



THE MERGING OF UNIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY: FURTHERING COLLABORATIVE EDUCATION

Dr Connie ISRAEL
UKZN Foundation,
Israel@ukzn.ac.za

ABSTRACT

The focus on community engagement and social responsibility in many higher education institutions in South Africa today, brings the University directly into a collaborative relationship with Society. The ivory tower is no more: partnerships are formed with a view to enhancing educational practice and the quality of community health and well-being. This paper briefly reviews the discourse surrounding community engagement in higher education, the University of KwaZulu-Natal's position in this endeavour and models of community engagement in South Africa. However, it focuses on avenues for community engagement enabled by the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Foundation, which seeks investment for strategic development projects. It concludes by presenting two such projects which the Foundation is supporting, suggesting that partnering the university with community in a mutually beneficial relationship, merging needs, resources, skills, knowledge and ideals, lends new meaning to "Collaborative Education".

Keywords: University, Community, Collaborative Education

INTRODUCTION

Given the background of social, political and economic change in South Africa, community engagement and social transformation and responsibility have dominated discourse in higher education contexts. While the shift in paradigm from *community service* to *community engagement* is evident, there is, at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), which has a long history of community engagement, and in the country's higher education institutions at large, ongoing debate and interrogation about what this means and how it reinterprets the role of the university, its model of teaching and learning, and the research it supports. How do scholarship and doing good works interact? Does higher education mean being responsive and responsible? Does it effect social transformation and social justice? What is the relationship between education and community? Is community engagement a core or supplemental function of the University? What are the factors which have impacted on the development of community engagement in universities? Should sharing and caring be one of the norms of higher education outcomes and practice? How does research at a university such as UKZN, which is research-led, further this collaborative, engaged relationship? Amongst others, Fourie (in *Community Engagement in Higher Education Conference Proceedings*, 2007) and Hall (in *Community Engagement in South African Higher Education*, 2010), address these and related issues.

Policies are being developed around responses to these questions, to incorporate how students may be evaluated for community engagement, how curriculum and practice, whether in the form of internship or research, may be built around it or infused with it. One of the principles and core values of the University of KwaZulu-Natal is to "Embrace our responsibility as a public institution to support and contribute to national and regional development, and the welfare and upliftment of the wider community, through the generation and dissemination of knowledge and the production of socially-responsible graduates" (UKZN Vision, Mission, Goals and Core Values, no.3). There is no need to rationalize further this commitment and the call for action, often made by theological institutions, as illustrated by Henry (2011 para.2): indeed, in a world with 925 million undernourished people, "social injustice is still dominant...".



Community engagement at UKZN was traditionally conceived of as “an umbrella term to describe social engagement in the areas of clinical service, placement, internship, community-based learning or service learning in a specific discipline and community outreach” (UKZN Community Engagement Conference, 2009, para. 1). It has made some progress from this point of departure. Similar initiatives abound across the country, driven by the commitment from higher education to forge and sustain mutually beneficial interaction with individuals and groups in society, though varying models apply.

In their report on Community Engagement through Higher Education Institutions Governance and Management (a workshop concurrent to the Community Engagement in Higher Education Conference, 2007: 109), Badat and Sattar identify three models of community engagement, where: i) the university has three roles, teaching and learning, research and community engagement but fulfils each independently, mainly through community outreach and student and staff volunteerism; ii) the university has these three roles, but there is some intersection among them, usually involving service-learning, with community outreach and volunteerism remaining separate; iii) the university has two roles, teaching and learning and research, and community engagement informs, animates and is *integrated* with both. Regardless of the varying levels of integration across higher education institutions here, the South African Council on Higher Education (CHE) affirms in 2010 that community engagement ranks alongside teaching and research, as one of three core responsibilities of higher education (Community Engagement in South African Higher Education, 2010, p.iii).

From Interrogation to Integration

The purpose of this paper is not to interrogate these and any other emerging models of community engagement or indeed the theoretical underpinnings for changing conceptualizations of the role of the university. For UKZN, given its vision of community engagement as one of three pillars which mobilize and inform its work, the goal may be to develop ways of not only interrogating but integrating community engagement into teaching, learning and research. Goal Two of the University’s current strategic plan is Responsible Community Engagement: “To contribute through knowledge to the prosperity and sustainability of our province, and to nation-building, by connecting with and committing ourselves to the communities we serve in a manner that adds value and earns their respect, admiration and trust” (UKZN Strategic Plan 2007-2016, pp. 8-9). It identifies the following strategies to accomplish this goal:

- Promote and reward community engagement that adds value
- Embed community engagement that adds value in selected niche academic programmes
- Give effect to public/private partnerships, including mutually advantageous, dynamic agreements with local municipalities and government.

What this paper does intend to do is focus on and identify the role of the Advancement Office, which though not directly involved with teaching and learning and research, as nonetheless an effective channel for integrating community engagement, and to highlight some of the key characteristics which make this a successful venture.

THE ROLE OF THE UKZN FOUNDATION OR ADVANCEMENT OFFICE

Community engagement is gaining momentum in the work of the UKZN Foundation (see our website), which has as its core business, philanthropic investment (Advancement, Development and Fundraising). The role of the Foundation is to garner third stream income to fund strategic development projects, in line with the University’s institutional development agenda, that would benefit both student and community.



Thus it must cultivate and solicit prospective donors on behalf of the University and its staff, and facilitate and manage all donor interaction, which calls for sustained relationship-building. In essence, this means it is responsible specifically for:

- Co-ordinating fundraising aimed at contributing to the developmental needs and advancing the interests of the University;
- Building the image of the University within the donor community;
- Managing relationships with donors;
- Providing support and advice to members of the University community who engage in fundraising which is related to the core business and strategic goals of the institution;
- Identifying, encouraging and assisting with development of projects and programmes within the University which donors have an interest in supporting;
- Presenting approved projects and programmes to donors and other prospective partners;
- Monitoring and reporting on overall donor income flows into the University, with due attention to tax exemption certificates, fiduciary control and audits (Guidelines for Fundraising for non-research purposes at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2010, p. 3).

The assumption underlying these responsibilities is a deep and current interest and involvement in the university's dynamic environment, with a keen awareness of how to further its development agenda, as well as an acute sense of the market, the public and private sector, the economy, giving trends and profiles. While the UKZN Foundation enjoys relationships with a wide range of local and international grant-makers including embassies, trusts, charities, foundations, individual donors and bequests, it seeks to establish partnerships with corporates by matching their giving capacity, interests and trends with University projects and needs, drawing on their policies on:

- Corporate social responsibility (CSR), which incorporates corporate governance, employment equity, environmental management, procurement, and corporate social investment.
- Corporate social investment (CSI), which refers to a company's contributions (in cash and kind) to organisations and communities external to the company, usually per policy, whether formalized or not.

Social Responsibility and Social Responsiveness

While social responsibility from donors is being activated by Advancement Offices in the country, the challenge is to activate social responsiveness from higher education. Beyond the normal brief of working with the grant-making community, the Foundation asks: How can we partner UKZN with the community to benefit both? Where can we locate the transactional zone which would enable maximum, meaningful exchange, that would work best and benefit both? And, in turn, how can research, teaching and learning take on the responsibility of philanthropic investment as an outcome? We argue that discourse in advancement contexts should increasingly open up to the possibility of enabling community engagement more actively.

The UKZN Foundation seeks to enable community engagement through the following avenues:

- By building a platform for sustainable giving (one of our strategic goals, UKZN Foundation Strategic Plan 2008-2012), via the identification and nurturing of student volunteers from the undergraduate cohort, to inspire among the student body a spirit of philanthropy and long-term



loyalty to the university, thereby promoting a culture of giving amongst them that is sustained throughout a life time.

- By engaging internal and external community through an online presence which invites participation in volunteer projects, covering the spectrum of the development work we do.
- By supporting projects with a strong community development ethos (which I shall elaborate upon shortly).

It is undeniable that at this stage in our growth trajectory, these avenues may still locate the Foundation some distance from the third model of community engagement outlined; furthermore, development across the university is indeed patchy. As noted, the goal for us is to shift from interrogation to integration, while bearing in mind the need for careful selection of projects, internal capacity and resources, and the challenges of implementation, monitoring and sustainability (Fourie, in Community Engagement in Higher Education Conference Proceedings, 2007, p. 41). Two case studies of projects we are supporting exemplify this: Sizabantwana and the Kenneth Gardens Project, the former fourteen years old, the latter a 2011 initiative, which I shall sketch briefly.

THE SIZABANTWANA PROJECT

The Sizabantwana Project (Mitchell, 2010) is an established project of the University of KwaZulu-Natal's School of Psychology in the College of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences. Sizabantwana means 'Helping Children' in *isiZulu*. The Project began by developing educators in schools so that they could deal more effectively with psycho-social issues in early childhood education, in their school communities. These educators became agents of change in their contexts, and were thus identified as resources by other community members. Educator support groups were established to address the needs of over 36 disadvantaged primary schools in the Pietermaritzburg region, focusing on medical and psychological screening and intervention; enhanced classroom learning experiences, and improved environmental conditions. The Project is intended to:

- Generate a self-sustaining educator training and support intervention (15-20 educators).
- Facilitate communication between the state departments involved in caring for these children (Department of Health, its hospital clinics and Department of Paediatrics at UKZN).
- Capitalise on student capacity by involving students on site in the different aspects of the project, for academic credit (40 medical, psychology, social work, dietetics, education and design students).
- Impact on children who would otherwise be marginalised, overlooked and neglected due to the overwhelming demands on the system (leading to referral and specialised assessment and treatment).

The Project is currently expanding into Sizabantwana-Inkunzi Isematholeni, meaning "The bull is amongst the calves", an indication of the seriousness of the escalating problems faced by pre-school children, who are deprived of facilities, stimulation and resources, leading to bio-psycho-social difficulties that are often ignored (Mitchell, 201, p. 4). The project's focus on African Psychology has also enriched its research standing, as it seeks to address issues on the local and global development agenda "through critically informed and reflective teaching, research and community responsiveness" (Mitchell, 2011, p.1). Sizabantwana has won a number of local and international awards, which "recognize exemplary partnerships between communities and higher educational institutions that build on each other's strengths to improve higher education, civic engagement, and the overall health of communities" (Mitchell, 2011, p. 7).



Funding for this project has been obtained in part by the UKZN Foundation.

KENNETH GARDENS MUNICIPAL ESTATE INTERVENTION PROJECT

The Kenneth Gardens Estate in Umbilo, Durban, is a cluster housing scheme, originally intended for poor, working class whites, and developed by the apartheid government. It is now home to a diverse community with a range of social problems such as unemployment; drug and alcohol abuse; family violence; isolated and neglected elderly residents; apathetic children and young adults with low self-esteem and limited aspirations; safety threats; HIV and other chronic illnesses, and racial and cultural intolerance (Marks & Erwin, 2011, p. 2).

The overall aims of the Kenneth Gardens Municipal Estate Intervention Project include determining the needs of the Kenneth Gardens community and providing a framework for interventions to help meet these needs; making recommendations to local government about a sound development strategy based on empirical evidence; initiating and managing a meaningful outreach program for the Community Development Department at UKZN, and providing UKZN students with practical opportunities to learn various aspects of community development (Marks & Erwin, 2011, p.5). Though led by the Community Development Programme at UKZN, academics from other departments of English Studies, History, the School of Music, Development Studies, Social Work, and the Centre for Critical Research on Race and Identity Studies, are actively involved in this project.

Given the range of needs, a suite of projects is proposed: a Bursary Programme for School leavers; a Food Production Feeding Scheme; an Early Childhood Intervention Programme, a Public Health Programme for Vulnerable Groupings, and a Youth Development Media Project. There are a number of outreach programmes that have already emerged as possibilities: Cultural tolerance and interfaith forums; Producing life history documentaries of residents of Kenneth Gardens; Drug and alcohol intervention; Domestic violence intervention; Built environment projects such as the design of a functional and safe parking area; Structured and resourced cultural and sporting activities for young people; Parenting style discussions forums; Enhancing governance arrangements (within Kenneth Gardens, and in relation to key actors such as local government, ward councilor, NGOs, etc.) and Public health support programmes, particularly with regard to HIV and the elderly (Marks & Erwin, 2011, p. 6).

The projects have an interlinked research component (for e.g. a comprehensive demographic and needs assessment survey) and community outreach component (designing and implementing community outreach programmes that are sustainable and a result of participatory action research processes). These are devised in collaboration with a range of partners, including the tenants, the Kenneth Gardens Residents Association, Ethekweni municipality, Turquoise Harmony Institute (an NGO), the School of Community Development and the UKZN (Marks & Erwin, 2011, pp. 7-8). The Kenneth Gardens Team anticipates that this initiative will become a model for how other similar public housing communities could be assisted to uplift themselves and improve their existing conditions through public-private partnerships and collaboration with tertiary institutions (Marks & Erwin, 2011, p.20).

The UKZN Foundation is currently seeking funding and other support for this project. Its volunteers are participating in project activities already.



KEY FEATURES OF COLLABORATIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROJECTS

What key features stand out in these projects that make them successful examples of community engagement?

- A clear community development focus and rationale, which positions the university in collaboration with community
- A well-managed, collaborative relationship with the University, and specifically, access to its human resources
- Involvement and mobilising of local community, business and government resources
- A cross-disciplinary, collaborative pool of expertise (educators, students, programmes)
- A clearly defined outreach and research component, with the latter intrinsic to the former
- A team of champions
- Identifiable and measurable goals and success indicators

CONCLUSION: FURTHERING COLLABORATIVE EDUCATION

The key word in these features is “collaborative”, to the point of merging the agendas of both university and community. Both projects partner the university with community, making for a sharing of resources and expertise, with benefit to both. This gives a different interpretation to “Collaborative Education” as we know it. I’d like to think of collaboration and merging together – of needs, resources, skills, knowledge and ideals - as engagement. The development trajectory of the Foundation is interesting to note as well, from its purely fund-seeking support for Sizabantwana many years ago (2008), to its participatory role now with the recruitment of its volunteers for the Kenneth Gardens Project (alongside fund-raising). Partnering, relationship-building and collaborating, are what characterize the work of the Foundation. Collaborating and merging with community gives new meaning to the Foundation’s call for social investment, and to our understanding and practice of community engagement.

REFERENCES

- Community Engagement in South African Higher Education. Kagisano No. 6. (2010). Durban: Fishwick Printers.
- Community Engagement in Higher Education, Proceedings of the Conference, The Higher Education Quality
- Committee of the Council on Higher Education and The Community - Higher Education – Service Partnerships Initiative of Jet Education Services. 3-5 September 2006. Cape Town: CHE AND CHESP.
- Guidelines for Fundraising for non-research purposes at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. (2010). Durban: University Publication.
- Henry, E. (2011, February 20). February 20 – World Day of Social Justice. Retrieved from www.bwanet.org.
- Marks, M., & Erwin, K. (2011). Kenneth Gardens Municipal Estate Intervention Project Proposal. The School of Community Development, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Mitchell, C. (2010). Sizabantwana Project Proposal. The School of Psychology, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Mitchell, C. (2011). Sizabantwana – Inkunzi Isematholeni (The bull is amongst the calves) Project Proposal. The School of Psychology, University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- University of KwaZulu-Natal Community Engagement Conference Programme. 8-9 October 2009. Kloof, South Africa.



University of KwaZulu-Natal. (2011). Vision, Mission, Goals and Core Values. Retrieved October 18, 2011 from <http://www.ukzn.ac.za/About-UKZN/ukzn-Vision-mission.aspx>

University of KwaZulu-Natal. (2011). Strategic Plan 2007-2016. Retrieved October 18, 2011 from <http://www.ukzn.ac.za/aboutus/strategicplan.pdf>

University of KwaZulu-Natal Foundation Trust. (2011). Retrieved September 15, 2011 from <http://www.ukznfoundation.org/>

IOJPE