

COMMUNITY-ENGAGED CURRICULA IN HIGHER EDUCATION: THE CASE OF A MASTER'S PROGRAMME IN PLAY THERAPY

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the results from research on community-engaged curricula using feedback from international and South African academics who teach on postgraduate programmes with a community engagement component. It also includes the findings from a sample master's programme in Play Therapy at a South African university. The findings indicated that at least five important issues are related to community-engaged master's programmes in Play Therapy, namely: programme relevance, integrated scholarship, community-



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based research, reciprocal learning, and close academic staff involvement. Based on these findings a curriculum framework is suggested which caters for an integrated scholarship approach in master's programmes in Play Therapy that closely engage with community needs. Such a framework may relate to similar or other professional master's programme curricula.

Keywords: community engagement, curricula, higher education, postgraduate programmes, Play Therapy

INTRODUCTION

It has been suggested that postgraduate students who learn to become engaged scholars via service learning and/or community-based research simultaneously emerge as professionals – able to connect various aspects of their work more easily (Bernardo, Butcher and Howard 2012; Lazarus et al. 2008; O'Meara 2008; O'Meara et al. 2010). However, to promote engaged scholarship remains a challenge for many higher education institutions (HEIs) and not much research has been done to indicate how scholarship that relates to communities outside of universities could take place in professional master's programmes (Hall 2010; O'Meara 2008). Some HEIs have responded to this challenge by offering learning programmes with increased community engagement exposure through promoting teaching and research that are sensitive to local, regional and national problems and needs (Bernardo et al. 2012; Thomson et al. 2011).

It is widely agreed that higher education can contribute to social and economic development in the world via at least four major missions, namely: the formation of human capital; the building of knowledge bases; the dissemination and use of knowledge; and the maintenance of knowledge (Bitzer and Wilkinson 2009; Clark 1995; OECD 2008). Little wonder that questions are increasingly being asked about how to connect disciplinary knowledge and scholarship with community needs; how to integrate teaching, research and community involvement to meet academic requirements; and how to promote professionalism in the careers of postgraduate students (Hall 2010; O'Meara 2008). However, although some barriers seem to exist, Hall (2010, 35) has emphasised that future quality enhancement measures in higher education need to look more closely at how South African universities translate their mission and vision statements into better understandings of and more productive practices to integrate teaching and learning, research and community engagement. This article thus reports on a study that explored the current state of professional postgraduate programmes with elements of community engagement and suggests a contextualised and integrated curriculum framework for community-engaged learning and research in a professional master's programme in Play Therapy.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULA

Community engagement, which in the article refers to engagement with local societal communities and some often evolving from destitute positions, aims to benefit and enhance new knowledge through research and to enrich teaching and learning (Bernardo et al. 2012; Subotzky 2000). The importance of community engagement being embedded in teaching-learning and research has gained some momentum. For instance, Lazarus et al. (2008, 58) point to the 1996 Report of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) that emphasised higher education's contribution to societal reconstruction and transformation. Thomson et al. (2011, 216) further highlight how, in employing their core functions of teaching, learning and research, South African HEIs have started to contribute to national and local development through a range of community engagement initiatives.

The Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (DoE 1997) and more recently the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET 2013) have sharpened the focus on engaging with local and other communities by defining this issue as an integral part of core university functions. Hence, community engagement has increasingly become a mechanism to infuse and enrich teaching, learning and research with 'a deeper sense of context, locality and application' (O'Brien 2005, 66). Further, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) has advised that where community engagement is discharged through a range of activities, including service learning, quality considerations for institutional engagement with local (and broader) communities should be formalised within institutions' quality management policies and procedures (CHE 2004). These arrangements should thus be given effect through the 'allocation of adequate resources and institutional recognition' (CHE 2004, 15).

Despite different universities' missions, cultures, histories and local community contexts, Albertyn and Daniels (2009, 410) assert that community engagement is generally not well-infused in university cultures. However, transformational processes and discourses either directly or indirectly reflect community engagement, placing it at the centre of modes of knowledge creation and debates on indigenous knowledge systems (Gibbons 2006; Kraak 2000). As the community engagement concept tends to encompass different forms of engagement (Lazarus et al. 2008) and different institutional models (Bender 2008), universities increasingly attempt to integrate community engagement into their core functions.

Waghid (2012) and others (Costandius and Bitzer 2014; Leibowitz 2012) point out that South African public universities have been making progress in changing from exclusive apartheid knowledge producers to HEIs that focus on links between research, teaching, learning and community engagement. In response to several policy initiatives, universities striving for public good also seem increasingly able to

produce advanced, high-quality scientific knowledge and technology; to train skilled professionals and researchers; and to contribute to a democratic citizenry through social engagement (Costandius and Bitzer 2014; Leibowitz 2012).

Bednarz et al. (2008, 87–89) observe that at both systemic and institutional levels there is a need for flexible and responsive processes towards the approval of new programmes and programme amendments to respond to the needs of communities in close proximity to universities. According to them, it is often through properly planned and implemented curricula that the values, beliefs and principles relating to learning, understanding and knowledge are realised. Bringle and Hatcher (2000, 273) argue for the importance of curricula to be reformed and improved by progressing from ‘community service’, ‘internships’, ‘practicals’ or ‘charity work by students’ as add-ons to modules/courses in academic programmes that integrate community engagement into core curricula. It thus seems important that universities promote and support community-engaged and community-sensitive curriculum models for their teaching, learning and research. It is ultimately through their curricula that universities put higher education into useful action (Bender 2007, 134).

Against this brief background, it may be concluded that there are ample reasons for promoting the importance of social responsibility and awareness among students. Also, the important role of HEIs in social and economic development through community engagement seems obvious. Hence, social responsiveness and accountability in postgraduate curricula are not only moral imperatives, but fundamental elements of a knowledge society and knowledge production as problem-solving knowledge intrinsically characterised by trans-disciplinary, trans-institutional learning and exposure to heterogeneous learning contexts. The important role that universities play in the promotion of social responsibility and awareness among students can thus not be overemphasised. Via postgraduate programme offerings universities are challenged to equip their postgraduate students by facilitating community-engaged learning and knowledge production. Postgraduate curricula therefore need to develop the skills graduates require to contribute to knowledge; to make sense of life in diverse societies; to make responsible and informed decisions; and to work collaboratively for the betterment of society. This could, as one worthy outcome, enable graduates to deal with change, diversity and tolerance and to empower and mobilise them on the basis of informed professional expertise and, very importantly, to see higher education inherently as an asset to society at large.

BACKGROUND TO THE MASTER’S PROGRAMME IN PLAY THERAPY

The master’s programme in Play Therapy at a South African university, which serves as a particular case in time, is not excluded from the mentioned changes and challenges. Against the backdrop of the transformation of higher education and

the subsequent increased importance of the centrality and integration of teaching, research and service into university curricula, the case evolved from one of the authors' involvement in the particular programme. She has been co-responsible for and involved in the community engagement component of this master's programme for at least six years and has first-hand experience of the way in which community engagement has been conceptualised and applied. Play Therapy is regarded as potentially well positioned to integrate community engagement in a professional postgraduate curriculum and this has led to a growing awareness of the lack of an integrated curriculum framework to guide the integration of teaching, learning, research and community engagement. The observed deficiency was mainly perceived as being due to the fragmented nature of the master's programme's core outcomes.

This master's programme provides postgraduate students with advanced knowledge, skills, attitudes and applied competence within the field of caring. It thus aims to contribute towards knowledge of comprehensive healing and development while taking account of indigenous, applied, evidence-based and theoretical programme characteristics as a basis for learning within an African and South African context. Currently, only three international universities (i.e., University of Roehampton, University of South Wales and Leeds Metropolitan University) and two national universities (i.e., University of Pretoria and North-West University) offer Play Therapy master's degrees. The South African programme that was chosen as a sample is aligned with strategic higher education research foci, such as research on human rights, youth development and the importance of gender and family within caring societies (Bloem 2010). It also focuses on applied research methodologies which enable candidates to approach real-life problems to the benefit of South African society in a scholarly way, thereby contributing to the outward-oriented role of the particular university (Bloem 2010).

The master's in Play Therapy contributes towards building scientific and intellectual capacity at postgraduate level through structured coursework, supervised research and community engagement via internships. The programme follows a relational-developmental approach, applicable to children, youth and families in diverse contexts and thereby also aims to play a role in societal development. The direct involvement of students through their research in local communities and high levels of student-community interaction are seen as strong assets of the programme (Bloem 2010, 2).

The master's in Play Therapy is offered as a postgraduate option in Social Work. It comprises four credit-bearing short courses which are presented in the first year of study and a practicum component in the second year where students have to complete 600 compulsory therapeutic hours of individual work and group work. Students also have to complete a research dissertation that comprises 180 learning credits at level 9 on the Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework (HEQSF).

METHODOLOGY

Taking an interpretative knowledge stance, a single case study design was used to generate mainly non-numerical data to analyse the master's in Play Therapy case (Denscombe 2007; Fouché and Schurink 2011). In addition, to provide a broader perspective on the selected case, semi-structured interviews (Denscombe 2007; Greeff 2011; Nieuwenhuis 2007) were conducted with 13 academics from six international and seven South African universities that offer postgraduate programmes with a community engagement component.

Interviews of approximately 45 minutes each were conducted via either Skype or telephone, and were recorded electronically. The interview data was transcribed verbatim and the transcriptions were returned to participants to check for content accuracy. All the participants were experienced academics at their respective institutions representing four different countries, including South Africa. Their contributions were thus considered valid and valuable. Table 1 indicates the rank and subject group of the 13 academics as well as their status in terms of either international or South African representation.

Table 1: Academics who participated in semi-structured interviews

Participant	Position	Subject group	National/International
1	Professor	Psychology	International
2	Professor	Play Therapy	International
3	Professor	Psychology	International
4	Associate Professor	Social Work	International
5	Senior lecturer	Psychology	International
6	Senior lecturer	Counselling	International
7	Senior lecturer	Psychology	National
8	Lecturer	Psychology	National
9	Lecturer	Psychology	National
10	Lecturer	Social Work/Child and Family Care	National
11	Lecturer	Psychology	National
12	Lecturer	Psychology	National
13	Lecturer	Child and Family Studies	National

Focus group interviews were conducted with current registered students and lecturers in the sample master's programme in Play Therapy. Availability and willingness to

participate were considerations in inviting students to participate, but all six lecturer-researchers who teach on the programme were involved. A total of eight master's students and the six lecturer-researchers thus participated in two successive focus group interviews for each constituency. Their responses were recorded electronically and transcribed verbatim, while qualitative content analysis was used to guide data interpretation (Creswell 2009; Denscombe 2010; Schurink, Fouché and De Vos 2011).

FINDINGS

From the three sets of interview data (international/South African academics, lecturer-researchers in the sample programme and students in the sample programme) five main themes emerged, namely: programmatic relevance; community engagement; linking research to community engagement; the role and importance of communities; and the role of academic staff in community engagement. In reporting the findings, distinctions are made between the three sets of data.

Programmatic relevance

Interviews with either international or South African academics indicated that community engagement is used differently in creating learning opportunities within their respective postgraduate programmes. For instance, some see teaching-based community engagement as highly relevant to the needs of communities. One international academic stated: '... teaching-based community engagement involves us or our students going out there to provide services; ... doing research for community benefit, coming back to the university and turning it into a credit research output'. Another international colleague saw field-based learning as relevant within the context of community engagement: '... students incorporate those practicum experiences early ... we don't call it service learning, we call it field-based learning', while a South African based academic indicated that student research is expected to be executed within communities:

... the type of projects we had going ... to open satellite clinics in rural school districts ... the focus really was providing services that were free to the community that they couldn't access. For instance, our child guidance centre on campus is basically a free clinic ...

For other South African lecturers, practicum involvement, community service and internships of students were identified as important community engagement efforts. As two South African lecturers pointed out: '... students who are in community settings are involved in doing counselling and practicum in school internships' and '... community engagement in the department forms definitely part of the master's degree ... our students do empirical work in settings in the community ...'.

These different ways of linking master's coursework and research were confirmed by the learning experiences of students in the sample master's programme in Play Therapy. For instance, some saw community engagement equal to the practicum; one student said: '... it refers to those practical hours involving individual and group play therapy sessions', while another said: '... our research for the master's links directly to what community members tell us they need ...'. Another saw the practicum as applied research within the community and based on identified community needs, while still another student equated her community experience as personal transformation.

It may thus be concluded that both internationally and in South Africa professional postgraduate programmes are considered as directly relevant to community needs and promote community engagement – something which puts students in these programmes in advantageous positions to cultivate and demonstrate community-related knowledge and learning skills.

Integrated scholarship

Although community engagement is perceived and structured differently across postgraduate programmes, the integration of teaching and learning within the practical components of such programmes seems central.

Academics highlighted the importance of integrated scholarship in community engagement. As indicated by one international academic: '... we introduced an academic curriculum into a service learning experience so students could learn as they were providing community service ... so it's serving someone while learning academic skills ...'. A South African academic added: '... engagement includes components of both student learning and student development'. Within such learning processes the importance and value of continuous reflection by students on their learning was highlighted by several academics. Another South African academic asserted: '... reflections on their studies have well illustrated the sort of connections they are making between theory and practice', while another added: '... all the modules in the programme have to incorporate social responsibility as a focus ... It has to be infused in all the modules and in the community modules, it is sort of most salient'. Academics furthermore indicated that teaching, research and community engagement are linked by means of integrated field experiences. An international academic reiterated: '... courses are offered in conjunction with the field experiences', and another: '... in the theoretical components, the practical application is built in ... they will go out and actually see how they can apply the theory practically'.

Students' responses from the sample master's programme in Play Therapy showed perceived benefits from learning within community contexts, while most students referred to learning gained at professional and personal level alike.

Community-based learning clearly provided opportunities for integration – applying both theoretical knowledge and research skills in practice. As one student participant stated:

I found the theoretical aspects came together in a way that made me look at the community in a different way as well as learning more about their own unique challenges. In terms of personal growth, I feel I grew tremendously over that period of time as well.

Learning gained through reflection on integrated learning activities were indicated by other master's students as, for instance, enhancing their sensitivity to real-life community issues; increasing an awareness of social responsibility; providing opportunities to better understand module content; allowing them to make connections between service and academic work; and broadening an appreciation of Play Therapy applications.

Some lecturers in the sample programme were of the opinion that the use of 'live case studies' can promote scholarly integration. One lecturer explained this as follows:

I think we need to use live case studies ... if we can pull together our perspectives on case studies and assemble an in-depth case study ... working with real-life case studies, maybe, from sort of integrated theoretical approach that you don't fragmentise the particular perspectives so much and that the student has a holistic approach, we can enhance an integrated student perspective.

From the evidence it thus became clear that an integrated scholarship approach was subscribed to by academics in Play Therapy master's programmes as a valuable strategy. These findings bring to the fore the forging of links between the teaching, learning and research components of such programmes with community engagement.

Community-based research

Community-based research in the context of professional master's programmes implies that research problems, research topics and accompanying methodologies are selected which either directly or indirectly benefit the local communities where master's students are involved. Typical methodologies may include community-based participatory research, participatory action research and case study research. Evidence gleaned from academics in South Africa and abroad shows that research as promoted in Play Therapy master's programmes has much potential in community settings. An international academic stated: '... they [Play Therapy students] do ongoing research and are taught research methodology for the final dissertation at MA level ...', while another emphasised: '... the students are doing research with communities and not only in communities – a lot of these research activities are directly needs orientated ...'.

Several South African colleagues indicated that even their own research was based within communities where students do their internships or practicum sessions. Such research is facilitated well if site supervisors are available and operate efficiently. This aspect was emphasised by one lecturer-researcher: ‘... sites are community-based and site supervisors should be familiar with such research and interested in guiding whatever project the student is participating in’. However, another lecturer pointed out that students need to have some solid theoretical research grounding before they may be able to link research with community engagement. He stated it as follows:

I think they should even have it (research training) before any other module ... they (the students) must have a solid understanding of the three research pillars of methodology, ethics and ontology, but also how these would interlink throughout the research project.

Some students in the sample master’s programme in Play Therapy were doubtful whether research and community engagement were well integrated into their research. One student voiced her doubts: ‘I am not sure that there was really a link between the practical community work and my research. To me it was somewhat removed.’ In contrast, lecturers on the sample programme indicated that they consider it possible to integrate students’ research better with community engagement in the curriculum. One lecturer remarked: ‘I definitely think it is possible to bring the real world in a small way into the research section of the programme.’ Another added:

I wonder if a reflective journal would not improve the research link ... each student could go into the community and keep a reflective journal on his or her research experiences in that community and then give feedback in class with regard to improving community-based research.

What thus emerged from the data was that at both international and national HEIs the link between research in postgraduate professional programmes such as Play Therapy and community engagement already appears to be strong. In the sample programme, however, students did not observe this link very clearly while their lecturers saw more potential ways of strengthening such links.

Reciprocal learning

International and South African academics involved in postgraduate programmes with a community engagement component agree that while their universities are mostly seen by communities as partners, those same communities have high expectations of their institutions. One international academic said:

... the community definitely see the university as a partner and they have a lot of expectations from the university too ... but I think there are expectations on both sides, that the community will take students and the students will help the community.

Forging relationships between the university and its immediate communities also appears to be very important. Two South African academics confirmed this point: ‘... we actually have been involved with the community over a number of years so we’ve built up a rapport with them and I think we sort of have a very good understanding of what’s happening there’ and ‘... cooperation must have really a mutually beneficial cycle for the university and the community to be considered engaged’.

For students in the sample master’s programme in Play Therapy the communities they engage with seem to fulfil an important role in their learning. One student said, for instance: ‘Yes, we provide a service to the community, but as much as they are empowered by our service, we benefit by learning from such service and learning from them.’ Another added: ‘Giving back to the community so they may benefit from our knowledge and help, but also to be aware of the needs of the community and they seeing us as learning from them and their living situations ...’. There was general consensus among students that although the communities in which they worked gained from the students’ involvement, mutual learning was taking place. One student summarised this well:

The community is not able to access therapeutic services easily. They have to travel long distances, which also costs money they do not have. The community definitely benefit by having easy access to therapy services. At the same time, however, we benefit from learning within real-life contexts and better understand theories that link to learning from experience and practical research.

Lecturer-researchers in the sample programme indicated that community representatives could be increasingly involved in classroom learning which can promote the reciprocal learning part of the partnership. One lecturer participant stated this as follows:

I think community partners can also provide good case studies – they can even come and present it in class to evoke discussions around the relationship between theory and practice from a community perspective. We would then also honour the reciprocal side of the partnership.

Evidence thus shows that as much as communities may benefit from the services rendered by master’s students in Play Therapy, student learning equally benefits. Community engagement seems to result in better insights into how Play Therapy theories may be realised; how real-life contexts can be interpreted in a better way; and how experiential learning can be put to use.

Involvement of academic staff members

Academic staff members obviously play key roles in identifying, creating and utilising community learning opportunities for students in postgraduate programmes with a community engagement component. This is no different in Play Therapy master’s

programmes where different types of academic staff involvement were identified by both international and South African lecturers. The work that lecturers do through their own professional practices and research in communities also seems important. One South African lecturer expressed this as follows: ‘... work that us lecturers do in our own time, maybe to see clients free of charge or supervise for the community and so forth are important as this helps one to identify learning opportunities and research projects for our students’. Another South African lecturer said:

Academics need to integrate community engagement in all of their roles ... it is expected of academics in fields of health and well-being to be involved in academic citizenship and community engagement ... the way we integrate it for ourselves in the department how we embed it into everything.

Lecturers in the sample master’s programme in Play Therapy suggested that they need to get more involved in the communities with their students and emphasised the importance of such involvement. One lecturer remarked:

... but I feel quite strongly ... the work we are doing ... in the context of communities I think we need to go out more to communities out there – not just involving one family in a community, but also organisations, specifically identified groups in communities ...

It thus appears that lecturers’ own involvement in community engagement can provide new ideas for student involvement as well as lead to the identification of opportunities for student learning and research in Play Therapy master’s programmes. The contrary may also be true, namely that lecturers who fail to involve themselves in community engagement and community-based research may not be well positioned to offer their master’s students good opportunities for real-life and community-engaged learning and research.

DISCUSSION

Although it became apparent from the research findings that community engagement is perceived and structured differently in the postgraduate programmes, internationally and in South Africa, the issue of integrating teaching, learning and research with therapeutic community services and research practices was central. Such a position was also observed earlier by Howard (2001) and Stacey, Rice and Langer (2001), accentuating that student learning is promoted by service activities, experiences within communities, experiential learning strategies and authentic assessment. This ties in well with the emphasis participants in the current study placed on the value and importance of experiential community work and research – also based on the belief that experience and constant reflection on experiences are key to effective professional learning (Bringle and Hatcher 1999; Eyer and Giles 1999; Kolb 1984; Zuber-Skerritt 2001, 2002).

The findings also indicated the importance of social responsive learning in postgraduate programmes. Bringle and Hatcher (2005) as well as Howard (2001) emphasise enhancing social responsive learning which prepares students for social responsibility and contributes to students' preparation for community-based involvement in diverse and democratic societies. Social responsive learning can include knowledge, skills and values that make explicit, direct and purposeful contributions to preparing students for future involvement in communities as professional play therapists. Within the South African context this feature corresponds with White Paper 3 (DoE 1997) that pointed to the promotion of social responsibility and awareness among students towards contributing to social and economic development.

There was clear confirmation of the importance of integrating research and teaching into community-based learning where solid theoretical research grounding is needed for students to move towards integrated scholarship. The linking of research and teaching in professional master's programmes is emphasised by Henkel (2000), while Stanton (2008) argues that community-engaged research provides opportunities for communities to benefit directly or indirectly from such research. Bringle and Hatcher (2005) also emphasise that integrated scholarship and its benefits need to be visible in a manner that demonstrates both student and community growth over time.

The sample master's programme in Play Therapy has again emphasised the significance and benefits of successful partnerships between universities and local communities. This supports Driscoll's (2009) view that in defining community engagement, collaboration should reflect partnership and reciprocity. McNall et al. (2009) and Bernardo et al. (2012) also highlight the relationship between universities and society as to be framed by a mutuality of outcomes, goals, trust and respect. The importance of reciprocity in such programmes cannot be over-emphasised as Bringle et al. (2005) and Norris-Tirrell, Lambert-Pennington and Hyland (2010) point out that a reciprocal relationship is based on a give and take of resources, ideas, power, products and responsibilities (see also, Brenner and Manice 2011; Carnegie Foundation 2009).

Based on the findings, a number of implications emerged from the study. These implications are highlighted by a suggested curriculum framework for a master's programme in Play Therapy. This framework is suggested as potentially helpful tool towards an integrated scholarship approach that engages with community needs and may inform similar or other professional master's programmes.

IMPLICATIONS

The three main functions in this Play Therapy master's programme are teaching/learning, play therapy practicum and community-based research on a problem related to the field of Play Therapy (see Figure 1, Frame A). While the practicum

component is squarely situated in community engaged or community work, the next level represents a new position with the two-way arrows that indicate a link between the three programmatic functions.

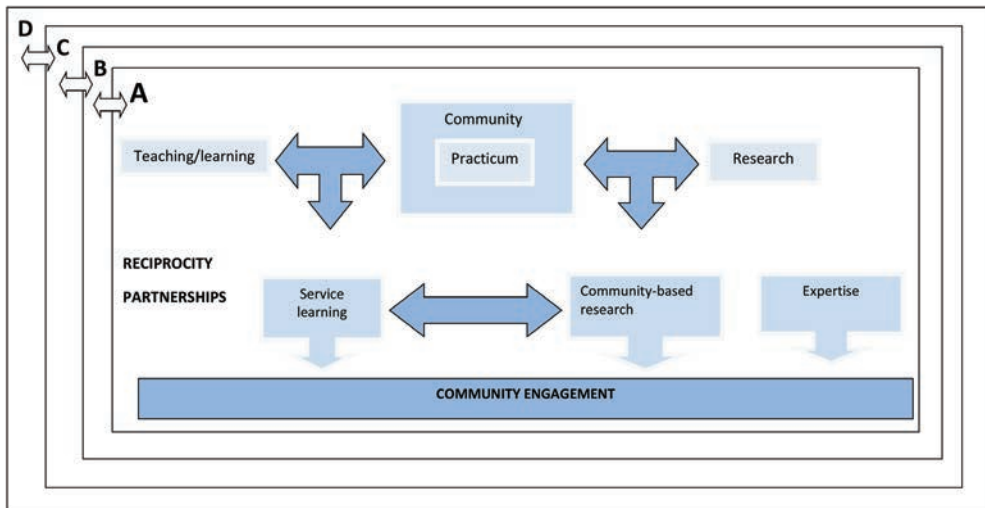


Figure 1: A proposed curriculum framework for community engagement in Play Therapy master's programmes

The teaching/learning component is linked to the community through service learning which represents a form of engaged learning which includes experiential learning. This provides students with the opportunity to engage in interactive and experiential processes. Service learning thus provides opportunities where both the community and the student are the primary learning beneficiaries and whereby reciprocity is a central characteristic. The use of live case studies could be another way of integrating theory and service.

Research is linked to the community through community-based research which promotes a scholarship of engagement. Scholarship provides an opportunity to build bridges between theory and practice, to assist students with creating own opportunities for generating useful data, to communicate knowledge effectively to the community and thereby to address their needs for therapy. Such research also promotes lecturers' involvement in communities and thereby contributes to both theoretical understanding as well as practical solutions to societal and therapeutic problems. Research is also linked to teaching and learning as community-based or community-sensitive research is needed to inform curriculum transformation.

The next frame (see Figure 1, Frame B) represents the institutional environment which points to institutional links that include a university's community engagement unit or office in order to raise awareness of the community engagement activities of the particular postgraduate programme. Such enabling environments need to be created to make it possible for students and academics to utilise community engagement as a mechanism in opening up knowledge generation and applications. These actions may be further promoted by faculty or graduate school incentives for community-engaged research and scholarship.

Curriculum development and curriculum design (see Figure 1, Frame C) are linked to the description of developmental learning outcomes, assessment and quality assurance procedures. Therefore, these outcomes, assessments and quality assurance procedures need to be embedded in solid theoretical grounding and policy imperatives.

The curriculum is shaped by its context and therefore the context or setting is important when changes to curricula become necessary (see Figure 1, Frame D). Requirements of the most important factor at this level, namely the university in its role as generator of public good, should be taken into account. National as well as international trends in community engagement should also be taken into cognisance as the mission, vision and programmes of universities are aligned with such needs to stay relevant. Legislative changes within higher education professions may shape professional master's programmes curricula in important ways.

CONCLUSION

From the study of the various postgraduate programmes, at least three major conclusions may be drawn. Firstly, postgraduate programmes differ in terms of approach, emphasis and content. What is similar, however, especially when such programmes involve strong community engagement components, is that programme relevance, reciprocal learning, community-based research, integrated scholarship and community-involved academic staff are foregrounded. Such features make these programmes highly suitable and exemplary for promoting their universities as institutions for the public good.

Secondly, it is clear that the rendering of professional services such as play therapy by master's students benefit their learning in important ways. This includes promoting the advantages of experiential learning; identifying socially relevant research topics; conducting needs-driven research; seeing the practicum as research-in-service; and promoting regular curriculum reviews.

Thirdly and finally, such studies have important educational implications which include the planning and implementing of professional master's curricula that are firmly embedded in community engagement practices – a feature of high importance

in South Africa where the shift is increasingly towards programme relevance and the quality of postgraduate academic offerings.

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