement might be better achieved by being funded directly by government. Earmarked funding for community engagement through the Department of Education (DoE) would both facilitate community engagement initiatives and signal a shift on the part of the DoE from a "symbolic" policy towards a substantive policy on community engagement. Universities would have to be committed to engaging with the DoE in this regard, as well as with foundations and donors. In response to this recommendation at the HEQC/JET Conference on Community Engagement in Higher Education (2006), Nasima Badsha, adviser to the Minister of Education, stated:

> We need to understand that earmarked funding is mainstream funding; there would be no benefit to be had from putting community engagement into the formula, because then it would come out in the block funding. Further, I must emphasise that earmarked funding in this area would not necessarily come from new funding; it would probably have to come from the same pool. Should we go that route, the DoE will need to engage quite intensively with CHESP and others, in order to determine the criteria for funding, in particular the nature and scope of activities that would be eligible for support. I think that

this is something we really need to explore. In the academic development area, we put together a reference group of experts, who helped us determine those criteria and then helped us in evaluating the programmes against those criteria (Badsha in HEQC/JET 2007, 95).

I argue that if we as academic staff are to "engage" in a critical and responsible way with the emerging philosophies and practices of community engagement in higher education, we should undertake our activities with conceptual, theoretical and lived understandings of, and reflections on, the social, political and ethical dynamics of community engagement. I posit that, to this end, the range of conceptual and theoretical frameworks introduced above could provide an important understanding of the nature of higher education and its embeddedness.

When higher education institutions in South Africa have conceptualised a CE model aligned with their vision, mission, strategic thrusts and objectives, the next phase would be to introduce institutional self-assessment to benchmark community engagement at their institutions. Using this self-assessment, the university should be able to identify its model of CE. The self-assessment instrument should be constructed around six dimensions, with the following indicators: Definition, mission and philosophy of CE; Staff commitment to and involvement in CE; Student involvement in CE; Community involvement; Service sector involvement; and Institutional involvement in CE (JET/CHESP 2006). A voluntary survey should be undertaken of the current status of CE in South African HEIs. Such a survey would assist HEIs with developing their own quality management systems for CE and would inform HEIs about their level of progress and the key development challenges for CE.

My specific interest in this article was to explore the conceptual frameworks for community engagement through a generic and holistic lens, and to promote further research into curricular and research-related community engagement. Using this lens, I could, with intentional pedagogical effort, extend and deepen the conceptual analysis of CE and indicate the implications for CE practice as follows: engagement is a fundamentally dynamic and relational process (partnership) and it "happens" at multiple levels of higher education institutions and in multiple sites in and over time; engagement is a fundamentally educative practice; community engagement can be formal and purposeful as well as informal and unrecognised; the contexts and sites of community engagement shape (both formally and informally) the nature of the engagement that is possible and acceptable in those contexts and sites; there are contextual "codes of engagement"; all human relationships and engagements involve a political and an ethical dimension; and the two main categories of community engagement at universities in South Africa are firstly, curricular and research-related CE and secondly, extracurricular or non-curricular CE.

Further research is needed on a conceptual and theoretical framework for curricular community engagement (CCE). It is of cardinal importance to obtain institutional consensus on the meaning of multiple forms of community-engaged teaching and learning, to formulate strategies accordingly and to train academic staff in CCE as part of professional development.

An extensive body of knowledge has been developed, and expertise and experiences have been accumulated around community engagement at universities in South Africa. There could be great benefits in supporting the establishment of a national network of community engagement managers and scholars for extending the theorising and research on community engagement, and sharing good practices on community engagement. It is time for the scholars of community engagement to develop a *Good Practice Guide* on community engagement, which would capture some of the more generic good practices that could be drawn on by different higher education institutions, irrespective of their context.

Acknowledgements

References

Badsha N 2007. Response to concurrent workshop reports. In Higher Education Quality Committee/ JET Education Services South Africa 2007a. *Community engagement in higher education. Proceedings of the CHE-HEQC/ JET-CHESP Conference on Community Engagement in Higher Education*: 3-5 September 2006. Pretoria, South Africa: Council on Higher Education. [Online]. Available url: http://www.chesp.org.za. Accessed 27 October 2007.

Bender CJG 2007. Pathways of change for integrating Community Service-Learning into the core curriculum. Special issue of *Education Change – Community Service-Learning*. **11**(3), 127-142.

Bringle R, Games R & Malloy E 1999. *Colleges and universities as citizens*. Needham Heights, VA: Allyn and Bacon.

Brukardt MJ Holland B Percy SL & Zimpher N 2004. *Calling the question: Is higher education ready to commit to Community Engagement?* A Wingspread Statement Conference Report. Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee Idea Office.

Burton C 1998. *Gender equity in Australian university staffing.* Canberra, ACT: Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs.

Calleson DC, Jordan C & Seifer S. 2005. Community-engaged scholarship: Is faculty work in communities a true academic enterprise? *Academic Medicine.* **80**(4), 317-321.

Council on Higher Education (CHE) 2004. *South African Higher Education in the first decade of democracy.* Pretoria: Council on Higher Education

Department of Education South Africa 1997. Education White Paper 3. A programme for higher education transformation. *Government Gazette* No. 18207, 15 August 1997. Pretoria: Government Printers.

Fourie M 2003. Beyond the ivory tower: service-learning for sustainable community development. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, **17**(1),31-38.

Fraenkel JR & Wallen NE 2000. *How to design and evaluate research in education.* Boston, Ma: McGraw-Hill.

Gibbons M 2006. *Engagement as a core value in a Mode 2 society*. Paper presented at the Community Engagement in Higher Education Conference, 3-5 September 2006, Cape Town, South Africa.

Higher Education Quality Committee South Africa 2001. *Founding document.* Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.

Higher Education Quality Committee South Africa 2004a. *Criteria for institutional audits*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.

Higher Education Quality Committee South Africa 2004b. *Criteria for programme accreditation*. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.

Higher Education Quality Committee South Africa 2004c. *Framework for programme accreditation.* Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.

Higher Education Quality Committee/ JET Education Services South Africa 2006a. *Service-Learning in the curriculum: a resource for higher education institutions*. Pretoria, South Africa: Council on Higher Education.

Higher Education Quality Committee/ JET Education Services South Africa 2006b. *A good practice guide and self-evaluation instruments for managing the quality of Service-Learning*. Pretoria, South Africa: Council on Higher Education.

Higher Education Quality Committee/ JET Education Services South Africa 2007a. *Community engagement in higher education. Proceedings of the CHE-HEQC/ JET-CHESP Conference on Community Engagement in Higher Education*: 3-5 September 2006. Pretoria, South Africa: Council on Higher Education. [Online]. Available url: http://www.chesp.org.za. Accessed 27 October 2007.

Higher Education Quality Committee/ JET Education Services South Africa 2007b. *Recommendations from the Conference on Community Engagement in Higher Education.* Pretoria, South Africa: Council on Higher Education.

Houghton JW Steele C & Henty M 2003. *Changing research practices in the digital information and communication environment*. Canberra, ACT: Department of Employment, Training, and Science.

Jansen JD 2004. Changes and continuities in South Africa's higher education 1994-2004. In Chisholm L (ed.) *Changing class. Education and social change in post-apartheid South Africa.* Pretoria: HSRC Publishers.

JET Education Services 2006. *Annual Report 2006*. Johannesburg: JET.

JET/CHESP 2006. Workshop on the design of an instrument to benchmark Community Engagement in South African Higher Education Institutions 10 & 11 April 2006. Cape Town: Hout Bay.

Lazarus J 2001. *A new contract between Higher Education and society: responsiveness through a scholarship of engagement*. Paper presented at the Third Consultative Conference of the Council on Higher Education, 29 and 30 November 2001.

Lazarus J 2007. *Embedding community engagement in S.A. universities: Results of a national research and development strategy.* Paper presented at the 10th Biennial International Conference of the South African Association for Research and Development in Higher Education, 1-4 July 2007. Pretoria, South Africa: University of Pretoria.

McMillan JH & Schumacher S 1997. *Research in education: A conceptual introduction.* New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers Inc.

Perold H 1998. *Community service in higher education: Final Report*. Braamfontein, South Africa: Joint Education Trust.

Popp K 1996. *Systems Thinking.* College of Education. Penn State University. [Online]. Available url: http://www.ed.psu.edu/insys/ESD/systems/theory/KPSystems.html Accessed on 4 may 2007.

Schön DA 1995. The new scholarship requires a new epistemology. *Change*, **27**(6), 26-34.

Singh M 2007. Conference Summary and Close. In: Higher Education Quality Committee/ JET Education Services South Africa 2007a. *Community engagement in higher education. Proceedings of the CHE-HEQC/ JET-CHESP Conference on Community Engagement in Higher Education*: 3-5 September 2006. Pretoria, South Africa: Council on Higher Education. [Online]. Available url: http://www.chesp.org.za. Accessed 27 October 2007.

Strauss A & Corbin J 1990. *Basics of qualitative research*. Newbury Park: Sage Publishers.