

Service Learning and Community Engagement in South African Universities: Towards an 'Adaptive Engagement' Approach

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Abstract

This is a concept article which develops the argument posited by Mahlomaholo & Matobako (2006) in an earlier *Alternation* publication that university community engagement through service learning fails to impact on community change because insufficient attention is paid to genuine engagement (listening to the community; enhancing local resources, critiquing power relations, reciprocity). The article traces the evolutionary nature of the terms community service, community engagement and service learning, particularly over the last six years. It briefly reviews the focus of recent studies on this topic and highlights some current concerns in the community engagement and service learning literature with mutidisciplinarity, the production of knowledge and sustainable community engagement. It reflects on the paucity of literature which links service learning and community engagement with community development theories and concludes with recommendations for more multidisciplinary service learning initiatives which focus on community engagement that leads service learning rather than the other way round. In so doing the article draws attention to the advantages of framing community engagement within asset-based community development theory (Ferriera & Ebersöhn 2012) and the concept of 'adaptive leadership' as discussed in a recent article by Stephenson (2011) from the US and offers a new concept of 'adaptive engagement'. The article concludes by suggesting there is a need for more

research which examines the implications for applying service learning through a community development lens.

Keywords: adaptive engagement, community development, community engagement, service learning,

Introduction

Higher education should create mutually beneficial partnerships with communities and civil societies to facilitate the sharing and transmission of appropriate knowledge (UNESCO 2009:6).

On a global scale universities are realigning their teaching and research missions to embrace ‘community service’ or ‘community engagement’. Other associated terms include ‘service learning’, which focuses on assessing university students’ analysis of how they learn from community activities, and ‘regional engagement’ which addresses university regional partnerships for development.

The interest in the way universities contribute to regional, as well as national and international development needs, is reflected in higher education policy recommendations (World Bank 2000; 2009), academic literature (Waghid 1999; Fourie 2003; Inman & Schuetze 2010) and international initiatives to stimulate ‘engagement’ (OECD 2007; PURE 2010) or service learning (Hatcher & Erasmus 2008).

While much of the international policy literature reflects an economic focus on building partnerships it has been argued in the African context that engagement must embrace broader social development partners (Subotsky 1999; Kotecha 2011) such as civil society. This is based on two reasons. On the one hand economic partners in developing countries are fewer and less well positioned to establish economically based relations with their universities. On the other hand the continent’s range of social development needs are complex and require a multidimensional approach to development (Kruss *et al.* 2011).

The South African government has enshrined community engage-

ment in higher education policy, with a particular focus on service learning as the mechanism for community engagement at local levels (DoE 1997; 2001). The introduction of a service learning (SL) dimension, specifically to nurture a sense of civic responsibility in students, is an attempt to encourage a more mutual relationship between university and community. But it is also a strategy to embed community engagement in the curriculum whereby students are assessed on their own documented learning as a result of contributing to community needs (Perold 1998).

However, the theory and practice of SL and community engagement (CE) have commanded much scrutiny, particularly in South Africa.

A primary focus of debate is the extent to which CE simply represents a philanthropic exercise by the university towards its disadvantaged neighbours and the extent to which university SL engages with its communities and regions as a mutual learning project and resource for knowledge production (Jansen 2002; Fourie 2003; Naido & Devnarain 2009; Erasmus 2011; Van Schalkwyck & Erasmus 2011). An article in *Alternation* by Mahlomaholo and Matobako (2006) highlights how Community SL rarely emanates from the community, draws on local resources or is controlled by the community; moreover the time limited contribution of SL programmes has little impact on real change.

This article takes Mahlomaholo and Matobako's concern with community ownership as its starting point. It begins with a brief review of the evolutionary relationship between Community Service, CE and SL with particular reference to African contexts. It draws attention to recent concerns about multidisciplinary and the production of knowledge, as well as sustainable CE, and reflects on literature which links SL and CE with community development theory, particularly on the African continent.

After a discussion of different community development lenses the article concludes with recommendations for more multi-disciplinary initiatives which focus on CE that leads SL, rather than the other way around. It draws attention to the advantages of framing CE within community development theory, offering the term 'adaptive engagement' to reflect the combination of an asset based approach as outlined by Ferriera and Ebersöhn (2012) in a South African context, and 'adaptive leadership' as articulated by Heifetz (1994) and interpreted by Stephenson (2011) in the context of the US.

Community Service

Community service has been the traditional term for university engagement as the university's third mission. There is an incremental trend in the way this term has been conceptualised and applied.

Community service, for instance, has been associated with volunteering and philanthropy (Perold 1998), implying a uni-directional approach from the university to the community. In this respect Perold suggests there can be two types of community service activities – one which is addressing a humanitarian need but not necessarily changing the conditions surrounding that need, and a second type which is more focused on radical change or community empowerment, although Mahlomaholo and Matobako (2006) suggest there are three types (charity, project and 'of the community'). Citing the South African White Paper on higher education Perold emphasises that the aim is to demonstrate social responsibility and a commitment to the common good by making available university expertise and infrastructure for community service (CS) programmes. However Mahlomaholo and Matobako (2006) go further to state that the university's relationship with its communities must focus on a larger sense of mission so that communities have more control over the relationship in order to address real issues that can potentially change the quality of life in those communities.

The concept of CS has gone through several conceptual evolutions as researchers have explored its value and approach in a variety of contexts. There is an increasing literature base which explores the notion of collaboration and partnership in relation to universities and their community service activities. This has evolved from the realization that community service should not be a one-way process and there are mutual learning gains from this kind of work (Nampota 2011; Preece 2011a). It is now seen as a means of contributing to the knowledge society, where students and staff can apply and adapt theoretical knowledge to specific local contexts (O'Brien 2009). So, for Africa, CS is also a way of contributing to the development of indigenous knowledge systems to acquire a better understanding of local knowledge for knowledge production that is relevant to African contexts (Oyewole 2010). However, for wider Africa there are few empirical studies and literature on this topic is limited, often either descriptive or speculative in nature (Preece, Ntseane, Modise & Osborne 2012).

As a result the term ‘engagement’ rather than ‘service’ has become a way of conceptualizing the university’s third mission work. Although Laredo (2007: 442), among others, discusses the changing notion of this third mission in terms of engagement as entrepreneurship research – whereby the university is expected to connect to ‘external economic and social worlds’ – the focus in this article is on the social purpose element of engagement.

Community Engagement

Since Mahlomaholo and Matobako’s article, various models, types and processes for CE have been offered, usually in an effort to promote the notion of integration. The discourse changes for CE are outlined succinctly by Lazarus *et al.* (2008) who suggest it was a relatively unknown descriptor in South Africa until the late 1990s when CE became embedded in higher education policy as a response to redressing the evils of apartheid. They track the shift in terminology across South African policy documents over a period of ten years from ‘community service’ to ‘knowledge based community service’ to ‘community engagement’ and now to a ‘scholarship of community engagement’ (2008:61). These shifts reflect a continuing attempt to both embed the work within academic scholarship as well as orientate involvement in communities as a collective endeavour between the communities and their higher education institutions. The aim is to secure greater recognition of the work itself and its outcomes within higher education. The discursive shift, therefore, is from one of *outreach* to one of *learning* and *knowledge creation*. This is particularly important in African contexts where indigenous and local knowledge have often been suppressed in favour of external agendas for development and this issue is discussed separately below.

Ostander (2004), cited in Brukardt *et al.* (2006:7), suggests that this discursive journey is the result of three potentially different visions; one being a vision for transformation of purpose in the new century, a second which is closely aligned to the South African context of a desire for higher education to support community building and civic work, and a third belief that a different form of teaching (‘engaged pedagogy’) can contribute to institutional and social change for a more just society.

Percy *et al.* (2006) and others (for example Council on Higher Education (CHE) 2009) list different categories of CE – ranging from community development, technical assistance, and life skills training to graduate students providing professional services. The CHE (2009) offers three models. These range from the *silo* approach (separating CE from the core missions of teaching and research) to an *intersecting* model (with some overlaps between the core functions of the university) and finally to the *infusion* model (where CE is institutionally embedded and cross cutting with teaching and research).

Although there may be as many descriptions as there are institutions, Hall (2010) describes CE as 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’ (Hall 2010:25).

Schuetze (2010) refers to three major types of engagement that embrace either knowledge transfer, continuing education or service teaching, and community based research. There is no shortage of definitions. Schuetze (2010:25), for instance, suggests that:

Community engagement is defined broadly, namely as the collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity.

‘Engagement’ in this interpretation therefore implies a partnership relationship that can involve a range of agencies within and around communities. Types of community partner may include government and other public bodies as well as private, industry or civil society organisations. The latter is a particular concern of South African universities where writers have argued the need to recognise the specific development contexts of

Africa which require a range of stakeholders (Kruss *et al.* 2011).

Even research is collaborative. Schuetze emphasises that community based research is research with, rather than on, communities. It is a distinctive feature of the associative concepts of CE.

Lall (2010) supports this notion, stating that such research entails the co-creation of knowledge through examining community issues in all their complexity as an inter-related research exercise. To achieve this relationship many emphasise that CE requires a community, needs-led approach, starting from where the community is at rather than imposing ideas from above (Bender 2008; Preece 2011b; Erasmus 2011). Bender (2008:87-89) for instance offers a conceptual framework for CE drawing on the CHE's three models. Bender emphasises that all models involve different 'levels of power flows' (89), but stresses the need for institutional cultures to change if engagement is to be a two way relationship. Partnership, dialogue and reciprocity are therefore key words associated with *engagement*, rather than *service*, with associated concepts such as 'multidisciplinarity', 'collaboration', 'sustainability' and 'community building' (Wallis *et al.* 2005:4).

The listed beneficiaries of engagement are multiple, demonstrating social, research and economic gains (Naidoo & Devnarain 2009; Oyewole 2010). So community members gain in terms of self-esteem, trust, skills acquisition, confidence and problem solving skills; students achieve professional development, enhanced learning, the opportunity to link theory and practice, with increased awareness and reflection; while the academic institution and staff increase their networks, pedagogical skills, curriculum relevance, research possibilities and recognition in the community. These outcomes, however do not reflect Mahlomaolo & Matobako's (2006) concern with collaboration for change or social transformation.

There are, at the same time, calls for clearer articulation of the essential features of CE to guide institutional practice (CHE 2009), particularly in relation to service learning (Bender 2008a; O'Brien 2009; Kruss *et al.* 2011).

Service Learning (SL)

Although many South African universities provide their own definition of

SL, most derive from the one by Bringle and Hatcher (1995), who describe SL as a:

Course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organised service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher 1995:112).

Bringle and Hatcher (2007) claim that by including SL as part of CE activities the purpose extends beyond the purely civic engagement focus of the community service mission.

From a process perspective Bender and Jordaan (2007:634) describe it as an activity:

Where students learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organised service that is ... conducted in and meets the needs of the community, is coordinated with an institution of higher education and service agencies, includes structured time and guidelines for students to reflect in written and oral format on the experience.

From a social purpose perspective it is justified as giving a 'broader appreciation of the discipline' (Bender & Jordaan 2007:634) and helping to foster social responsibility. The four ideological perspectives are 'civic responsibility', 'moral development', the promotion of 'social justice' and 'political activism' (Imperial *et al.* 2007:232-233), with the aim of giving greater relevance to the curriculum (Hall 2010).

Whilst the earlier aims in South African policy focused on fostering civic responsibility (Department of Education 1997), this concept, too, has evolved in an effort to gain credibility within the core functions of teaching and research in higher education. The academic literature has focused on theorising SL as a typology, a pedagogical philosophy, and a contribution to new forms of knowledge.

The most commonly cited **typology** of SL originates from Furco (1996) which is cited in Nduna (2006) in the form of four variations, each of which places a different emphasis on the way the words ‘service’ or ‘learning’ are written. However, the preferred ideology reflects his fourth position, written as SERVICE-LEARNING which denotes a strong focus on ensuring a reciprocal relationship between all partners.

The **pedagogical** philosophy draws on the experiential teaching and learning theories of Dewey, Schoen and Kolb (cited in Bender & Jordaan 2007), whereby students undergo a cyclical, practice-based learning process of concrete experience, reflective observation, conceptualisation and active experimentation. Lantis *et al.* (2010) bracket SL within experiential learning approaches which link theory to practice. In this way, SL becomes more than mere community involvement. It has a specific teaching purpose to link practice with a course curriculum and which contributes to student assessment. Other theoretical explorations include Hlengwa’s (2010) application of Bernstein’s theory of vertical and horizontal discourses to embed SL into the curriculum, while Petersen and Henning (2010) explore SL in relation to pre-service teacher education designs. Ebersöhn *et al.* (2010) evaluate student experiences of SL in an education psychology course.

The use of the word ‘service’ does suggest, however that the activity may still be operating, albeit unintentionally, within an ideological perspective that aligns itself more to the original concept of community service, rather than engagement. Indeed the most commonly cited objective for SL is to change the attitude of the service participant – the learner (Imperial *et al.* 2007; Parker *et al.* 2009). This emphasis reflects a paucity of research that explores the community perspective (Fourie 2006; Nduna 2007; Alperstein 2007). Hlengwa (2010:1), for instance, questions the role of SL as a strategy for community engagement:

There are complexities which need to be considered regarding the potential of service-learning to bridge the gap between the university and society, and the extent to which it is the most appropriate pedagogic tool for this purpose.

In an effort to shift this perspective, some writers refer to **community service learning**:

Good community service learning needs to take place in a collaborative partnership context that enhances mutual reciprocal teaching and learning among all members of the partnership ... the often asymmetric power relations inherent in the relationship between university and community need careful thought (Fourie 2006:36).

Indeed, Stellenbosch University (2009: 2) in South Africa, amongst other universities, now provides its own definition of community service learning as:

An educational approach involving curriculum-based, credit-bearing learning experiences in which students (a) participate in contextualised, well-structured and organised service activities aimed at addressing identified service needs in a community, and (b) reflect on the service experiences in order to gain a deeper understanding of the linkage between curriculum content and community dynamics, as well as achieve personal growth and a sense of social responsibility. It requires a collaborative partnership context that enhances mutual, reciprocal teaching and learning among all members of the partnership (lecturers and students, members of the communities and representatives of the service sector).

Camacho (2004) elaborates, suggesting that the learning experience needs to be explored in relation to how the student addresses power inequalities with the 'served' community. In order to do this the experience must be sufficiently sustained to move beyond the student experience of being merely a tourist in his or her placement organisation. Camacho's observation, reiterated by Mahlomaholo and Matobako (2006), is also a justification for more sustained CE relationships with organisations that extend beyond their SL components. These observations have implications for knowledge and scholarship in CE and SL, as Bender (2008a) points out. Erasmus (2011), for example, in sharing recent concerns about issues of reciprocity, unequal power relations and lack of multisectoral approaches, also points to the dominance of single discipline approaches to community engagement, with implications for knowledge production.

Knowledge Production

Recent studies in South Africa highlight a number of issues around the constitution of cross-disciplinary knowledge and the role of experiential learning to address the multifaceted social problems of communities (Kruss *et al.* 2011). Discussions around new forms of knowledge production have created an opportunity to re-package experiential learning as a resource for ‘open system logic’. This recognises the subjective nature of knowledge that is embedded in context, in contrast with the more conventional ‘closed system logic’ of linear learning systems that lead towards universal knowledge claims (Lounsbury 2001:323).

Gibbons (2006) expands on this distinction. Two associated concepts are mode 1 and mode 2 knowledge and ‘reliable knowledge’ versus ‘socially robust knowledge’. In summary, mode 1 knowledge represents discipline based knowledge where the locus of the problem to be solved remains within a specific discipline. Mode 2 knowledge is associated with practice based research where the locus of the problem is in a context that requires a multidimensional approach to its solution. Mode 2 knowledge is often constructed collaboratively in a transdisciplinary way (Muller & Subotsky 2001; Albertyn & Daniels 2009).

Whilst the distinction between these two forms of knowledge have been revisited (Nowotny, Scott & Gibbons 2003), the argument continues that the language of knowledge creation is being re-cast to have a closer relationship to its application. Gibbons (2006:28) suggests that the concept of ‘reliable knowledge’ – equating broadly with mode 1 knowledge - is only valid in an experimental context, while ‘socially robust knowledge’ – equating more closely with the mode 2 distinction – is valued because it has been tested in a range of contexts. So he is arguing that universities need to focus on socially robust knowledge as part of the new language of ‘engagement’ as a means of contextualising research.

The role that indigenous knowledge (locally embedded knowledge based on experience) can play is also highlighted. Brock Utne (2003:49) calls attention to the range of local knowledges that could broaden university teaching:

Village women are great science teachers in the fields of agriculture, medicine and food technology ... [they] will even explain about the

different soils suitable for different crops. [They] will also talk about food processing and food preservation, for instance, through drying or smoking meat.

O'Brien (2009) associates these activities with a 'scholarship of engagement'. This means that all partners collaborate to produce increased access to indigenous and/or mode 2 knowledge. At the same time, she argues that such scholarship increases human capital and the community voice in knowledge construction.

The credentials of community SL, then, are justified by Fourie (2006:38-39) through four types of scholarship – discovery, teaching, application (engagement), and integration of knowledges across different disciplines.

These are all ideological claims which require a related alignment of university infrastructure and support systems. They also need closer examination in the field.

Criteria for Successful Implementation of CE with SL

The literature is consistent in its vision for an institutional framework that supports the principles of CE with SL (Bender & Jordaan 2007; Bringle & Hatcher 2007; Lazarus *et al.* 2008). The criteria include a mission statement that supports SL, an executive post with responsibility for CE with institution wide and faculty based committees, staff promotion and reward systems that recognise this work alongside teaching and research, an institutional culture that supports the integration of SL with other aspects of the university's work, budget and resources that enable reciprocal partnerships with relevant community agencies.

Fourie (2006: 44) further emphasises the issue of mutuality 'where all partners contribute to the mutual search for sustainable solutions to challenges and service needs, implementing a mutually agreed upon *modus operandi*'. Trust and reciprocity between all constituencies are core elements for a constructive partnership.

Recent evaluations of such work in South Africa (CHE 2009; Kruss *et al.* 2011) suggest that such parameters are not always in place. Furthermore, the purpose and mission of CE and SL are not without their

critics. Evaluations from the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC), cited in Anderson's (2010) unpublished report on Community Engagement as an Area of Specialization in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, and more recently in Kruss *et al.* (2011) in South Africa highlight many gaps across the system that are reflected in lack of overall coordination, evaluation and funding frameworks, alongside insufficient assessment of impact on the communities that institutions are working with. Similarly, inadequate exploration of the evolving conceptual nature of SL and CE fails to maximise their potential for curriculum innovation and responsiveness to social welfare needs. Indeed, recent research by Preece *et al.* (2012) in one South African institution suggests that both SL and CE continue to suffer from a fuzziness of definition and interpretation in practice. These concerns suggest the need for closer attention to how SL interfaces with CE in order to provide policy ideas for quality improvement.

How, then, can a scholarship of engagement be developed in order to give credibility to the potential contribution of CE and SL to institutional teaching and research – whilst at the same time contributing to community development and change?

Three integrated features stand out as in need of further research in this respect – the issue of sustainability in engagement activities (O'Brien 2009; Erasmus 2011), the untapped potential for cross disciplinary engagement (Erasmus 2011; Kruss *et al.* 2011) and – added to concerns about sustainability - literature that discusses community development theory in relation to CE. A brief review of these three concerns paves the way for my proposed notion of 'adaptive engagement' as an overarching concept for SL and CE.

Multidisciplinarity and Cross-disciplinarity

In spite of the articulated connections between the multidimensional nature of community problems and the potential for multidimensional approaches, multidisciplinary work is under used and under-researched (Kruss *et al.* 2011). One documented example of its challenges and prospects is recorded in Billig and Furco (2002). The publication consists of a series of papers from a conference on service-learning research. The focus of the book is on identifying ways in which different disciplines can apply core research

principles and different theories to research service-learning impact. Although one chapter (Steinke *et al.*) specifically reports on an interdisciplinary study, the majority of papers focus on the way in which a specific discipline shapes and defines 'the concepts of civic education and citizenship' (Furco & Billig, 2002:20). Equally, the emphasis tends to be on exploring student, rather than community outcomes. One more recent interdisciplinary example by Hill (2008:122) in the context of field based courses on 'sustainable land use and natural resource management in rural communities in southern Africa' demonstrates that community dialogue, negotiation and critical reflection are essential components for student learning (and by implication a contribution to Gibbon's (2006) notion of socially robust knowledge). But in order to capture community benefits there is a need for sustained involvement.

Another recent study by Preece *et al.* (2012) suggests that academics value the idea of encouraging students to explore community challenges through multiple disciplinary lenses in recognition of the multi-dimensional nature of community based issues and concerns. This same study revealed that SL courses often involve students who have already chosen a multidisciplinary degree structure, mixing two or more subjects such as Psychology, Media, Politics, Sociology and Education, with consequent influences on how they perceived and approached their SL projects (Preece *et al.* 2013). However, efforts to integrate student participation across different discipline based classes met timetable challenges. Furthermore, the extent to which community partners either realized, or benefitted from, the contribution of integrated disciplines was not always apparent. One successful example in the above study was illustrated by an NGO whose specialism was counseling. The NGO requested assistance from Education students to improve the quality of spoken and written English by its isiZulu speaking counselors, but requested students who had an understanding of psychological terms so that the learning activities were relevant for the counselors (Preece *et al.* 2013). Students in an Education and Development SL module, who were also majoring in Psychology, responded resulting in positive feedback from the participating counsellors. The study indicated that one way to maximise multidisciplinary resources is to address community challenges from a community initiated perspective, whereby the community (in this case an NGO) articulates the complexity of its problems and potential

solutions in order to draw in a variety of disciplinary lenses and to create space for shared knowledge production. Such engagement strategies need closer theoretical scrutiny to assess what works where and how.

Sustainability

In terms of sustainable community engagement, Erasmus (2011) cites an example of ‘flagship sites’, developed by the University of the Free State, that provide spaces for dialogue with specific communities over extended lengths of time. She argues that building sustained relationships over time enables ‘communities to become co-educators’. This practice is supported for similar reasons by West (2004) in the University of KwaZulu-Natal, in the context of sharing interpretations of the bible amongst marginalised African communities. He emphasises the insights that communities bring to these interpretations based on their local resources and contexts. But he also argues that such interactions depend on long-term partnerships.

The necessity for long term partnerships and relationships to secure sustainable community engagement is in direct tension with SL as it is practiced in many universities, as Mahlomaholo and Matobako (2006) emphasise. SL courses are time-limited and constrained by institutional demands for completion dates which divert student attention from community agendas. It is apparent, therefore, that SL cannot stand alone as an engagement strategy if we are to view sustainability in terms of relationships and learning progression or the ongoing construction of knowledge that builds on what has already been learned. Although the above mentioned project identified by Preece *et al.* (2013) contributed as a short term measure to the organisation’s identified development needs, the organization also stressed that it required continuous involvement for a variety of reasons, including those of staff turnover.

However, many writers (for example Camacho 2004; Bender 2008; Hlengwa 2010; Erasmus 2011) have stressed the need to pay closer attention to the inequality of power relations in university-community partnerships.

It is suggested here, therefore, that the relationship between community development theory (as a resource for discussing power issues), and the practice of SL and CE deserves more scrutiny. This part of the article

reflects on the implications for university community engagement from different community development perspectives.

Community Development

Four recent examples shift the focus on SL as a pedagogy or learning experience for students onto CE as a developmental strategy for communities, to which SL students can contribute. The first two draw explicitly from educational and dialogic strategies. From an emancipatory education perspective Van der Merwe and Albertyn (2009) apply the Freirian process of ‘conscientisation’ to raise critical consciousness amongst rural women in South Africa ‘focusing on participation, dialogue, critical thinking and consciousness-raising which will lead to transformation’ (2009:165). A further example in Botswana is a community empowerment project for remote rural dwellers conducted in partnership between Ba Isago University College and the Kellogg Foundation, using what is known as the ‘zooming process’ – a consultative approach that aims to develop ‘self-drive’ capacity in communities to act for themselves, but over a period of several years (Raditloang 2011:39-41). Both these approaches demonstrate that engagement entails an implicit leadership role by the university although they do not discuss the inherent power differentials between the higher education institution and its target community. The extent to which this leadership relationship may enable community ownership over change processes in the face of particular challenges therefore needs to be explored at a more theoretical level. Two further publications provide an opportunity to examine how leadership can be paced and sequenced to facilitate community solutions to community problems within context specific situations, drawing respectively on organizational management and community development theories. While these two theories do not naturally sit together, they share a common goal to mobilise communities to ‘develop their response ability’ (Heifetz 1994:84) to address context specific problems.

Stephenson (2010) in the context of the United States, links CE to the concept of ‘adaptive leadership’ – an organizational management term taken from Ronald Heifetz (1994; Heifetz *et al.* 2009). Heifetz claims that the leadership process of pacing and sequencing authoritative action is a

mobilizing strategy that applies sensitivity to context specific situations. It entails a focus on maintaining trust whilst at the same time challenging individuals or groups to take responsibility for decision making processes at a pace which does not alienate participating actors from the painful process of adapting to change. Stephenson draws on Heifetz to provide a conceptual framework for the role of universities in community change processes. The lenses of ‘adaptive leadership’ and ‘network development’ challenge the university to think in multidimensional and multidisciplinary ways. Some of the leadership roles from the university’s perspective may include enabling access to technical information and, through listening to community expressed values, framing issues that can interface with current thinking whilst at the same time challenging participants to reflect on those values and cultural assumptions. The leadership role therefore includes encouraging community or organizational participants to ‘clarify values and make progress on the problems those values define’ as a dialogic process (Heifetz 1994:5). Heifetz (1994:25) summarises this as ‘working within society’s own frame of reference’. Stephenson (2011) drew on Heifetz because he attempted to move away from his institution’s more traditional role of merely providing technical expertise to community problems. He revealed that this traditional strategy did not necessarily address the problems from a community perspective, and the resultant effect was to nurture a dependency relationship by the community on the university. He describes the complexities of a university relationship with its communities in trying to find a fine balance between facilitating, challenging and ultimately letting communities take ownership over their own decisions. Heifetz’s approach is defined within a leadership theoretical framework and does not pretend to follow the community engagement rhetoric that promotes mutuality and reciprocity of relations. As such it accepts as a ‘given’ the university-community power relationship. Instead it concentrates on working through that power relationship that respects diversity and reduces dependency.

As Hill (2008) and others demonstrate, however, this is a fine and delicate balancing act. Hill suggests that from the student perspective the challenges of working with others across disciplines increased awareness of the need for critical reflection and responsiveness to different positions and cultures. Heifetz (1994:86) also emphasises the need to respect diversity of views. He openly acknowledges the existing power or ‘authority

relationship’ but suggests one can ‘fashion’ this relationship to ‘mobilise rather than hinder’ change by building on the assumption ‘that people have the potential to take responsibility’ for their own development ‘but need help to employ it’. But since Heifetz was essentially concerned with organizational management it is important to see how his ideas can be contextualised in community development theory which is more concerned with participatory reflection and building on community assets, often in the most disempowered circumstances.

In this respect Ferreira and Ebersöhn (2012) describe their STAR project (supportive teachers, assets and resilience) in a South African context. The goal in this case is to encourage communities to recognise and draw on their assets (skills, attitudes, knowledge, physical resources) to organically develop their own awareness of their ability to address local problems. Whilst using different terminology (Heifetz and Stephenson talk about adaptiveness, clarifying values, and context; Ferreira and Ebersöhn talk about participatory reflection and action and locality) all the writers are talking about a process of enabling communities to identify and mobilise their own resources for change, to solve their own problems. Ferreira and Ebersöhn take a position that recognises communities have a resilience which has always responded to challenging circumstances and that community interventions should harness rather than override that resilience. Heifetz (1994) and Stephenson’s (2011) position is to reduce dependency by communities when external interventions engage with them by developing a listening approach to their values and reference frameworks in a way that encourages communities to recognise their own resources for resilience. But the process of ‘empowerment’ within communities – and the process of disentangling the different layers of power within and across all sectors of the university-community partnership is not achieved through short term engagement activities. Competing values and purposes must be constantly renegotiated throughout the relationship, especially when a new SL initiative is introduced to an ongoing development process. The process of empowerment therefore requires long term relationships between key actors across institutions and community agencies, within which SL is a contributing factor.

These insights reflect West’s (2004) earlier mentioned focus on dialogue with communities for mutual growth and understanding. But rarely

does the SL literature encourage students to think in such adaptive terms. Rather it encourages students to explore their own growth, based on their empirical actions in community settings. It is argued here that a wider theoretical framework is needed for understanding SL as a CE process and the above multidimensional reflections may provide a starting point for taking the CE and SL literature beyond its pedagogical and single disciplinary focus.

So, for instance, Heifetz's adaptive leadership approach could be employed to recognise the potentially multi-layered dimensions of community participants. An 'adaptive engagement' process would therefore ensure university dialogue with all community layers (such as gatekeepers, community organisation leaders and their participants or co-workers). The dialogue process would foreground the different and often competing values and purposes for university involvement in order to clarify aims and outcomes. In other words, by using Heifetz's assumed authority (power) relationship to mobilise thinking around competing values and purposes universities (staff and students) can complement asset-based community development theories about the ability of communities to maximise their own resources to solve their own problems. This involves ongoing communication, respect, trust and participatory reflection about how people are working with the presented situation in order to build community independence. 'Adaptive engagement' starts with an acceptance that power relations are unequal. The approach employs adaptive leadership concerns with listening and working within societies' own frame of reference whereby all stakeholders clarify at the outset their competing goals and values. But this engagement employs community development philosophies for asset building that organically pace change over time through ongoing communication, respect and trust, recognising that no-one person has all the answers. Multidisciplinary involvement by university members raises awareness of these competing concerns because it broadens the range of perspectives that connect with the different aspects of the community problem. The power tensions that arise within these processes must be constantly clarified between and during SL interventions. This requires the involvement of academic staff as ongoing anchors in the community-university relationship which extends beyond the SL project. This, in turn, would raise awareness of both the complementarity of disciplines and the

need to clarify potentially competing value systems across disciplines which might impact on their community SL contributions. Thus ‘adaptive engagement’ operates at multiple levels in multiple ways. The aim would be to gradually change the power dynamics through the ongoing process of new learning within communities.

Concluding Remarks

This article has offered a brief account of the evolution of terminology and academic thinking that is now associated with the concept of community engagement and service learning. The focus has been on the South African context where such work is enshrined in government policy. The article has highlighted some gaps in understanding or theorizing particularly in relation to community values and power dimensions. These are outlined as relating to multidisciplinary and knowledge creation, sustainability and the link to community development theory. It is proposed that by employing community development theory with ‘adaptive leadership’ as a reflective tool has potential to enhance concerns about community ownership of the engagement process and provides additional lenses through which service learning might be led by community engagement rather than the other way round. In this context SL would be a complementary resource within a broader community-university relationship that develops over time through ongoing dialogue. An ‘adaptive engagement’ concept draws on the combined literature articulated by Heifetz and Ferreira and Ebersöhn (adaptive leadership and asset-based community development) as well as encouraging interdisciplinary collaboration. Such a focus, if established over time with communities, might go some way towards addressing some of the concerns about unsustainable SL as identified by Mahlomaholo and Matobako (2006) and others. This theoretical perspective requires further empirical research that establishes what works where and how.

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