
AN OVERVIEW OF THE FLAMINGO CRESCENT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT WITHIN CPUT DEPARTMENT OF TOWN AND REGIONAL PLANNING

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ABSTRACT

One of the strategic objectives of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) is to integrate community engagement into the academic curriculum. CPUT seeks to be actively involved in social transformation and social responsiveness by matching academics with community engagement. Being an engaged university, CPUT continually seeks partnerships where mutual, interchangeable, cooperative interaction occurs between communities and the university. The Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation in South Africa, which was tabled in response to the National Commission on Higher Education Report, stipulates that Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) must develop curriculums that have more modes of delivery and variation in the patterns of teaching. As a result the Green Paper evolved into the White Paper 1997 that finally informed the National Plan for Higher Education. The question is how to create an enabling environment for community engagement, taking account of the complexity of power issues within the university and community. The University of Technology, Sydney in Australia uses the 'shopfront' model which works in partnerships with community groups on community-initiated projects. The 'science shop' model adopted by the University of Cape Town (UCT) consists of independent, participatory research support provided mostly by supervised students. The Department of Town and Regional Planning at CPUT embarked on a community-led mapping and enumeration project at Flamingo Crescent Informal Settlement in Lansdowne Industrial. A problem-based, service-learning model was used where students talk to the community, investigate how the community functions and then assist the community in making decisions with regard to 're-blocking'. This three-stage model includes analysis and reflection before engagement, critical thinking and reflection during engagement and finally decision making and reflection after engagement. One of the revealing outcomes of the project was the establishment of cooperation between individuals and groups within the community, resulting in social constructivism. Trust was established between CPUT students and Flamingo Crescent residents, this provided a catalyst for communication and cooperation. As advocates of the service learning movement it is necessary to document and publish best practice service-learning in order to support this academic form of community engagement. This paper reflects on the lessons learnt during the CPUT-Flamingo Crescent 're-blocking' community engagement project on how these lessons can be carried forward to other community engagement projects.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Community engagement within higher education has historically been considered as a voluntary service to communities, rather than a core function along with teaching and research. The transformation of higher education in South Africa has seen Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) become more responsive to community matters by making available services and infrastructure for service-learning programs and includes community engagement as the third core function of a university together with teaching and research (Thomson et al, 2011: 221). Even though community engagement policies are in place, HEIs do not always incorporate service-learning in the curriculum, which results in community projects being 'add on' rather than credit-bearing components of the curriculum (Lazarus et al, 2008:58). Despite service-learning being practiced in most departments at CPUT, a significant gap exists in the way academics perceive service-learning and support it within the curriculum. This article explores the accomplishments achieved during the Flamingo Crescent Community Engagement and Service-Learning Project run by the Department of Town and Regional Planning at CPUT. Some of the questions that are explored in this article include:

- Does CPUT follow a specific community engagement model?
- Has the Flamingo Crescent Community Engagement and Service-Learning Project provided a benchmark for other service-learning projects in the Department of Town and Regional Planning?
- What are the key variables evident in service-learning projects that lecturers should be aware of?
- Is reciprocity of knowledge truly achievable in a service-learning project?

These questions are explored during the assessment of the Flamingo Crescent Community Engagement and Service-Learning Project implemented in 2013. The Flamingo Crescent Community Engagement and Service-Learning Project incorporates three modules taught in the undergraduate National Diploma in Town and Regional Planning. These include Infrastructure and Service Planning, Geographic Information Systems and Planning Design Studio. This inter-modular approach allows students to link complex societal problems across modules and arrive at solutions based on integrated knowledge. Finally this article investigates if CPUT is an engaged university that has sufficiently integrated community engagement into its academic program.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The three core functions of a university in South Africa are teaching/learning, research and community engagement. Community engagement is seen as part of the academic workload of staff members. Community engagement informs students about communities through participation where problems are explored and contributions to solutions are made, through this involvement quality of life is improved (Thomson et al, 2011:218). Community engagement has the potential to influence students in becoming socially responsive in their careers after graduating. The notion of Mode 1 and Mode 2 knowledge at universities was highlighted by Gibbons and his co-authors in their 1994 book, *The New Production of Knowledge* (Gibbons et al., 1994). Mode 1 knowledge is knowledge put together for knowledge's sake while Mode 2 knowledge is socially useful knowledge that is problem oriented and trans-disciplinary in nature (Gibbons 2006). Mode 2 knowledge suggests open, exploratory networks rather than the confined

traditional institutional-structured knowledge creation (Hall, 2009:19). The debate on the two types of knowledge at universities continues with far-reaching forecasts of the demise of universities and Mode 1 knowledge for more local forms of knowledge (Gibbons 2006) to the view that strict policy on conducting Mode 2 approaches could undermine traditional knowledge resulting in a decline in the quality of education and research (Muller, 2000:28). It is however true to say that contemporary society demands that universities engage with society in a quest to integrate tacit knowledge with other forms of knowledge in the knowledge economy (Thomson et al, 2011:218). Community engagement in South African universities is distinctly concerned with the government agenda to transform and become responsive to the socio-economic issues that face the country (Thomson et al, 2011:221). However progress in implementing community engagement and service-learning in HEIs is slow and confused due to a lack of conceptual clarity. Auf der Heyde (2005) in Hall (2009:36) believes that there is a need for a better theorised understanding of community engagement to enable work in engagement to be evaluated alongside teaching and research. Slamati (2009: 109) and Nongxa (2009:57) believe a common concept of community engagement for all universities is not necessary at this point as community engagement is defined by scholarship through funding and the mission and vision statement of the individual university.

A way of implementing academic-based community engagement is through the pedagogy of service-learning. Service-learning is a relatively new pedagogy that provides a framework for partnership building between universities and society and stimulates civic engagement (Thomson, 2011:220). It is said that service-learning contextualises and provides new insights into knowledge production and provides a pedagogical intervention that provides students with an opportunity to educate themselves in society's problems and gain knowledge of community issues first-hand (Bringle, 2010:228 in CHE 2006). According to Bringle et al (2004:6) in CHE (2006:25), service-learning exposes students to tacit knowledge that allows them to develop new ways of thinking and acting that are integrated with their personal values. Furthermore service-learning provides a means for students to relate academic content to practice. Unlike volunteer community-service, service-learning is community-service activities that are connected to academic content that permits formal academic learning (Thomson, 2011:224). However, community engagement must include reciprocal learning where student and community learning takes place. Community activities must not be done for the community but with the community. In many cases community service is associated with charity work. Community engagement at HEIs is about gaining and transferring knowledge rather than providing a free service.

Academic-based community engagement generates self-awareness, understanding and knowledge of human settlements. This research investigates community mapping and enumeration in a service-learning context where the focus is on the student's ability to adapt to a community environment. The research question asks if community-led mapping and enumeration can be used as a vehicle to gradually induct students into communities and allow partnership building, the establishment of social capital and the encouragement of social constructivism. Bridger and Luloff (2001) and Dale and Newman (2010) argue that developing social capital in a community is one of the primary factors that needs to be enhanced in the development of sustainable communities in the future. Once this has been achieved the task of addressing the community's most urgent needs can be realised. Local governments are pressurised into providing more resources in order to prevent urban insecurity, violence and environmental deterioration. Human beings have needs that are complex and interconnected. Urban prosperity lies in the linking of all city-dwellers in their interdependence. This study uses an ethnographic, qualitative research approach to investigate the realities of the Flamingo Crescent informal settlement community, in the hope that an insider perspective of the community's realities can be revealed so that better services can be provided for the community in a minimalistic in situ upgrade. The Flamingo Crescent Community Engagement Project has provided an innovative way for teaching students within a community setting. Participation in a dynamic community environment has initiated action that has resulted in the community being able to exchange ideas and knowledge amongst themselves and to negotiate with partners, in particular the service provider. Through the acquisition of tacit knowledge, the status quo of conditions within the community has been revealed; this allows a better understanding of how the community works. This has

benefited the students and the community in their quest to generate new knowledge within the context of the community (Pinfold, 2014b).

3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODELS

The University of Technology, Sydney in Australia implemented the ‘shopfront’ model for community engagement. The ‘shopfront’ model is a university wide program where each faculty advertises themselves in a bid to attract community engagement. This model acts as a gateway for communities to access the university’s knowledge and resources in a bottom-up approach that ensures community-led rather than institutional-dominated projects. Communities are able to approach all faculties rather than just one proactive faculty/department. This model is collaborative and multidisciplinary where community groups, academics and students work together in all facets of a community engagement project, within an innovative and supportive environment. The project outcomes become multidisciplinary in character, shaped by the community and institution together rather than by the community and individual faculties/departments. This multidisciplinary approach can involve many subjects, supervised by academics and spanning over a number of semesters, or it can involve small projects requiring only a few students. The strength of this model is in the central control and coordination of projects rather than a fragmented individualistic and uncoordinated approach to projects at departmental level. This multidisciplinary approach ensures a uniform way of dealing with community groups (Smith-Tolken, 2012:16). The ‘science shop’ model, developed in Europe in the 1970s, has been adopted by the University of Cape Town (UCT) and encourages community-based organisations, local and central government and labour unions to submit community engagement proposals to the central Knowledge Co-op office. The central Knowledge Co-op office serves all faculties and matches the proposal with appropriate faculty/department and staff/students. The project output is research-based and is presented in the form of a thesis at honours or master’s level. This model ensures that the designated academic is matched to the particular community’s needs and therefore ensures a productive partnership (Schmidt: 2012:19). At CPUT the Community Engagement and Work Integrated Learning Centre (CE and WIL Centre) was established to coordinate community engagement and work integrated learning across all faculties. This centre is responsible for initiating partnerships and to ensure appropriate student placements. The CE and WIL Centre also coordinates the flow of communication to and from external partners. The level at which students engage with communities on a project is not determined by the CE and WIL Centre but by the respective Departments. All proposed service-learning projects are first submitted to the relevant Faculty for approval and are then registered with the CE and WIL Centre. All sites for service-learning projects are visited and approved by CPUT and/or service partners prior to the commencement of the placement of students/academics to enhance the chance of a favourable learning environment. All logistical arrangements for the implementation of service-learning projects take place within academic departments involved. The CE and WIL Centre in collaboration with Quality Office monitor, and evaluate the role of the service-learning program and makes recommendations for improvements.

4 THE FLAMINGO CRESCENT COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT

The Flamingo Crescent Community Engagement and Service-Learning Project links the community with teaching and learning through service-learning pedagogy. The project provided students with an exceptional learning experience. During this project students were able to practice academic theory taught in the classroom within a community setting. The connection between theory and practice was achieved through reflection sessions prepared in the classroom before, during and after engagement. Student’s knowledge, skills and educational thinking was stimulated through ‘knowledge by acquaintance’ inspiring a higher order of thinking through real life experience.

The Flamingo Crescent informal settlement services upgrade project was initiated by the South African branch of Slum Dwellers International (SDI). SDI is a Non-Government Organisation (NGO) that links urban

communities from the global south through mobilising, supporting and transferring development opportunities from one location to other cities regions and countries. SDI is affiliated to the Informal Settlement Network (ISN) and the Community Organisation Resource Centre (CORC) which are community based NGOs. ISN is a network of representatives of residents of informal settlements and backyards at metropolitan level in South Africa that is committed to partnering with government in the incremental improvement of informal settlements and backyard precincts and the improvement of livelihood opportunities for their residents. CORC is a NGO that deals with social development in South Africa. The Flaming Crescent informal settlement steering committee was made up of specific community interest groups who wanted to participate in the service-learning activities. These interest groups defined their own development outcomes to ensure a bottom-up approach to the development of the community. The controlling academic at CPUT was responsible for ensuring that a clear connection existed between the community's defined outcomes and the relevant academic module outcomes. This mixing of outcomes strengthened the prospect of reciprocity of knowledge during the project. Partnerships in community engagement are built around common interests and reciprocal cooperation between parties (Jones, 2003:152). Equity within partnerships requires that each partner respect the other and is fully cognizant of varied expectations. Reciprocity is regarded as a key characteristic of the partnership relation. This presupposes that benefits are equally distributed amongst all stakeholders. Universities who seek community partners should not view communities as a liaison of convenience, laboratories for experimentation, or passive recipients of expertise.

The location of Flamingo Crescent Informal Settlement is in Lansdowne Industrial in the Southern Suburbs of Cape Town. It is a small erf (property) zoned as 'Public Open Space' and the settlement consists of approximately 95 shacks. The settlement has been in existence for approximately 10 years with its inhabitants being very poor homeless people. The Flamingo Crescent Informal Settlement community is one of several communities identified by the City of Cape Town for services upgrade. This small, retained community provided an ideal site for a service-learning pilot project and a way to initiate community engagement within the curriculum of CPUT's Department of Town and Regional Planning. The fact that service-learning is seen as an unconventional teaching method, contributes to the fact that this pedagogy is unpopular amongst academic staff. The development of service-learning in the curriculum therefore depends largely on an individual's commitment and requires a good understanding and knowledge of institutional policy and guidelines pertaining to service-learning. Theoretical and conceptual frameworks need to be put into practice to ensure this form of teaching is successful and ethically executed. Service-learning demands much more flexibility from lecturers as course material is not fully controllable due to student learning in the community. Lecturers need to accept that students become a resource of knowledge which needs to be extracted in reflective sessions. Theory and experience becomes integrated, resulting in the need to ensure that academic standards are strictly upheld. Learning goals must be achieved through well-structured assignments that facilitate student learning from service experience. The lecturer has the added responsibility of insuring that students are able to engage with partners in order to harvest knowledge during their experience. Classroom teaching and community engagement is distinctly different and requires consistency between the two environments to provide equal opportunities for student learning. Lecturer's must therefore disseminate information before engagement, provide support during engagement and then facilitate and guide in reflection after engagement.

The design of a service-learning module is challenging as there are a number of variables that the lecturer needs to be aware of. The first variable is the formulation of module outcomes. Module outcomes differ depending on the developmental needs of the community. A situational analysis of the community is needed beforehand to ensure that the students can work within the parameters of the community's operation. This requires careful planning to ensure that the academic program is not compromised in order to accommodate the community's outcomes. Module design can only be determined once a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) has been finalised and signed with the respective partners. The second variable relates to the time spent in the community. The community will determine when engagement can happen and the amount of time available for student activities. This has implications for timetabling of academic work. Provision must be made in the academic

timetable to accommodate students on site so that the required knowledge is gained from the engagement experience. Twenty to forty hours of community engagement is recommended by the Council for Higher Education resource manual (CHE, 2006: 34). The third variable relates to the challenges of placing students in the community. These include community readiness to host students, the student's readiness to engage with the community, weather conditions and logistical arrangements such as transport and safety. Furthermore care must be taken not to demoralise or frustrate students in their placement within the community.

Service-learning projects generally take on three different forms; discipline-based, project-based and capstone-based. Discipline based service-learning projects require that students have a continuous presence in the community throughout the project. The Flamingo Crescent Service-Learning Project is problem-based where students attend site visits to gather and disseminate information. The first stage of the Flamingo Crescent service-learning project was to introduce small groups of five students to the community each day. This was intended to discreetly induct students to the community rather than deploy a large group that would give a sense of invading the community space and creating the risk of xenophobia. The capstone method is the third approach where postgraduate students collaborate with communities. Postgraduates are able to conduct themselves more professionally and require less supervision; they also offer more knowledge, skills and value to the project and are therefore more effective at finding a solution. Furthermore postgraduates are able to gather personal experience that can be useful to them in practice.

During the Flamingo Crescent Service-Learning Project certain cross-field outcomes were achieved. These included skills such as critical and creative thinking, being able to work in groups and communicate across languages. Students were required to work with people at varied academic levels, with different home languages and with expectations that sometimes exceeded the brief of the project. The problems confronting students were not simple and were in some instances unsolvable. This problem solving exercise required students to think critically, be strategic and communicate their ideas in creative ways. It was important that students be tolerant and sensitive to the culture of the community and make sure they did not offend anyone. Furthermore students had to act in a socially responsive way when confronted with the problems facing the community. At the same time students had to relate the experience to the outcomes of their academic module and ensure that the collective objectives of the project were achieved.

The pedagogy of service-learning is grounded in reflection which enables learning to occur. Feedback in the form of reflection sessions was critical to assess the outcomes of the experience. Students were able to discuss the effectiveness of their role as agents in the community engagement process. Importantly the students needed to contextualise the experience into the theory learnt in the classroom. The ultimate goal was to gain knowledge of the module content and understand it in the context of the community setting. During the Flamingo Crescent Service-Learning Project strict procedural skills allowed students to gain self-confidence, self-esteem and personal growth. Students were encouraged to ask questions and derive new meaning to what they had learnt in the classroom. The lecturer's responsibility was to develop a meaningful connection between the experience and the course content as well as to encourage students to explore issues more deeply. Contextualising the reflection sessions is important to enhance the effectiveness of the project. During the Flamingo Crescent Service-Learning Project reflective sessions were conducted before, during and after site visits. The reflection before engagement was a rational comprehensive view of the community and was devoid of community emotion. During community engagement, reflection sessions became increasingly vocal. The first meeting on-site with partners and stakeholders provided the context that enabled the students to formulate impressions. Later reflective sessions became more exhilarating where students celebrated their experience. The reflection activities took on various forms. The first was through telling, where students told stories about their experience and showed photographs, building on each other's experience. During these sessions students began to understand that impressions and ideas vary and that not everyone necessarily had positive feedback. Thereafter posters, brochures and planning documents were compiled. Individual reflective essays and formal reports were also presented outlining the significance of what students had done and what they propose for the future. The

final submission was a portfolio which included analysis in the form of GIS maps, accompanied by statistics and graphs. Reflection was reciprocated in the community with community partners telling stories of their experiences, impressions, concerns and desires, which students recorded in a questionnaire.

5 CPUT AS AN ENGAGED UNIVERSITY

A university's civic identity and public purpose depends on strategies of engagement. The definition of an engaged campus is no longer vague. Over the last decade essential foundations of engagement have become clearly identified. These include pedagogy and epistemology, faculty development, enabling mechanisms, resource allocation, external resource allocation, faculty's roles and rewards, disciplines, departments, interoperability, community voice, administrative and academic leadership, mission and purpose (Hollander, 2002:9). The CPUT policy on community engagement ensures that knowledge obtained during service-learning activities is academically accredited and that tacit knowledge is integrated with course content through reflective practice. CPUT intentions are to integrate institutional aims and goals with community needs in a responsive and appropriate manner. At CPUT academics are encouraged to include community engagement in their teaching programs and to include service-learning pedagogy in course modules. The CE and WIL Centre at CPUT is proactive in coordinating community engagement and work integrated projects that assist academics from all faculties and campuses in integrating community service into mainstream academic programmes and research. The CE and WIL Centre assist academics in creating partnerships and encourages academic-based community engagement. However internal resource allocation is limited, mainly providing money for transporting students to and from site. For further funding project proposals need to be submitted to the CE and WIL Centre. This includes securing external resource-allocation funding available for communities to access resources on campus. The acknowledgement of academics scholarship in community engagement at CPUT is rewarded by Ad Hominem promotions and funding awarded for quality research. Despite institutional support for community engagement service-learning projects are limited and do not attract the interest of academic staff. A recent study conducted at CPUT found that the lack of support for community engagement was a result of poor communication between faculties and departments. This has created a fragmented and uncoordinated approach to service-learning projects (Nchu et al: 2013). This is consistent with Nongxa (2010) who identifies poor management as a key concern for ensuring community engagement activities at departmental level. The difficulty of identifying what is an appropriate community for engagement is another factor that Favish (2010) believes distracts from a departmental enthusiasm in implementing community engagement projects. In this regard the CE and WIL Centre at CPUT is proactive in organising workshops and seminars that encourage community members, service providers and academics to engage in a tri-partnership summit that showcases projects.

6 CONCLUSION

At CPUT all proposed service-learning projects are initiated at departmental level before being submitted to the faculty for approval and finally registered with the CPUT CE and WIL Centre. The level of engagement is thus determined by the departments and is not conducive to a multidisciplinary approach shaped together with the community and institution, but rather a fragmented engagement between community and department. The coordination of service-learning is beginning to improve at departmental level. Service-learning programs are being executed in accordance with learning outcomes of the modules being taught. Furthermore assessment and credits are inline and appropriate to their respective modules. The shopfront model used by institutions controls and coordinates projects centrally in a multidisciplinary approach that ensures a uniform way of dealing with community groups. The 'science shop' model used by UCT encourages community-based organisations to submit community engagement proposals to the central institutional office where proposals are matched with appropriate faculty/department and staff/students. This model ensures that the appropriate academic program is matched to the particular community needs. The Flamingo Crescent Community Engagement and Service-Learning Project has provided a benchmark for implementing service-learning projects within the Department

of Town and Regional Planning at CPUT. The practice of community-led mapping and enumeration was used to focus on the student's ability to adapt to a community environment while ensuring reciprocal learning. Community-led mapping and enumeration has been used as a vehicle to gradually induct students into communities and allow partnership building, establish social capital and encourage social constructivism. This has established a base from which other service-learning projects that address the community's most urgent needs can be initiated. The key variables in service-learning projects that lecturers should be aware of, highlighted in the Flamingo Crescent Community Engagement and Service-Learning Project, are:

- The formulation of module outcomes that relate to the academic program as well as the community required outcomes
- Amount of time a student needs to spend in the community in order to benefit from the experience
- The readiness of the community to host students within the timetable of the academic program

Research shows that the majority of Flamingo Crescent residents were in favour of having students in their community and that reciprocal learning in this endeavour was indeed achieved (Pinfold, 2014a). Students gained a better understanding of course content in the context of the community and in turn residents of Flamingo Crescent gained knowledge and confidence to negotiate for better conditions. At CPUT assessment of service-learning projects are being carried out along the broad guidelines as set out by the Council for Higher Education however it is imperative that lecturer's workload be managed to ensure effective and innovative educational practices. Availability of financial resources is also crucial for quality implementation of service-learning. The institution needs to ensure that each academic department is well-resourced to carry out service-learning functions.

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