

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN THEORY & PRACTICE



RHODES UNIVERSITY
Where leaders learn

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT DIVISION
RHODES UNIVERSITY
SOUTH AFRICA



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Foreword: Vice Chancellor, Dr Sizwe Mabizela



The position of universities within our society has never been simultaneously more vulnerable nor important. Globally, the purpose and value of higher education in the twenty first century, is being seriously challenged more than ever before. Locally, we are confronted with social and economic problems that continue to plague the previously excluded and marginalised in South Africa. This fact is clearly evident in the location of Rhodes University, situated, as it is, in the midst of poverty, in a town with high unemployment and in one of the poorest and most neglected provinces in the country. This demands of us to ask the question that is currently resonating the world over: What then is the purpose of a university? And while we are attempting to answer this question, specifically for the South African context, we should be aware of the urgency to reimagine ourselves and step up, work collectively to redress the imbalances in our society.

Universities do not exist in a vacuum - they exist within a particular social, economic, cultural, political and historical context and are an integral part of the community in which they exist. They shape and are shaped by the milieu in which they exist. Through their mission of knowledge creation, knowledge sharing and knowledge application, they are uniquely and ideally placed to play a critical role in the project of nation-building, social advancement and societal transformation. Given the complex and painful past of our nation that is characterised by centuries of colonialism and decades of apartheid, racial oppression and dispossession and the denial of opportunities to the majority of the citizens of this country, our universities cannot remain 'ivory towers' unconcerned with the daily struggles of those who were systematically excluded from opportunities to realise their full potential. It is our responsibility, indeed our duty, to ensure that we place at the service of our community and humankind the knowledge that we generate. In so doing, we will make it possible for ordinary citizens to become agents of their own emancipation and social advancement.

On the occasion of my inauguration as the Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes University, I pointed out that:

"If we remain true and faithful to our intellectual project, as we must, we will be able to advance the higher purpose of higher education: to transform individual lives for the better, to transform societies for the better and to transform the world for the better."

Indeed, the higher purpose of higher education is to transform lives for the better. Community engagement provides universities with opportunities to deepen and broaden our understanding of the role and purpose of our universities in the creation and sustaining of a better society and a better world.

It is only when we build respectful, reciprocal and mutually beneficial partnerships with the previously excluded communities and draw on the different kinds of knowledge that reside in these communities that our knowledge project can start to respond meaningfully and appropriately to the cause of building and sustaining a more just, a more humane, a more caring, a more equitable, a fairer, a more compassionate and more inclusive society.

Our University has committed itself to four guiding principles that will drive all our endeavours as an institution of higher learning. These are:

- Sustainability – we need to ensure that the principle of sustainability permeates every aspect of our academic endeavour and every decision taken by our university. In the process, we want to produce graduates with an elevated sense of awareness and responsibility in building and sustaining sustainable communities.
- Simultaneous local responsiveness and global engagement – our academic endeavour should seek to respond to the pressing and urgent local challenges while simultaneously contributing to our accumulated global stock of knowledge. This will allow us to enter the global knowledge system from our position of strength.
- Advancing social justice – given the painful past of our country characterized by exclusion and denial of opportunities for some segments of our society, it is vitally important that we do all we can to restore the dignity and humanity of those who were treated as less than human by the previous dispensation.
- Advancing the public good purpose of higher education – our university does not exist in a vacuum. It exists within social, cultural and economic milieu and has an important role to play in lifting the standard of living of our local community.

These four principles should guide all academic endeavours in teaching, research and community engagement for the realisation of a society free of hunger, want, inequality and despair. And may it serve as a significant stepping stone towards placing community engagement on a more solid philosophical and moral footing.

This publication is packed with a number of exciting and innovative case studies that amply demonstrate that Rhodes University is at the forefront of engaged scholarship and the nurturing of young, talented, committed and engaged citizens. All these initiatives are anchored on the five important pillars of community engagement – mutual respect, reciprocity, mutual benefit, co-creation, and sustainability.

We thank all our colleagues and students who go above and beyond the call of duty to contribute in a very meaningful way in transforming the lives of our local community for the better. We are deeply grateful to our Community Engagement Office for enabling and facilitating the interaction between the Rhodes University staff and students and our local community. A word of deep gratitude and sincere appreciation to our community partners who are ever prepared to welcome us with open arms and are always ready to offer our staff and students a different kind of education to the one available within the walls of a lecture room.

Our sincere appreciation and gratitude also to our Communications & Advancement Division for seeing to the production of this fabulous publication. I have no hesitation in strongly recommending this publication to all who share our vision of a better society and a better world and are committed to working with courage and conviction to the realisation of a society and a world of our dreams.

Dr Sizwe Mabizela

Message from the Director: Community Engagement

Community engagement in democratic South Africa demands of us to ask the question? What is the purpose of education generally and higher education in particular? For it is through the various forms of community engagement as demonstrated by Rhodes University, staff and students of this institution are provided with opportunities to step out of the boundaries of the institution and share their knowledge, skills and talents with others. And in doing so, learn about their own sense of being in relation to others, further develop humane qualities or virtues that may be latent, and enhance skills that will be of benefit in future employment situations. Community engagement shifts the purpose of higher education from that of producing students for the labour market to the integral development of students, that is, emphasising the interconnection of mind, body and heart.

Community engagement has always existed in university spaces. But it was the kind of engagement that benefitted academics only. During apartheid, engagement with communities could be described as being 'extractive' and largely intent on perpetuating the dominance of academic knowledge. National education policies and documents post 1994 highlight the developmental role of higher education institutions. However, many universities are yet to fully comprehend what is meant by the 'developmental role of higher education institutions'. Rhodes University is fortunate in that it's previous and current Vice-Chancellors have been and are committed to not only understanding this imperative of higher education institutions, but lead by example and make attempts to effect what is integral to their thinking by utilising platforms to further the value of working in engaged and meaningful ways with communities. They have ensured the institutionalization of community engagement and it's infusion into teaching, learning and research at every level and with purpose.

Ultimately, the essence of development is relational. And because it is such, it behoves all of us at universities to be aware of and ask questions about knowledge creation; whose knowledge counts; the values attached to different sources of knowledge; social justice; change and transformation, in relation to the purpose of education and the developmental role of higher education institutions. Community engagement provides us with the space to find answers to these questions through our relationship with communities outside the boundaries of universities. We need to support and promote the movement for knowledge democracy without negating the need for knowledge to grow the economy. The co-creation of knowledge with communities and acknowledging communities as a valuable source of knowledge will only serve to enhance students' academic knowledge with knowledge for life and living, through their participation in the various forms of community engagement.

The national government has a pivotal role to play if it is serious about universities producing students who are socially and civically responsible through engagement with communities. While a number of universities, including Rhodes University, appreciate the critical function of community engagement together with research, teaching and learning, they are nevertheless challenged by the lack of funding to purposefully enact their 'developmental role' in a sustainable way. Community engagement is an unfunded national mandate. The danger is that community engagement will remain on the periphery while it has the capacity to help transform higher education. Ongoing societal challenges demand that higher education reimagine itself and better understand it's purpose in society.

Diana Hornby



Introduction

The post-apartheid paradigm provides a platform for higher education institutions to respond to and engage with external stakeholders and local communities in 'respectful' and 'humble' ways in an effort to redefine themselves in opposition to their former identity as separatist, colonial, privileged beacons of the Apartheid regime. Recent student-led movements (in particular the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall protests) have called for the decolonization of South African higher education institutions and the democratization of the knowledge production process. Student movements have raised important questions about the accessibility and relevance of academic knowledge, as well as questions of epistemic justice with regards to whose knowledge counts within the academy. The mandate for community engagement (encompassing volunteerism, engaged learning, service-learning and engaged research) in South Africa has been to transform the sector by breaking down the division between town and gown, to make academe more socially responsive and accessible, and to allow for the co-creation of knowledge between the academy and broader society in mutually beneficial partnerships. The ultimate aim of all this has been to democratise the knowledge economy - which is still largely divided along socio-economic and racial lines.

Community Engagement has a strategic role to fulfil as Rhodes University seeks to reimagine itself as an engaged University – one which is both responsive to the socio-political context in which it is embedded, and one which produces graduates and research which contribute to sustainable development within that context. Community engagement serves as one of the core purposes of higher education, transforming teaching and learning as well as research practices in order to break down the boundaries between institutions which were isolated from the societies in which they should rightly have been embedded, and making them more responsive to those contexts. Community engagement is also a crucial way to transform individuals who are involved, changing people's ways of being and perceiving each other and the world around them, undermining biases and prejudices, and cultivating criticality, reflexivity and civic values. In its most broad sense, community engagement is an important way for universities to operate as institutions which work for the public good by partnering with community based organisations and broader society to tackle issues of local importance in a unified way. By making university assets available through community engaged learning programs, and harnessing the assets available in local communities, we can work to overcome some of the major challenges faced by society today.

Rhodes University has emerged as a national leading engaged university, housing volunteerism, service-learning and engaged research projects which highlight and underpin a unique philosophy of community engagement. This publication comprises a critical collection of case studies of exemplary community engagement practices at Rhodes University, highlighting individual and collective approaches to, and understandings of, community engagement by staff, students and community partners involved in engaged work. The case studies are presented in four core thematic areas:

- 1) Cultivating engaged and critical citizens;
- 2) Building disciplinary expertise communally;
- 3) Research for the Public Good;
- 4) Blurring the line between town and gown – making higher education accessible.

In bringing together case studies from across the spectrum of community engagement activities, the publication aims to put forward views for and from the global South, which can contribute to current understanding of the nature, purpose and practice of community engagement locally and internationally. The theories and practices reflected in the cases presented in the publication should serve as a point of departure for critical debate, as well as stimulating new thinking and action in higher education for community engagement theory and practice.

Dr S.A. Paphitis

Community Engagement
Rhodes University

Cultivating engaged and critical citizens

Conversations about life, meaning and community

The Allan Gray Centre for Leadership Ethics (AGCLE) in the Philosophy Department is a trans-disciplinary space that brings a philosophical perspective to leadership ethics and looks at interventions that promote effective ethical agency. Political, economic and cultural conditions play crucial roles in the formation of a person's mind and only an awareness of how this affects us will allow us to resist them. The AGCLE focuses on how to promote ethical leadership by working to create the right sorts of cultures. It aims to pilot other such interventions in schools, universities, and the private and public sectors across South Africa.

Professor Tabensky, Director of the AGCLE, has introduced liNtetho zoBomi, a wide-ranging participatory course that challenges students to confront their circumstances and the status quo, and to grapple with understanding how their minds and physical lives are formed by the world they inhabit, with particular attention to the post-apartheid South African context. "zoBomi responds to several concerns," said Professor Tabensky. "We are using empirical evidence from social psychology, behavioural economics, infant psychology and theoretical philosophy to teach ethics in a way that changes people's ways of believing and seeing."



A reflective journal provides a space for students to grapple with their opinions, beliefs, values and preferences, and increase self-understanding and awareness in relation to the topics presented. Compulsory participation in a service-learning component, in which students tutor Grade 8 learners in one of the flagship programs of the Vice Chancellor's Education Initiative-Reviving Grahamstown Schools, encourages them to reflect on the complex interrelationship between thought and action. The service-learning component is coordinated by Ms Mapula Maponya and the course is taught by Professor Pedro Tabensky, Dr Nikolai Viedge, Dr Lindsay Kelland and Dr Sergion Alloggio.

Working in Community Engagement, Dr Sharli Paphitis, whose PhD Professor Tabensky supervised, introduced the idea that the action side of the programme could be catered for by service-learning. "Community Engagement used to be known as charity work and that is kind of condescending," said Professor Tabensky. "Community Engagement is a way of opening the doors and shattering the castle walls around the university and linking the idea of knowledge production to the idea of service for the betterment of society in a way that is consistent with the academic project." After extensive discussion with all stakeholders, 250 students currently go out into our community



once a week and teach English and offer tutoring at schools in Grahamstown East. This is the biggest service-learning initiative at Rhodes and has required funding, systems, checks and balances ably implemented by Dr Kelland and Ms Maponya, who is doing her own PhD on the service-learning component of zoBomi.

"The project started very simply six years ago when I got the money and was told to do something in leadership," said Professor Tabensky. Through the AGCLE, he wanted to link a concern for philosophy and a concern for an instrumental approach to university education where a typical student is equipped with skills to go out into the job market but remains unchanged by the university experience.

In zoBomi students take possession of the knowledge and are actively involved in the learning project. When students have completed zoBomi 1, a select number who enter zoBomi 2 are required to teach the first course as part of their own learning. These student leaders are taught to present the material and lead two-hour conversations and discussions about films consistent with the topic under discussion, such as conformity, gender, sexuality, racism, etc. The course material plays to the pervasive visual culture in which students live and reading is limited initially. The content speaks to the development of the whole person, which they apply during their service-learning.

In their journals they reflect on their own lives in relation to the material. "As a form of assessment for this course, the journal came out to be the best," said Professor Tabensky. "The course tries to connect knowledge to the person, and in this respect reflection is important." Already feedback from students is overwhelmingly positive: "I took this course as an arb, I was mistaken, it is one of the most difficult courses I've done, it's changed my life."



The course is so popular that there are more students registered for zoBomi than in the entire Philosophy Department. It has also gained impetus outside of Rhodes and the AGCLE is running zoBomi in local Grahamstown schools as well as Port Alfred High. The Allan Gray Orbis Foundation's Circle of Excellence Schools, which includes 100 schools from around the country has also approached Tabensky.

In the future Professor Tabensky would like to remove the current cap of 250 students for the course, and subscribe the course to its full potential: "I have excellent colleagues. We need to create a centre where the right people for the job are employed on a permanent basis." For the present he is developing a model of zoBomi for the United Nations and will run a nine-day workshop in Denver. Beneath the surface an idea for another course is taking shape.

Kerry Peter



Agents of change

“A critical and engaged citizen is informed about the context in which he/she operates and is active in that context,” said Dr Ashley Westaway, Director of GADRA Education. “In other words, he/she uses critical understanding as the basis for effective action to impact positively on the context.”

GADRA is one of 28 community partner organisations participating in the Engaged Citizen’s Programme (ECP), formerly known as the Student Volunteer Programme (SVP), at Rhodes University. The core thrust of the ECP is to build meaningful relationships that are reciprocal, supportive and mutually beneficial. By contributing to sustainable development goals, it is believed that all citizens can make a tangible contribution to the development of Grahamstown. The ECP aims to develop and harness critical agency in Rhodes students to bring about positive change in society, fostering in them a sense of accountability for building a just, equitable and understanding society.

Open to all students and staff members, volunteers sign up for a minimum of one hour a week. “The most important part is the quality of our volunteers rather than quantity,” said Ms Benita Bobo, Volunteerism Coordinator. “In order to build meaningful relationships one needs to show up and be open to learning.” Signing up involves attending mandatory training and a Partner Fair at which the Community Partners (CP) showcase their organisation’s assets and explain what volunteers can expect to do when working in partnership with them. Volunteering requires commitment, and students must meet an 80% attendance requirement.

GADRA Education has been a valuable community partner of the ECP and demonstrates an inspiring model of volunteering. “They have a very good relationship with their students, they really get what volunteerism is,” said Ms Bobo. With one of the biggest volunteer groups GADRA makes personal connections with their volunteers. “We stress the importance of relationships and human solidarity. All people involved in the programmes (mentors and mentees, tutors and tutlings) are valued,” said Dr Westaway, “We actively promote those volunteers who stand out, in the form of writing references, nominating them for awards, and so on.”

Volunteer Managers (VM) from the community-based organisations are in charge of the student volunteers and determine their weekly activities. “We train our students on the principles of community engagement,” explained Ms Bobo. “It is the VM’s responsibility to provide further training on aspects that are specific to their organisations.” This ongoing training is critical to the success of the process: “GADRA holds that student volunteering achieves the best impact when it is effectively managed. Part of this challenge is to ensure that the volunteers understand the programme clearly and are adequately equipped to perform their roles effectively,” said Dr Westaway.

Five different categories of organisation fall under the ECP. Arts and alternative education organisations offer music, drama and art programmes. Support organisations include shelters, orphanages and old age homes.

Students who sign up to high-school tutoring programmes complete an accredited short course that is done through the Education Faculty. The mentoring programme is pitched at partnerships between university students and high-school learners. Finally, literacy and homework programmes include homework and reading clubs. Students who volunteer to be in a reading club also complete an accredited short course run by the Department of English and Literary Studies. In addition to the partnerships with English and Literary Studies and Education, 25 students



are starting an isiXhosa short course through the School of Languages. The Afrikaans Department will have a similar arrangement.

“Dr Mabizela says students who are involved in community engagement are qualitatively different,” explained Ms Bobo who is currently doing research to see what role the programme has in student development. To measure progress, all volunteers complete online reflections once a term and attend a reflection meeting with their student leaders and volunteer managers. At the end of each term, after meeting with Ms Bobo about administrative issues, the student leaders and volunteer managers jointly submit a written report. This is in line with a strategic plan developed at the beginning of the year, followed by a mid-year review and an end-of-year evaluation.



A long-term goal envisions turning the programme into an academic short course that could count as a credit towards students' degrees. Engaged academic research allows an integrated learning experience that develops all dimensions of an individual and benefits the community,” said Ms Bobo. *“Students are encouraged to use the programme as a springboard into academic studies.”* For example, the current SRC CE councillor, who is also a volunteer and involved in the 9/10ths mentoring programme has undertaken an Honours in Development Studies.



“The student body has immense potential to impact on public education, especially in a context such as Grahamstown,” affirmed Dr Westaway. *“Comprising a full 10% of the population of Grahamstown, we have a large body of students, relative to the city’s population, with excellent academic ability and agency!”*

Kerry Peter



Connection with intention

Community Engagement at Rhodes University is about meeting community partners halfway: working together, finding a balance and gaining mutual understanding in order to implement change strategically.

Complementing the Vice Chancellor's education initiative, which has focused on educational needs in Grahamstown from ECD through to post-matric, the Early Childhood Development (ECD) Residence Programme was piloted by the Rhodes Community Engagement Division (RUCED) in 2016. The Programme matches community partner organisations, particularly ECD sites, to Halls of Residences for university and community wide engaged activities. A group of 3 to 5 residences to work together and support one ECD centre from the list of ECD centres registered as community partners with RUCED. This approach to partnership with ECD centres ensures that the relationship is maintained with the university even with a change in student body because the partnership is established through the Residence/Hall rather than individual student groups. Halls that had prior engagements with a particular ECD centre typically tend to maintain these relationships beyond the yearlong cycle, though some Residences/Halls and ECD sites establish new relationships over the years as goals are reached and priorities shift.



Siyakhana@Makana, or S@M, is a 19-week project-planning process that runs under the umbrella of the ECD Residence Programme. Ms Nosi Nkwinti, who coordinates S@M, describes the ethos of critical and engaged citizenship from which the programme draws: *"It means being vested in social progression, understanding the context of the community you are in, performing duties collaboratively with those who share a vision in building a socially just and more equitable society."* To achieve this, Community Engagement Representatives (CE Reps) are selected to represent the student body of the Residence/Hall and work with the programme coordinators. Concurrently, Volunteer Managers (VM) at the ECD Centres are asked to come up with three goals for the year. Volunteer Managers meet with the CE Reps to discuss what is feasible, negotiate, plan and divide tasks equally. Following this, CE Reps and VMs jointly present their chosen goal to a panel consisting of all the community partners. It is a stringent process followed by training for the students and the partners before implementation begins. A termly meeting between the programme coordinators, CE Reps and VMs tracks the progress of each partnership, while a mid-year review and an end-of-year evaluation assess the outcomes.

"Mid-way through 2016 our community partners said that while they appreciated S@M they missed having student volunteers coming to interact with the children at the schools," said Ms Benita Bobo, Volunteering Coordinator. *"In response to that we established a school readiness programme."* Initially the programme experimented with different methods of launching school readiness, including Nali'Bali materials, locally produced resources and, Wordworks. Ms Anna Talbot, Coordinator of the ECD Residence Programme, runs the literacy component and is training CE Reps to use the Wordworks programme. Ms Bobo also runs a service-learning course for Psychology Honours students in which Ms Talbot trains them as Wordworks trainers. These trained students go on to train volunteers to do reading, literacy and numeracy activities with children aged 3 to 5.

Within the ECD Residence programme, as CE Reps are working with the VMs on the three organisational goals, another team of students trained in Wordworks work with the pre-school children. The students are encouraged to stay with the individual children they are working with so their progress can be tracked.



Ms Talbot says: "If we are going to fully transform South Africa's education system it has to start with getting our basics fixed and supported. In Grahamstown 80% of children cannot read in their mother tongue by the time they get to Grade 3 (the next year they switch to English and need to read for meaning). This is a tragedy that creates a massive lag for the rest of their schooling."

An assessment strategy is essential in establishing school readiness and the overall impact of the literacy programme.

Ms Talbot has adopted DIBELS, an open access resource that tests initial sound fluency, letter naming fluency, phoneme segmentation, nonsense word fluency and word use fluency: "Its shown great results in other Grahamstown programmes and we believe having a consistent measure among multiple parties helps attain a broad picture of ECD achievement."

Ms Bobo is doing her PhD on the ECD Residence programme as a whole and looking at the partnership model which emphasises joint planning, implementation and reflection. Encouraging feedback thus far, is that the relationships are ongoing even after the programme closes at the end of the year: "One of the striking comments from a CE Rep was that CPs don't see them just as students coming to help out, but also as humans and individuals. They get the idea that it is a 50/50 partnership and it's about building reciprocal relationships."

Kerry Peter



Creating chemistry with our community

The Chemistry Department of Rhodes University has a long history of community and service learning (SL), and has worked with primary school and high school students, teachers and the wider community. But, its service-learning course in Chemistry Honours has gone further than most other community engagement-based approaches.

For the service activity, honours students present 'A Pollutant's Tale' and two hands-on experiments to grade 7 learners (12 - 14 years old) at both a well-resourced school (WRS) and under-resourced schools (URS) in Grahamstown. 'A Pollutant's Tale' is a lecture-demonstration on gases in the atmosphere and links these to the greenhouse effect and global warming. The two hands-on experiments introduce the grade 7 learners to the method of investigation in chemistry. In



the first experiment, the learners measure the time it takes for a piece of magnesium ribbon to react completely in varying concentrations of hydrochloric acid, and from these times, learners estimate an unknown concentration of hydrochloric acid. In the second experiment, learners make a slime from a solution of polyvinyl alcohol and borax. Learners start with the same volume of polyvinyl alcohol and add varying volumes of borax to find the effects on the 'stickiness' of the slime.

The lecture and experiments meet the goals of schools, in that they are directly relevant to the grade 7 curriculum. This includes the specific aims that learners are expected to undertake investigations, in which they measure, record and interpret the information.

"Learners also benefit enormously from engaging with science students who provide aspirational role models who are closer to them in age than lecturers or teachers and show them that science can be fun and 'cool';" says senior lecturer in the Chemistry Department, Mrs Joyce Sewry.

Learners are given the opportunity to see and use equipment and materials brought in for the demonstration and experiments to which they do not have access at school.



After each school visit a debriefing meeting is held with the lecturers and the honours students. Students are then given a week to write reflections which are then submitted to the lecturers.

"The SL course has been developed as a mutually beneficial course in terms of student learning outcomes, as well as serving the goals of community-based organisations (schools) with whom students conduct their service activities," says Mrs Sewry. The students are assessed on their learnings as seen through their own reflections on the activities in reflective journals.

In an analysis of the students' reflections over three years, Mrs Sewry and researcher Dr Sharli Paphitis from Rhodes University's Community Engagement division, found that the service-learning students had learnt to do things "differently" in Chemistry. *"They have learnt about society beyond the laboratory and beyond their previous life-experiences. Importantly, the students have undergone personal development and picked up critical skills which they will need when traversing life and its challenges – such as, working with diverse groups of people, teamwork and learning to cope in stressful situations,"* Mrs Sewry and Dr Paphitis found.

Students' reflections provided a great deal of insight into both their experiences of the course and their learning, and at the same time served as a valuable tool for assessing whether the educational goals have been met through the course.

In their analysis of student reflections, they found a heightened understanding of the broader South African society. Students began to assess their expectations and preconceived beliefs. Despite the noticeable differences between the schools, and in re-evaluating their own preconceived ideas, many students reasoned that socio-economic status does not necessarily determine education. One student for example noted that for learners, education is *"not entirely dependent on their resources but their desire to learn in and outside the classroom"*, while another noted that at the URS the "quality of education is good despite the lack of resources".

Sewry and Paphitis concluded that through the process of reflection, students came to understand their role within the SL group and gained insight into their own personal attributes, as well as critically interrogating their roles in broader society.



"Student reflections overwhelmingly showed that through the SL experience: students came to critically reflect on their role as citizens and what this meant to them to think actively about the challenges and solutions related to contemporary socio-economic, science communication and science education challenges within the South African context; students had improved their ability to solve problems, both individually and as a collective; students realised the importance of personal and group planning, preparation and management; and students had improved their ability to communicate within groups of diverse people."

Perhaps the entire course was best summed up by a student in 2015 who reflected: *"What a way to solve different problems our communities are facing while having fun in the process."*

Adrienne Carlisle

Leadership for sustainability

The Rhodes University Business School markets its AMBA-accredited MBA programme as enabling students to “actively engage with contemporary business practice through a lens of sustainability,” teaching students to “lead responsibly through understanding the relationship between economy, ethics, ecology and equity.” This statement is borne out by the MBA’s service-learning component, launched in 2015 in partnership with the Rhodes University Community Engagement Division (RUCE) and the Assumption Development Centre (ADC) in Joza.



RUCE works across the university with departments and faculties to establish partnerships locally that will facilitate the service-learning process. A partnership between RUCE and the Assumption Development Centre, which is a community-based organization providing mentorship to entrepreneurs and micro-enterprises from Joza and the surrounding areas, was already established when the Business School decided to invest in developing a service-learning course. **RUCE anticipated that a service-learning project between the Business School and ADC would create a mutually beneficial relationship facilitating a two-way learning stream between the Business School and the ADC, and between MBA students and the local business entrepreneurs supported by the ADC.**

Professor Noel Pearse of the Rhodes Business School is the co-ordinator of the MBA programme, and oversees the service-learning project. He explains that the Rhodes University MBA is a part-time course, run over two years with a further six months allocated for writing up research and handing in dissertations. The part-time nature of the degree makes incorporating a service-learning component somewhat tricky, due to the lack of contact teaching time – students attend three teaching blocks on campus each year, into which the service-learning component has been built as part of the first year of study. Initially, the thought of fitting a service-learning component into the intensive timetable was daunting, but says Professor Pearse, the School could see immediately that there would be mutual benefit.

Each teaching block includes three hours of service-learning time. From 2015 to 2017, the programme focused on matching groups of MBA students with the owners of micro-enterprises, local entrepreneurs setting up small businesses in Joza and surrounds. The first teaching block incorporated a three-hour session involved students meeting the entrepreneurial partner. During the second block, students carried out an in-depth interview with their business partner, and the third and last teaching block contained a training session, developed by the MBA student group and designed to address specific issues experienced by the micro-enterprise business owner. Through the course, students were able to learn from their business partners, drawing on their partner’s experiences for critical insight into business contexts and challenges, which are not well documented, or which are under explored. Finally, students were expected to learn from their experiences, drawing together crucial insights from the experience as a whole and bringing these insights to bear on their MBA curricula more broadly, through a reflective assignment. **Students who participated in the course found it to be a transformative experience, one that**



students recognised they could not have had without being involved in service-learning. One student reflected on their experience of the course saying: “for me, I know that the experience I gained having worked with these leaders to develop their leadership abilities, and them helping me to develop my own leadership abilities, is a learning that I would not have read from any book...the lessons learnt will assist me even when I have my MBA, always treating all people with dignity and respect. I really feel privileged and honoured to have worked with my community partners.”

This transformative aspect of the course was particularly appealing to the Rhodes Business School, given its interest in educating students for responsible business practice.

While this was the initial design of the partnership with ADC, a number of issues arose which have led to the course shifting and changing to become more suited to the needs and the skills of the MBA students. Micro-enterprise businesses are emergent, and tend to be quite resource-needy, which meant



that a thrice-yearly collaboration was not necessarily meeting the needs of these entrepreneurs, who were seeking more regular contact. On the other side of the equation, students of the MBA were coming from established businesses, and were looking to gain skills in that sector.

This resulted in a mismatch in expectations, says Professor Pearse, which was resolved satisfactorily with the establishment of the PDEM, the Post-graduate Diploma in Enterprise Management, run by the Business School. The PDEM is a single year diploma in which students work full-time on enterprise management. From 2018, therefore, emerging micro-enterprises will be partnered with PDEM students, rather than those on the MBA.

Many of the MBA students come from larger, more established business environments, and for them the value in the course lies more with business management and administration, as opposed to entrepreneurship. From 2018, therefore, MBA students will be partnered with more established social enterprises programmes, including the Raphael Centre, the Grahamstown Residents Association and the Assumption Development Centre itself. It is anticipated that this will be of more value to MBA students and will provide great value to the local NGOs and social enterprises programmes in Grahamstown.

The format of the revised service-learning programme remains very much the same, with the contact sessions taking place during the three first year block teaching periods. MBA students will still have the orientation and 'meet and greet' opportunity in their first two week block; during this period they will visit the business enterprise onsite and gather background in an attempt to identify an area where collaboration would prove the most fruitful for both. In the second teaching block, a more in-depth interview and analysis will take place, after which a Business Report will be prepared by the students. In the third session, this report will be presented to the business, with the opportunity for discussion. This will replace the training session.

Professor Pearse notes the value experienced by both students and organisations in this arrangement. Additionally, the fact that the MBA is partnering with community organisations and NGOs fulfils the mission and ethos of the School, namely Leadership for Sustainability, and assists students and community leaders in recognising the contribution of business to society and community.

Jeannie McKeown



Building disciplinary expertise communally

There's work to be done

Dr Jonathan Davy and Mr Andrew Todd, from the Human Kinetics and Ergonomics Department, have wide-ranging interests in the various areas of their discipline. Together, they are passionate about Community Engagement and service-learning. The old-fashioned concept of a university being divided into silos, which work independently of each other, is, thankfully, being broken down through the CE and service-learning projects being undertaken across department and faculties. The service-learning project being run by Dr Davy and Mr Todd exemplifies this.

It all started with the another exemplary project being run by Distinguished Professor Martin Hill, from the Department of Zoology & Entomology. Distinguished Professor Hill has devoted his career to combatting the spread of exotic vegetation, invasive alien species which push out the indigenous plant and insect life, and lead to severe repercussions in local habitats. Distinguished Professor Hill holds the South Africa Research Chair Initiative in *"Insects in sustainable agricultural ecosystems."* He runs a project at the Waainek Mass Rearing Facility breeding insects and running exhaustive tests to ensure that, once released, these will act as intended to combat invasive aquatic weeds such as water hyacinth and salvinia.

This might all seem very far away from the discipline of Human Kinetics and Ergonomics. However, the workers employed at the Waainek Mass Rearing Facility site are all classed as disabled. They oversee the breeding, rearing and harvesting of the insects – which are shipped all over South Africa, Africa and the world, once they are cleared for release. It occurred to Dr Davy and Mr Todd that this project presented the perfect service-learning opportunity for their Honours students in ergonomics. In 2016 they instituted a new Honours module together aimed at making students aware of how to identify the systemic challenges that face workers in any working context. The Waainek project offered the opportunity for HKE students to both apply their knowledge and to make a significant impact on the lives of the workers they would be observing and working with.



Students would spend four hours a week, for four weeks, alongside the workers at the Waainek Rearing Facility, doing everything the workers did, immersed in the same environment in which the workers spent their days. *The aim was for the students to embed themselves sufficiently to be able to identify components of the work environment or system (the human, tasks/activities, tools and other technology) and the physical environment.*

Ergonomics is the human-centred science of exploring how humans interact with other elements of the system, including the actual work to be done, the organisational structure, tools and technology used, as well as the external environment, wellness and safety of the worker. All this, while maximizing productivity! By doing the same work in the same place as the employees of the facility, the students are able to better envisage the system and its positive and negative aspects, and get a true understanding of "work as done" rather than "work as imagined."



Students electing to take this module react differently to the organisational and working structures in which they find themselves. Some enjoy the opportunity and find it cements their desire to work in ergonomics (which is a practice-based science). Others realise that they would be better off taking a different pathway within the discipline.

The module has been a success, with a sense of trust developing between the workers and the students. This was made evident during the Community Engagement Award speech given by Distinguished Professor Hill towards the end of 2017. A large number of the workers from the Facility attended, as did students from the Honours course, and Mr Todd and Dr Davy found it extremely validating to see the interaction and friendships which had developed between the two groups.



Service learning and community engagement form a delicate symbiosis, and both Dr Davy and Mr Todd acknowledge the importance of a collaboration such as this one being sustainable. The students will move on, new students will take their place, but, as Davy says, the lecturers involved remain, and the importance of building relationships up the chain is acknowledged and will be worked on further.

This is a relatively new service learning project, but it is planned that the observations being made by students will contribute to suggestions as to how to improve the systems in place for workers at the facility. In 2018, Dr Davy and Mr Todd plan to increase the scope of the module, creating space for it in the second and fourth terms, which allows for the experience to become more fully integrated into the minds of the students, producing richer reflections in the journals they keep as part of the academic requirements of the module.

Jeannie McKeown

Masibambane

Service-learning represents an approach to learning which incorporates both academic and civic values, connecting universities with local communities and creating reciprocal relationships between the two. The following definition of service-learning encapsulates the Masibambane programme, run by the Department of Psychology:

“Service-learning integrates meaningful community service with reflection, providing university students with a community based context for their learning which allows them to make connections between their academic coursework and their roles as critical and engaged citizens.”

Professor Lisa Saville Young has been coordinating the Masibambane programme since 2010, with the assistance of community partners in the Department of Health (DOH) and the Association for Person's with Physical Disabilities (APD). Masibambane is a programme which learns from and provides support to carers and infants/children with physical disabilities. The problems faced by these carers came to light through contact with the Developmental Clinic, which is run by the DOH and APD. At the Clinic, a team of therapists, including occupational and physiotherapists, assess the developmental progress of the children attending and make recommendations to the caregivers regarding physical exercises to be done at home.

The majority of children attending the Developmental Clinic are being looked after at home, by carers (parental or otherwise) with little or no training in how to work with children with disabilities. Traditionally, occupational therapists would draw up a home programme for the child, but it would become apparent at later clinic visits that these were not being followed. Additionally, health care professionals working with the clinic reported that carers themselves were experiencing a low mood and not regularly bringing their charges to the clinic for ongoing assessment.



As a result a decision was made to partner with the Department of Psychology at Rhodes to bring students taking a service-learning module in to visit caregivers and children in their homes on a weekly basis. This has had the effect of providing support to the caregivers, increasing the stimulation offered to the child, and introducing the student to the experience of carrying out mental health prevention and promotion work in community settings. Students offer caregivers and their children a service, while also learning from caregivers and their children about the experiences of living with a physical disability and caring for someone with a physical disability.

Alongside this community-based experiential learning, students attend seminars on various topics, which include Disability and the Environment; Childhood Disability and Child Mental Health; Childhood Disability and Maternal Mental Health; Disability and Relationships; Psycho-emotional Understandings of Disablism; and Challenging Disablism.

Students work in pairs throughout the course and each pair is allocated to a child and a caregiver who has given their informed consent to participate in the programme. Home visits take place once to twice a week during the duration of the course; students are also encouraged to attend the Developmental Clinic with 'their' caregiver and child, as they form part of the team providing care and support. By attending the Developmental Clinic with 'their' caregiver and child, students also experience alongside them the various barriers that these caregivers and their children have to overcome in accessing health services.

Both students and community partners benefit from the Masibambane programme. Caregivers and children with physical disabilities are provided with support and practical help in respect of both the child's developmental needs and the social needs of caregivers, who often find themselves isolated. *The students encourage the caregivers in carrying out the home programme provided by therapists at the Developmental Clinic. Students also encourage caregiver-child interaction, which promotes bonding between the two.* In turn, students gain an awareness of childhood physical disabilities, and the challenges linked to caring for a child with physical disabilities in historically disadvantaged communities. As is common practice in service-learning projects, students keep a journal, which develops reflective skills and connects the theory covered in classes with real-world practice. Students develop research skills as they evaluate their interventions, and become advocates for the rights of children and their caregivers. In addition, inter-sectoral collaboration (between university, NGOs and government sector) is enhanced, leading to increased sharing of skills and resources.

Jeannie McKeown

Shining a spotlight on social issues

In 2013, the UBOM! Eastern Cape Drama Company, was founded based on Janet Buckland from the Rhodes Drama Department's vision to give a wide range of people in the Eastern Cape exposure to quality theatre. In addition, Ms Buckland hoped UBOM! would provide the opportunity for local performers and ex-students to work together on a professional basis in Grahamstown. Although UBOM! no longer runs as a theatre company on a permanent basis due to a lack of funding, there are still outstanding community theatre initiatives being run under the UBOM! ideal and Project Manager Katlego Gabatsane. UBOM! maintains their annual production of a children's theatre piece (usually around Christmas) that is attended by around 2 000 primary school children. Workshops with juvenile offenders from the local prison, and the Vuka Drama Workshops with local schools are two further projects which UBOM! continue to run.

The Vuka Workshops take place through drama clubs that are facilitated by trained community artists, and culminate in pieces that are performed at the end of the year in the Makana Drama Development Festival at Rhodes Theatre, with the help of postgrad Drama students. The students

assist the winner of the senior category to prepare their production for the National Arts Festival, which is held annually in Grahamstown. Ms Buckland points out that UBOM! productions are often linked to environmental issues or issues contained in the Life Orientation curriculum of schools. They are dynamic productions that have a particular stamp: very physical, very engaged, multi-lingual and multi-cultural. "In essence" she says, "a microcosm of creating a unified South Africa." In 2018, the winner of the MDDA will direct a piece focused on the issues of young women in the townships, and Buckland is of the opinion that the Honours students assisting her will also learn much in the process.



Masters students in the Rhodes Drama Department are required to challenge themselves beyond the norm and to work outside the traditional confines of the theatre. Sam Pennington, who had first embarked on working with masks in his Honours year, decided to extend this into his Masters project and to work with a social issue on which he also brought to bear the insights from his background in Sociology - xenophobia. This was no accident. In late 2015, Grahamstown had a terrible eruption of xenophobic attacks on people considered to be foreigners – much of it fueled by unsubstantiated rumours and resentment towards men from other countries who married some of the local women.

Mr Pennington decided to produce a piece that would portray the difficulties of displaced people and those seeking asylum in safer African environs – figuratively 'falling off the horn of Africa'. More than anything, he wanted audiences to connect with the humanity of these families and the inhumanity of what was done to them; to evoke empathy and understanding rather than mistrust and suspicion.

"Falling of the Horn" makes use of masks throughout the production, which takes place without any words being spoken until right at the end, when the actors remove their masks and step forward to address the audience. After a few stringent rounds of auditions, a bigger than usual cast of nine local actors was selected, and with a very high level of involvement by the actors, Mr

Pennington created what Ms Buckland describes as “a very strong and moving piece, where the music is dominant.”

According to Ms Buckland, the actors had to adjust to not speaking, but they had a good understanding of the level of physicality demanded by the piece, from their previous experiences with UBOM! They also had some experience of working with masks from a previous piece about water done under director Rob Murray. Mr Pennington’s mother, an artist, created the masks and the local actors brought with them inside information about the situation in the townships. This had also served as motivation for them to want to participate in the production and tell the story in a way that would touch audiences.

Staged first as part of the Fringe Festival at the National Arts Festival in 2016, it won an Ovation Award and then went on to be designated **Pick of the Fringe in Cape Town**. The Rhodes Community Engagement Office supported the production being taken to schools, while the National Arts Festival sponsored it to go to Cape Town. Aside from the poignancy of the piece that brought home some of the realities of the xenophobic attacks, audiences also commented on the skill and ability of the actors.



Other ways in which Rhodes Drama students engage with initiatives in Grahamstown are by assisting with the annual children’s theatre production - through acting as ushers, playing games with the children before the show, and running an art competition – as well as assisting local groups who might ask for help, such as the Sakhuluntu Cultural Group. In turn, local artists are involved in the Rhodes Drama Department through the attendance of certain classes and the facilitation of workshops. All this serves to illustrate that high levels of integration have been created between the Rhodes Drama Department and local schools, community based organisations and community actors. But as Ms Buckland points out, “You’ve got to keep working at it – it’s not a natural process”.

Cathy Gush



Soccer and service-learning

Mr Ben Ryan, from the Department of Human Kinetics and Ergonomics (HKE), has always been interested in both soccer and community engagement (CE). While studying for his Masters in HKE, he decided to look more deeply into the practical and community oriented applications of HKE. He began exploring his interest in both soccer and the science of soccer, particularly in the South African context. His work involved developing a strength training intervention to combat hamstring injuries for soccer players, which are prevalent in the game no matter where it is played, or the level at which it is played.

Mr Ryan found a local Grahamstown League team to work with, setting up control and intervention groups. Much to his surprise, however, he found that the players weren't asking about hamstring injuries – they had bigger and more pressing socio-economic issues to deal with. Mr Ryan notes that his research had been predicated on what he had assumed the most important problem would be, whereas what he discovered was that the average South African amateur soccer player has very different issues they are grappling with.

Determined to move away from the reductionist approach he felt he had taken during his Masters, Mr Ryan decided he wanted to do something with a bigger scope for his PhD. When he was approached by a local soccer team and asked to assist them with strengthening exercises and conditioning of the players, Mr Ryan realised he had found his project. Again, however, he found that hamstring issues were secondary to the more immediate problems of bad, uneven playing ground, often situated under power lines, and equally often without boundaries, effectively resulting in play taking place on the side of the road.

Mr Ryan explains that, *in the field of sports science, there has been a move towards systems theory – the idea that if you choose to intervene into a situation, you have to acknowledge all the other factors at play.* Systems are complex, and one cannot look at only one component of them. Upbringing, nutrition, education, training and available resources, he found, all played an important role. His PhD work was geared towards adopting systems theory into a soccer development framework, the purpose of which was the improvement of youth football and the encouragement of the well-balanced lifestyle best suited for sports players, including teamwork, discipline and training.

In order to sustain the work he had pioneered in his PHD, Mr Ryan realised that he needed to embed his work within the HKE departmental CE efforts. In terms of CE, an integrated approach has been found to be advantageous. Academic work is well supported and enhanced by service-learning, for instance, where the goal is that benefits accrue to both students and the community partners involved. In setting up a service-learning element to complement his work,





Mr Ryan wondered how to balance the scale of benefits for students and partners. A paper by Wilson, published in 2014, came to the rescue. [This peer-reviewed article supported the use of systems theory methodology, presenting six notions for understanding a system, including that of embedding – to understand a system, get inside it!](#)

Following this, Mr Ryan realised that to develop a successful service learning component based on the ideas and work done in his PhD studies, he and his students would need to embed themselves into the system of soccer league in this area. Effectively, as coordinator, he would need to become a component of the system, building up trust among the players, committing himself to the project for the long-term. He found a partner in Sakhulutsha, who had approached HKE, self-motivated to become a stakeholder in this process.



Undergraduates and postgraduates are now offered the opportunity to be a part of the Sakhulutsha service-learning project. There is a core group of postgraduates – Honours and Masters students – who attend sessions with Sakhulutsha weekly, and undergraduates are invited to attend and learn. [Mr Ryan noted that by creating a service-learning component, he is encouraging a symbiosis between the department and Sakhulutsha, which bodes well for the long-term sustainability of the project.](#)

Jeannie McKeown



Heart and mind

Professor Jacqui Akhurst, joined the staff of Rhodes University in 2015, tasked with coordinating Community Psychology in the Department of Psychology. The Community Psychology module is compulsory for all Masters students, both clinical and counselling. It provides a core part of the training offered to students and, says Professor Akhurst, the commitment made by Rhodes University to Community Engagement, has meant that such projects have access to greater resources than might be the case at other universities. Professor Akhurst oversees a large number of community-based partnerships, many in conjunction with the Community Engagement Office. Projects overseen and run by Professor Akhurst include both service-learning and volunteerism. The service-learning projects are run at both Master's and Honours levels. On average, there are 12 masters students per year – six in the Clinical and six in the Counselling stream. All students do a module on Community Psychology, which involves working in partnership with a community-based organisation. In some instances, the partnership is initiated by the psychology department, but it is preferred if they are initiated by the organisation. Partners in the service-learning Community Psychology courses include community-based organisations such as Khulunathi, Eluxolweni, Amasango Career School, Isiqualo, Mary Waters Secondary School, the Lebone centre and the Joza Youth Hub. Community partners can approach Professor Akhurst directly or convey a request via Ms Yvonne Scheepers at the Psychology Clinic.

Community Psychology is based on the premise that one should work with the systems already in place. Professor Akhurst therefore tells students that they are not there to do individual counselling, but rather to work in partnership with people. Interventions in a community psychology project would typically take the following form: for example, in working with a community partner such as a school, at the request of the learners students would partner with teachers to workshop how

to deal with substance abuse, or the topic of sexuality, in the classroom. For students who may be considering a career in schools or NGOs, as opposed to individual psychotherapy, this represents an invaluable opportunity for developing the sensitivities and negotiation skills that this kind of work requires. The module also prepares clinical students for their community service year that follows after their internship training.



Professor Akhurst states that, starting in the April/May of their first Masters' year, students are prepared for Community Psychology, a process which includes communicating with their community partners, conducting a needs and assets assessment and establishing how best their skills can be utilised. Students work in pairs as this is their first foray into this type of work, and working in pairs allows them to learn from each other, as well as to support one other in the field. Students keep a reflective journal for the duration of the

community psychology module. Drawing from this journal, the students produce an assignment, which requires them to reflect on the theory behind, and the pragmatic outcomes of, their particular partnerships and project.

With so many initiatives and partnerships underway, Professor Akhurst outlines two further activities. The Ithemba Peer Counselling is an initiative linked to the Joza Youth Hub. Under the supervision of Professor Akhurst, Masters students are assisted to train and supervise Honours (and some senior undergraduate) students who, again working in pairs, provide counselling

services at the Youth Hub and group facilitation at Ntsika Secondary School. First year Master's students in the counselling stream can carry on this work into their second year by continuing to offer support from their internship year at the Counselling Centre. However, Clinical students, who serve their internship year at Fort England, are not able to continue with Ithemba; these students have a handover session with the incoming Master's students, handing over case-files and written notes. Ithemba Counselling runs from April to October, and sometimes right into November. In the interest of maintaining support for learners, the Psychology Clinic is available for those who need assistance outside these months.

Professor Akhurst also oversees volunteer initiatives within the Psychology Department. One of these is the Fort England Buddy programme, which involves having student volunteers visiting patients at Fort England Hospital. These patients often find themselves in a type of limbo, with very little stimulation available and often little therapeutic intervention. Students who volunteer for this programme have both an opportunity to work with a clinical population and to get a sense of the challenges and resource limitations in a South African context. Students volunteer for a semester, and have first choice to volunteer for the second semester, should they wish to do so. These students build relationships with the patients through engaging in activities like games and adult colouring; and often provide the only conduit to the outside world for patients who may have lost touch with their families, and receive no other visitors.

Jeannie McKeown



Research for the Public Good

Amanzi for food



New ways of harvesting, storing, and using rainwater to improve food production has become essential in water-scarce South Africa. An estimated 59% of 13.7 million households remain food insecure, resulting in widespread hunger and chronic malnutrition. While agriculture contributes significantly to the livelihoods of an estimated 4.5 million people who have access to small portions of arable land, the utilisation of available land water resources for smallholders reportedly remains low. The National Development Plan of government seeks to increase the number of households benefiting from food and nutrition security initiatives, as well as to establish and support smallholder producers. [The Amanzi for Food programme was born out of this need.](#)

Funded by the Water Research Commission (WRC), and led and implemented by the Environmental Learning Research Centre at Rhodes University, the Amanzi for Food programme developed an action-oriented approach to sharing research-based information on rainwater harvesting and conservation in the agricultural sector, with emphasis on smallholder and household food production settings.

The idea behind the Amanzi for Food programme was a simple one. [It sought to help people involved in growing food to implement different ways of harvesting, storing and using rainwater.](#) But it has also developed into a powerful driver of formal and informal networks consisting of commercial, subsistence, emerging, and women farmers, academic and agricultural training institutions, students, and non-governmental and other organisations. The networks have developed their own momentum, and through communication via social media, blogs, cell phones and the Amanzi for Water website, have shared knowledge and ideas as well as practical items such as seeds.

The programme also facilitated the formation of a formal learning network '*Imvotho Bubomi*' (Water is Life), bringing together many different agricultural partners in the Raymond Mhlaba municipal area. Members of the network undertook a Rhodes University accredited participatory 'Training of Trainers' course in Rainwater Harvesting and Conservation. The network members continue to support one another in their agricultural practices and in the implementation of productive demonstration sites.

Over three years the learning network has led to the development of a new model of co-engaged research focussing on the co-creation of practices and knowledge, rather than just knowledge dissemination. Team member Ms Kim Weaver explains:

["The participants remain in contact. They share what's going on in their everyday lives. They have farm days and share articles \(on farming\), the award winners share their news. They discuss their problems and possible solutions."](#)

The Rhodes Environmental Learning Research Centre led the first phase of the programme, with a vast collaborative network including the involvement of: the Umhlaba Consulting Group; the Fort Cox Agricultural Training Institute; the University of Fort Hare's Agriculture Faculty, and its Agricultural and Rural Development Research Institute; the Raymond Mhlaba Economic Development Agency and the Department of Rural Development and Agrarian Reform (DRDAR); Alice and Middelbult Extension Offices; and, Raymond Mhlaba Farmer's Association and Local Farmers.

The research group has been awarded another four years of funding and will build new relationships around two other key agricultural colleges, said Ms Weaver. The University of Mpumalanga- Mbombela Campus, Potchefstroom /Taung Agricultural College will join Fort Cox College. The focus of the relationships will be to develop capacity to support Agricultural Training Institutions centred Learning Networks, and to provide continued support for locally relevant research-based agricultural water knowledge dissemination, training and demonstration. According to Ms Weaver, "Although there are new people and partners involved, the guidelines, frameworks and course materials developed will be used." These will be adapted, necessarily, to be context specific.

One farmer from Mqayise Village in the Raymond Mhlaba municipal area, Mrs Peter, said the project had come at the right time for communal farmers who used the knowledge to produce crops despite the drought. Mrs Peter explained: "We are now the envy of other farmers as our gardens survived the harsh effects of the drought because of following different methods of rain water harvesting."

The Amanzi for Food team comprised not only a large network of partners, but a larger number of team members for phase one include Ms Weaver, Heila Lotz Sisitka, Tichaona Pesanayi, Chisala Lupele, Lawrence Sisitka, Rob O'Donoghue, Phindile Sithole, Wilma van Staden, Chris Mabeza, Jonathan Denison, and Katrina Phillips. In phase two, they are being joined by Patience Shawarira, Mandilive Matiwane and Crispin Dirwai.

Adrienne Carlisle



Building safer spaces

Water scarcity and quality in the Makana Municipal area have represented a major issue bedeviling residents for more than a decade. When municipal water is available, it is often discoloured or foul smelling, leaving residents insecure about whether or not it is safe to drink.

This is the reality local Rhodes University masters student Ms Thandiswa Nqowana grew up with and one she was determined to help Grahamstown residents confront. According to Ms Nqowana: “Water scarcity is indirectly influenced by the quality of water available to people. Polluted water can’t be used for drinking, bathing, industrial or agricultural purposes, and reduces the amount of useable water available.”



Ms Nqowana, together with senior Pharmacy lecturer Roman Tandlich and Dr Sharli Paphitis from Community Engagement, became part of an ambitious water quality science engagement programme between Rhodes University and the Grahamstown community to monitor water quality in the area. It became the subject of her Master’s thesis. Ms Nqowana said: “Grahamstown is my community. I want to give back. And in doing so I too am benefitted as we work together to find solutions for problems and to make our spaces better and safer.”

The programme involved 90 Grade 9 pupils from three local schools who were introduced to Hydrogen Sulphide (H_2S) water testing kits. The kits test for microbial contamination in water which make it unsafe for human consumption.

The first part of the programme involved training third-year Pharmacy student volunteers in basic facilitation skills so that they could assist in workshops at schools. Together with Ms Nqowana, the student volunteers offered workshops to students at the schools on water conservation and the importance of water quality on health and wellbeing. Learners were supplied with the H_2S water testing kits with English, IsiXhosa and Afrikaans manuals. Ms Nqowana explained that following this: “Over the next three weeks, the learners tested the tap water at home using the kit. They then reported back to us and we recorded their results.” This was followed up by a fun competition with learners producing posters on water conservation and the importance of water quality. The learners had also contributed to making the kits – which had initially looked similar to urine testing kits – more colourful and appealing and less intimidating.

Some of the water quality results reported by learners had been alarming, leading to further



Water samples collected using H_2S kits.

Left: water sample collected was negative as the colour of the kit remained a light brown colour.

Right: the water sample was positive for faecal coliforms, as the kit turned into a black colour.

research and engagement with the municipality on the reasons behind the poor water quality. The results were also communicated to parents, learners and teachers via SMS as was the need to boil the water before using it.

Ms Ngowana said the relationship between the schools, Rhodes, the volunteers and the learners was a dynamic, fun and interesting one. *"They learnt from us and we learnt so much from them."*

The intention is to take what was learnt from the pilot and educate the community more widely on using the kits and obtaining vital, regular results. She is also using the results to map the problem areas.

Ms Ngowana is adamant about the importance of research and teaching having a community engagement or service-learning aspect. According to her:

"Every course we offer should have a service learning aspect where every senior student has the opportunity to go out and share information and interact with the community to see how we can benefit from each other. We need to build a relationship between the community and the courses offered at the university and the research it undertakes."

Adrienne Carlisle



Open lab learning

The Awarenet Open Lab is a research partnership between Awarenet, which is the online platform for the NGO Village Scribe Association (VSA), and the School of Journalism and Media Studies. The Open Lab represents the core project of Mr Rod Amner's action research PhD. Mr Amner's doctoral work explores communicative ecologies: a conceptual model used in media and communications research, development work and social justice. As in environmental ecologies, a number of smaller projects have a common link or links, forming different but equally important parts of a communicative ecosystem. "Given the complex set of stakeholders involved, how would you design a communication system for this city?" asks Mr Amner, especially "if you were interested in communicating about education, given that education is the core business of Grahamstown."



Many of the community engagement programmes being run through the CE Division, often in conjunction with the JMS, have their centre at the Joza Youth Hub. The Hub, which has been supported for the past five years by the CE Division and by a consortium of NGOs, is where the partnership between Mr Amner and Awarenet chose to situate the Awarenet Open Lab. The Lab has gone full open-access to learners in the afternoons since May 2017, the lab houses 12 computers with fast internet access (a new radio link has been installed, through Geenet, which gives unlimited access to the internet). Rhodes University donated the computer boxes and the screens were paid for through fundraising efforts.



The Awarenet Open Lab is currently the only public access ICT lab in the Sarah Baartman District, due to problems with the Vox service – a government-funded internet access programme that was supposed to make the internet accessible in all public libraries, but which has disappeared entirely, awaiting a new tender process before it can be revitalized. This of course puts tremendous pressure on the Open Lab. *In the weeks after it opened, without any advertising, there were 600 applications for membership cards!* Members are content to wait in corridors for a turn on a computer. Particularly for children from Grahamstown East, who have no internet access at home or at school, the Lab provides a vital educational and enrichment service. Despite

projects to install computer facilities in state schools, says Amner, most of these schools' facilities, if not all, are non-functional, due to, often, a lack of capacity to staff, open and maintain them.

The Awarenet Open Lab has addressed this issue in a way that, it is hoped, will increase both the accessibility and the sustainability of the project. The Lab is used extensively by learners, and the older learners have been co-opted as lab assistants, and given training to enable them to run the lab efficiently, answering questions and assisting with ICT issues which inevitably crop up. The Lab is open for two hours in the afternoon on weekdays, and from 9 to 5 on Saturday. "It has been interesting", says Amner, "to see what is being done during those two hours." The newly trained lab assistants have clashed with learners who want to use some of their time on the machines to play games. For kids who have never been exposed to ICT before, playing games teaches them essential skills, but assistants had been outraged that the facilities were being used for pleasure, as opposed to what they saw as educational work. Going forward, Amner says, the tension between the two



uses will be further explored. A treasure trove of learner support is available on the Open Lab servers. This includes CAPS-aligned educational material prepared by Mindset Learn and reading for pleasure material developed by Cape Town-based NGO Fundza, which has donated a small computer server, called Raspberry Pie, to the Lab. Raspberry Pie enables the creation of a wifi hotspot, through which a wide variety of materials created by Fundza can be accessed.

Looking to the future of the project, Mr Amner aims to rally students with IT skills to work as volunteers with the Open Lab Project. The goal for 2019 is to work with schools and libraries to

replicate the infrastructure and the model: using young people to mediate ICT spaces for other learners. Nombulelo High has already expressed interest in using the model espoused by the Open Lab as a way of re-opening the lab at the school. Given that the costs of providing a stipend to the four student helpers comes in at under R1000 a month, and the educational and enrichment materials are free, this model represents a viable and affordable model for reactivating the currently unused labs at schools and libraries.

Funding is currently being sourced for a second lab, and Rhodes has again

donated 20 computer boxes, which now only require screens. [The aim for this second Lab is to focus on developing clubs that train kids in valuable skills such as coding and gaming.](#) In addition, some learners are already being encouraged to use the technology to become citizen journalists – they create education-related content from a learner perspective for Grocott's Mail, produce education-themed radio shows for Radio Grahamstown and Rhodes Music Radio on Saturday mornings, and are producing an audio drama for broadcast on community radio stations across the province. A balance would thus be struck between structured courses, creative work, play and less formal ICT learning.

The model of using learners is a sustainable and empowering one. Mr Amner notes that the project has huge potential and scope for interrogating the developmental model. [Learners taking ownership of their learning, and assisting others to learn, makes for a sustainable future.](#)

Jeannie McKeown



Culture and nature

The *Inkcubeko Nendalo* (isiXhosa for ‘culture and nature’) Biocultural Diversity Education Programme was developed out of a recognition that overexploitation of natural resources threatens not only biodiversity, but also indigenous knowledge and, ultimately, South Africa’s cultural heritage.

Inkcubeko Nendalo, with its recognition of cultural diversity, indigenous knowledge systems and its intrinsic link to identity, nature, biodiversity and conservation, was ahead of its time. In 2009, recognition of South Africa’s rich Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) was often limited to lip service in political, policy and academic circles. But, two researchers Professor Michelle Cocks, now head of Rhodes University’s Anthropology Department and Mr Tony Dold, Curator of the Selmar Schonland Herbarium decided to take indigenous knowledge into our schools where western ideas dominated the curricula. The aim, says Professor Cocks, was to explore school learners’ awareness around the link between cultural diversity and biodiversity as well as their own identities.

Professor Cocks and Mr Dold turned theory into practice for thousands of youth who came into contact with the programme, allowing them to rediscover their proud cultural roots and their vital link to nature. In the Eastern Cape people continue to use wild plants and herbs for cosmetics, religious functions, medicines, rituals and good luck charms. As Professor Cocks explains:

“Contemporary rural and urban South Africans find great cultural and spiritual value in nature and its products especially as many cultural practices make use of wild plants on a daily basis.”



The programme, which kicked off in 2009 at seven historically disadvantaged schools, initially piggybacked on another Rhodes community engagement project, the Mobile Science Laboratory (MSL). [The MSL was created to encourage learners to develop an interest in science.](#) It provided laboratory infrastructure and expertise to facilitate practical science lessons at historically disadvantaged schools.

Inkcubeko Nendalo made provision for four formal classroom lessons during school hours as well as a forest or nature excursion. The lessons made use of custom-built teaching aids, including a number of well-known Xhosa cultural artefacts made from plant materials such as sedge mats (*amakhuko*), grass brooms (*imitshayelo*), and a cosmetic fungus (*isibindi*). Pupils were encouraged to collect their own stories from their elders and share these experiences after class. This was followed by a discussion centred on the idea that cultural heritage and cultural identity are reliant on continued access to the plants, animal and places that, together, make up indalo (nature/biodiversity).

Professor Cocks said it was well documented that when indigenous communities lose their cultural heritage in the form of practices, values and forms of knowledge, the youth often became a lost generation. The programme is based on the belief that children and young people need to embrace their cultural knowledge and heritage so that they may become leaders that contribute to a more peaceful responsible, engaged and sustainable global future.

In a documentary made on the programme, several learners who were interviewed recognised the importance of their culture to their identity, and the tendency of young people to forget it in an increasingly busy, modern and urban environment. Programme participant, Sibusiso Matiwana said it had become easy to neglect his culture:

"The world is changing and we need to adjust to the way it is changing without forgetting our culture."

Another participant, Asemahle Mphelo said nature was vital to the Xhosa culture. For instance, to connect with the ancestors requires the use of the plant *isilawu*. The olive tree is also essential to rituals. Nomvelo Sicetshe said, "The forest is our life," offering food to eat when hungry, medicines when ill and trees to rest under when tired.

"Nature helps us, so we also need to help it. It protects us we must protect it."

Solitary moments in a forest engendered the most remarkable responses from the learners, many of whom live in poor, urban, cluttered and crowded environments. A trip to the beautiful forests and beaches of Woody Cape led one learner to write:

"It's like I'm dreaming. I hear the birds singing and speaking and they were showing me the way of living saying: 'this is how things should be'. My brain somehow connects with this place as I can focus and think outside the box."

Over 4500 learners have benefitted from this programme. It is hoped many more will soon be able too. The programme is currently on hiatus while more funding is sought.

Adrienne Carlisle



Community engagement as a lifestyle

Dr Nosiphiwe 'Nosi' Ngqwala has charted an inspiring personal, professional and academic journey at Rhodes University thus far. Dr Ngqwala has a PhD in Pharmaceutical chemistry. She is also a Hall Fellow at Hobson House and a Faculty advisor for Enactus Society. Among other roles, she is a mentor for her thriving group Sisterhood with Dr N – where she offers support, guidance and life skills to young women in the university space.



The art of wearing different hats is no novelty to her. She has fulfilled many rewarding roles: as a student, a volunteer, a tutor, a mentor, a faculty advisor, a director, a board member, and of course a senior lecturer in the Department of Pharmacy. Her vast experience working with university students, primary-and-high school learners, teachers, and Grahamstown community members has revealed that more can still be done to address the need for teaching and learning around environmental awareness in our immediate local setting.

This young academic has centred her research and community involvements on teaching, learning and innovating in the areas of: (i) health, (ii) food and water security, (iii) minimising negative impacts on our economy caused by environmental neglect, (iv) climate change, (v) better management of environmental waste, (vi) preserving our natural habitats, and (vii) community-strengthening. *At the heart of all her projects is a passion for community building, youth upliftment and environmental education.*

What makes her research, and the research of other pioneering academics like her, so important is that it is combined with critical engagement in action, aiming to make tangible differences in the lives of the people of Grahamstown. *"I am a community builder and a committed citizen,"* says Dr Ngqwala, *"my academic titles and my other positions come after that"*. She believes that her work, her PhD and her achievements should not be celebrated if they cannot be used to effect real changes in the lives and experiences of locals in the communities.

In 2014, Dr Ngqwala founded Children of the Soil (COTS) – a Non-Profit Organisation – as a direct solution to some of the challenges she has identified in Grahamstown. COTS aims to engage students and community members on important issues of climate change and food security. Dr Ngqwala's intention is for COTS to become an enabling space for people – considered as the real "change-drivers" – to empower themselves with the knowledge, skills and expertise needed for sustainable development at a grassroots level. Her focus on children and young people is catalysed by the potential she sees in school curricula to incorporate critical environmental education at the earlier schooling stages. Her well-known slogan, *"catch them young"*, speaks to her belief in developing environmental awareness in children from a young age.

For learners, COTS has contributed towards skills and ideas development for major schooling events such as the Science Expo, during Grahamstown's annual Science Festival.

For community members and local organisations, a lot of work has been done in teaching people how to grow and sustain their own food gardens. This



includes projects on water purification filters, water testing kits and grey water treatment systems in the townships.



Dr Ngqwala also works with a number of Rhodes University societies and residences. COTS community partners include: RU's Community Engagement office (RUCE), the Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC), Grahamstown's local schools, and Rhini's Assumption Development Centre (ADC).

Community engagement is already a major part of teaching, learning and research in universities, but funding issues still persist. Despite the challenges these initiatives, projects and platforms are overcoming there are still serious socio-economic gaps that exist. If community engagement is going to leave lasting impacts on the people and in the places it locates itself in, then more practical application (dynamic theory in action) is needed to further lift and uphold the good work that is already being done through various enriched community activities.

Going beyond the formal and academic roles assumed in the university space, and integrating one's work into the lives of everyday people: that is what Dr Ngqwala embodies. About when, where and who should be expected to fill the gaps in the province's current education market, she asked and answered those questions in herself first. She has never doubted that the goal to see the Eastern Cape's education system truly transformed begins with her, right now and right here – in this special town where she has been placed to make real contributions towards the public good. *"Every day I learn and am humbled to realise that the little you can do truly does go a long way,"* she says.

Dr Ngqwala's highly informed and constructive research, together with her community engagement, reminds us that over and above who you are, where you come from, and where you are planning on going – it is fundamental to be able to give and share with meaning in your community. *"Anyone can do it!"* remarks Dr Ngqwala.



Anima McBrown



The sweet rewards of action research



When Gillian McGregor, a lecturer in the Department of Geography, embarked on a study of aspects of the sustainability of the honeybush industry for her PhD, she little imagined it would result in a set of guidelines for the industry to encourage sustainable harvesting practices to preserve a unique local resource and support the emerging South African honeybush export industry. “*For me the important thing is action research,*” said Ms McGregor. “*Harvesters, processors, farmers, landowners, researchers and officials alike are anxious about protecting their resource*”.

Honeybush is unusual as 85% of the crop is wild harvested. The industry is centred in the Langkloof, where four of the six processing plants are located, and stretches through to Uniondale, Plettenberg Bay, Kouga and the Tsitsikammas. It produces about 350 tonnes of dry tea a year, processed from 900 tonnes of green tea, and 85% of the tea produced is exported.

Wild harvesting is done by a mix of resident labourers on farms and contract teams made up of local harvesters. In theory, the harvesters, farmer and harvest manager (who organises the permits and transport) each get a third of the price of the green honeybush. Currently honeybush is R10 per kg, sometimes R12 if it comes from a certified organic farm. In reality, contract workers get R1.50 to R3.50 per kilo, depending on how hard it was to get. Permanently employed farm labourers get a wage rather than a per kilo price and on some farms this wage is higher than a normal wage because it is linked to overseas trade requirements.

Ms McGregor spent over a year establishing relationships with processors, harvesters and landowners before any research activities began. She visited farmers, went into the field with harvesters and joined the industry body SAHTA to become informed about the industry. When the government tender process came about, she already had the relevant data to secure the contract. Further data collection and scientific analysis led to the production of a series of reports for the industry.

The Honeybush Community of Practice put forward the idea of publishing a handy guide for harvesters, farmers and officials to refer to in the field. This was contracted and published by the Western Cape’s Department of Environmental Affairs and Development Planning in both English and Afrikaans, since 90% of the honeybush community speak Afrikaans. It is a resource for anyone in the industry to manage and harvest honeybush sustainably and obtain the best yield and price.

Honeybush is a slow growing plant which needs time to recover after harvest or fire. The real pressure to understand and protect this natural resource has only come about in the past 15 years. “*To me it was a science project, but out of necessity we involved the role players of the community, so that much of the information we have recorded is their knowledge,*” explained Ms McGregor.

"We have had to rely on their knowledge from 50 or 60 years of farming and harvesting, and back it with scientific knowledge and understanding of fynbos ecology." For example, *Bergtea* is the dominant species found over 15000 km² from Barrydale to Port Elizabeth. Good harvesters are conservative, only cropping it every three to four years, knowing from experience that the plant needs time to recover. The plant in fact has an underground root stock that requires a three to four year recovery period after cropping.

The Department of Economic Development, Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEDEAT) issue the permits required for harvesting honeybush. DEDEAT is recommending that farmers use the guidelines for, among other things, density and potential yield per farm when they put in their applications. "This is not mandatory yet, but the farmers have a better chance of getting a permit approved if they are using the guidelines," explained McGregor.

One of the biggest challenges of the project is to get the information to the harvesters, who might not read the guidelines. Grounded is an international company that operates in the Langkloof, helping with aspects of development that relate to social responsibility, biodiversity management, improving conditions for workers and developing business plans for farmers. They are conducting workshops with harvesters and farmers to see that the guideline practices are put in place. Grounded will expand training to a wider range of topics such as knowledge of snakes, spiders and first aid in the field, and include field visits with the harvesters to talk about the ecology of honeybush. They are also getting farmers on board with financial incentives on the export market. "Farmers who become certified will qualify to sell their tea at a better price," said Ms McGregor.



This project has been responsive to explicit requests from the harvesters to protect their livelihoods. "It is more complex than the harvesters wanting a better monetary deal," said Ms McGregor. "Honeybush harvesting in mountainous terrain is a difficult job, and risky in terms of injury. Harvesters would like a better deal in terms of their health and safety. They also want recognition of their experience with some form of 'qualification'. Without them, the industry wouldn't exist. They see this as a way of excluding harvesters who give them a bad reputation."

Three MSc students participated in the study, developing their knowledge through work in the field and helping present the workshops and meetings. Matt Sephton works with Grounded and is based in the Langkloof. Wouter van der Walt is doing a study on Subtonata vlei tea, which is 10% of the honeybush crop. Roxanne Starkey is undertaking a study on honeybush and fire.



Some of their research contributed to the guidelines but their main role has been as research assistants in the field who have been able to break down the barriers between the scientists and the non-scientists. "I am proud of the way my students interacted with the harvesters," said Ms McGregor. "They developed a very real understanding of how hard the harvesters work."

To develop this project further, Ms McGregor sees the need to set up monitoring experiments to deepen the understanding of the ecology of the plant, the impact

of harvesting methods and production yields: "I'd also like to see the project extended beyond the ecological requirements of honeybush to the social and economic side, with improved conditions and returns for everyone. The obvious way to take pressure off the wild resource is through cultivation, but the cultivated sector is struggling with problems like crop pests which need to be researched. The important thing is that all this scientific research is made accessible to those in the industry."

Water for people, and people for water

With drought afflicting large parts of South Africa, water shortages are becoming a daily reality for many. But solutions continue to be sought in what Institute for Water Research director, Professor Tally Palmer refers to as “widgets.” These engineering or technological solutions to clean and save



water ignore social and ecological engagements, which require longer-term commitment and seemingly slower reportable results. The IWR bucks the widget trend by engaging directly with people, adopting the tag line “water for people, and people for water.”

All research undertaken by the Institute for Water Research (IWR) is for the public good. Everything the institute does is aimed at social and ecological justice. Professor Palmer says, “there can be no ecological resource protection if it is not embedded in a just society.” Professor Palmer’s philosophy is made manifest in the research of the IWR, which is cutting-edge, and most importantly, socially, and

ecologically responsible. All of this contributes to a vibrant teaching, supervisory, and community-engaged research programme.

The IWR’s aim is to empower people at every phase at which the institute connects with them. All training is to be oriented towards water advocacy. Professor Palmer explains: “We take the idea of eco-system services seriously. This is the idea that water in the environment delivers services to people. We also understand that if you push ecosystems beyond their capacity to deliver services you can induce a changed state that radically changes the form, kind and value of services available to people. We take seriously the thresholds of system change and the indicators that these are being reached.”

The IWR has adopted a “trans-disciplinary” approach to research, drawing on different academic disciplines to understand complex systems. According to Professor Palmer: “The IWR is committed to community-engaged action research that is practice based, draws on knowledge across a wide range of academic domains, as well as from practitioners and communities, and is then used to effect behavioural change.”

Central to this, is engaging with those who are intended to benefit from the research so that the ideas behind it are co-created. What this means, for Professor Palmer, is that all the innovative



ideas birthed at the IWR are shared, in the first instance, with people and communities, where “listening to their context and needs” serves as a precursor for the co-creation of knowledge and solutions – or as Professor Palmer puts it, “jointly shaping how we may together work towards an end-point.”



An example of the IWR's trans-disciplinary approach is its project interrogating coal mining practices. Among other aims the project sought to compare legislation governing mining to actual mining practice. The academic review of legislation was used to highlight a lack of mining accountability for ecological impact. The research provided challenging evidence of mining impact on wetlands and a lesser impact from agriculture. The local catchment forum, with a broad civil society and formal institutional membership,

became an empowered multi-stakeholder group able to engage confidently in advocacy concerning the impact of mining on ecological infrastructure, and long-term livelihoods. Professor Palmer, Dr Victor Munnik and two MSc students Gareth Thompson and Tia Keighley took on the project.

Professor Palmer explained that, “there is this dilemma where coal mining is accepted as an economic driver and the cost to people and the environment is taken as collateral damage for the good outcome of economies.” But, she said when this was probed by putting together wetland system research and hydrogeology and interviews with affected farmers a clearer picture emerged of the ‘real’ impact. The puncturing of impermeable rock during coal mining led to water draining. As a result, wetlands were starved and doomed to fade away. According to Professor Palmer, the long-term structural damage to eco-systems that coal mining inflicts on land and water use far exceeds the impact made by agriculture.

An important part of Professor Palmer's approach to engagement is her belief that research should be a catalyst for transformation, learning and change.

The IWR is now engaging with local activists and stakeholders in the large and heavily polluted Olifants River catchment, facilitating water clinics in partnership with the non-governmental organization AWARD (Association for Water and Rural Development), so that stakeholders have a better understanding of issues and are more



able to represent their interests. The Sunday River Valley study provides another example where the IWR assisted to catalyse change in water supply and management. The thriving citrus industry in the area enjoyed a plentiful water supply while hundreds of households did not. Professor Palmer explains that, “while the engineers claimed they could solve the problem quickly, our study showed such political knots and barriers were in place that took two years to unravel, identifying exactly where the barriers to water supply to people was.”

The IWR's work in the Sundays River Valley was extended to the problematic Makana/Upper Kowie River Catchment area where there was a focus on water governance in local government. Although the case study was initiated with the idea of investigating microbial pollution, household water security emerged as the main issue for citizens. The Makana case study has accelerated local water institutional development with the establishment of the first ever South African Water, Sanitation and Catchment Management Forum. The combined forum is actively co-hosted by the local Municipality and the Department of Water and Sanitation (DWS). The forum, called the "Makana Water Forum" is actively developing a local catchment management strategy (CMS), to contribute to the overall CMS of the Mzimvubu to Tsitsikamma Catchment Management Agency (MT-CMA). This ground-breaking research is already being extended to the Tsitsa River Catchment in the Maclear area with the support of the DWS, MT-CMA and the Department of Environmental Affairs (DEA). The idea of a single "land and water forum" has traction for participatory governance with multiple government institutions. As Professor Palmer puts it, "there are now ordinary people engaged in water governance. The land and water forums are the institutions and mechanisms of that engagement."



Throughout, a process of Strategic Adaptive Planning (SAM) is used. The process is explicitly designed to ensure people have equal opportunities to speak and that there are no hierarchies of position or language and gender. According to Professor Palmer: "At public forums such as Catchment Management Forums it is the loud voices such as big water users, that are heard. Ordinary people may not have the language, the concepts and the articulation of views that commands respect in action. We always work towards sharing ways of knowing and understanding so that local people are able to advocate for responsible and sustainable management of their waters."

To this end, the IWR is undertaking epistemic research in partnership with Dr Sharli Paphitis from Community Engagement at the Centre for Epistemic Justice and Engaged Research, aimed at ensuring that people's actual experiences match the ideal? Were they respectfully treated and included in the process. Did they enjoy equal opportunities to contribute their ideas? Did they have sufficient knowledge to participate meaningfully?

Overall, the IWR has made a substantive contribution to water governance in the Eastern Cape through developing and supporting institutions and ensuring ordinary people have a better understanding of the issues and are able to represent their interests. Part of it all lies in getting the least powerful water users influencing governance at the strategic national, provincial and municipal levels.

With so many examples of infrastructure failing and local government lacking human, financial and technical resources, it has become vital for catchment management agencies to ensure there is requisite enforcement to keep the environment stable. The power of working as a change agent through engaged research shines through as Professor Palmer says: "All our research seeks to find the best small points of intervention where we can shift the system into a more positive space."

Adrienne Carlisle



Transformation through knowledge creation

South Africa's e-Education policy goal states that every South African learner should be able to use Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) confidently and creatively to help develop the skills and knowledge learners need to achieve personal goals and participate fully in the global community. But, the reality at the majority of South Africa's historically disadvantaged schools is very different. Most have no ICT equipment, teachers lack the skills required to integrate ICT into the schools and no real ICT teaching is taking place. Rhodes University's Information Systems Department believes integrating Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) into historically disadvantaged schools can transform lives and serve as a catalyst for positive change in marginalised communities.

The Department of Basic Education acknowledges that it does not have the capacity to take sole responsibility for ICT integration in schools and that it required guidance from universities and resources from the private sector and human resources located in NGOs. In 2014 Rhodes University's Information Systems department took up this challenge with a direct programme of taking ICT training into schools. The experience generated a considerable number of research ideas and outputs. These, in turn, continue to inform best practice in terms of transformative and integrative approaches to ICTs at schools and in community-based settings more generally.



Former Rhodes University Information Systems academic Dr Kirstin Kraus, visiting academic to the department Prof Sue Conger, and PhD student Mr Clement Simuja, kicked off the project at Alexandria High School in the Eastern Cape, where the department tailored computer application technology (CAT) courses for the teachers. The courses aimed to engender skills in self-learning, peer-learning, knowledge discovery, and information literacy. Although not certified or accredited, the training assisted teachers with hands-on practical experience in Microsoft applications such as Excel with the purpose of integrating ICTs into their teaching and administrative activities.

Alexandria High School principal, Mr Aldy Meyer, said that the impact of the training on the school community was immediately noticeable. Educators presented their classes and school administration in electronic form, mark schedules were processed electronically and it prepared them for the electronic submission of data expected by the Education Department.

A year later and, with a relationship of trust and collaboration having been established, a research component was introduced. Mr Meyer said that he believed the research activities of the team would assist the school in its journey to the digital era and the findings would allow replication in similar rural contexts to enrich teaching and learning programmes. His words were prophetic.

PHD student Clement Simuja, assisted the school with four weeks of CAT classes for Grade 10, 11 and 12 learners, which led to a deep-seated interest in the effect of different teaching methods on marginalized high school learner engagement and performance. Mr Simuja said it was the beginning of a long association with the school and the community as both the project, and his research associated with it, began to grow. Others began to attend the courses and the

IS department expanded into other schools in the area. The community also began attending. The research later expanded to investigate how schools could act as gateways to communities, and how CAT training could be contextualized and made relevant to the grassroots-level developmental realities such as unemployment, lack of skills, ICT access, and small business entrepreneurship.

Writing about the project Dr Krauss described Alexandria as a community in tension, characterised by high rates of unemployment, poverty and disrupted families. Dr Krauss said the initial overarching research objective was to determine techniques, Internet apps, and methods of teaching that engaged and motivated students that lived in poverty, where there was a lack of opportunities and

a feeling of hopelessness. In his writing, Krauss has described existing CAT textbooks and curriculum as a-contextual, asocial, a-cultural, and non-developmental, and subsequently irrelevant to many learners, saying: “It is a contradiction in society and therefore a problem that we seek to understand and address.” Simuja’s research approach and focus aimed to be practical and relevant to the realities of learners and teachers and their community with a view to create motivation and hope, and emancipatory change.

As word spread about his work, Simuja expanded the project to schools in Makana where there are few or no ICT facilities whatsoever. Teacher training took place on borrowed iPads and laptops with up to four teachers training on one laptop. Training now also takes place more locally, in Grahamstown, at the Assumption Development Centre where there are better facilities as well as the Joza Youth Hub – where Rhodes University and the Lion Club are donating computer equipment.

Having seen firsthand how the training impacts on the community, Mr Simuja has expanded the project even further to include training for unemployed youth in the community. He explains, “We train them on the use of ICTs in personal day-to-day life and on how to use ICTs for opportunities.” As a result of this work, four unemployed youth have subsequently registered for online education via Unisa.



Mr Simuja is himself from a rural area and had to break through barriers of access and poverty to get into Rhodes. He puts it this way:

“Part of my approach to the project depends on my life experience. That is what my PhD is about. It looks at developing transformative ICT education practices in rural schools. It provides a theoretical model to use in a community-based project. The schools are a starting point. If we can provide ICT that is transformative, and the learners can see the potential, they can take that into the community.”

ICT can do more than benefit teaching and learning in historically disadvantaged schools; it can also be a catalytic and transformative tool that induces knowledge reformation and production amongst learners in an informed society.

Adrienne Carlisle

Gone Fishing

A day out fishing with competitive and recreational anglers is, for the Recreational Fisheries Research Group in the Department of Ichthyology & Fisheries Science, a hard day's work. The group's projects have benefitted thousands of subsistence, small-scale and commercial fishers who don't even know the group exists. But, how exactly does working with a relatively advantaged community who fish for fun and competition count as community engagement and how is the research that emerges from this engagement for the public good?

"There are between 500 000 and 900 000 recreational marine anglers in South Africa", explains the research group's leader Professor Warren Potts. They significantly outnumber the commercial, small scale and subsistence linefishers and the recreational anglers' harvest is also, ironically, far greater. This disproportionate harvest when compared with other sectors – for which coastal fish are a source of livelihood – is a social injustice that has developed from South Africa's early history.

"Imagine", says Professor Potts, "if just 600 000 recreational fishers each kept a single one-kilogram fish per year. There would be 600 tonnes less fish available to harvest for those who rely on fishing for their livelihood." This estimate does not include fish that die after they are released. A recent global study estimated that approximately 60% of all fish captured in recreational fisheries are released. The situation is no different in South Africa, where recreational fishers release fish to comply with regulations and on a voluntary basis. Although it varies by species, research suggests that up to 90% of fish may die after a catch-and-release event. *Many of these deaths can be attributed to the incorrect handling of the fish, said Professor Potts. Nevertheless, if you add the number of fish that die after their release, the impact of recreational fishing is even greater.*



To exacerbate the problem of overharvest, a recent study by the Recreational Fisheries Research Group, led by Professor Potts found that about 43% of anglers do not comply with recreational fishery regulations which: restrict size-limits (anglers are only allowed to keep individuals of a certain species above a minimum size); bag-limits (anglers are not allowed to keep more than a specified number of a certain species of fish); delineate closed seasons (anglers are not allowed to keep certain species at certain times of the year, usually during peak breeding); and demarcate Marine Protected Areas (areas that are closed to angling).



While the South African government has emphasised the development of the small-scale and subsistence fishing sectors, Professor Potts believes this will remain a pipedream unless the recreational harvest is more carefully managed, as he explains: *"Ultimately, if one wants to benefit needy fishing communities, and address social injustice, addressing the harvest of recreational anglers is crucial."*

The community engagement initiative by the Recreational Fisheries Research Group, engages with anglers to educate them on fish stocks and to enhance their practices in order to improve the health and survival of the fish that they release. The idea was to develop voluntary conservation behaviour in recreational fisheries, which required anglers to mobilise themselves and establish informal regulations on personal bag limits, size limits, constraints on gear and

the development of entirely catch-and-release fisheries.

Building a rapport with recreational anglers is easier said than done, however, as they are distrustful of scientists who they see as a threat to their activities. With this in mind, Potts and his

team developed a mutually beneficial relationship with a competitive angling body, the Rock and Surf Super Pro League (RASSPL). This voluntary competitive league has over 1000 members and several franchises across South Africa and Namibia and operates on a purely catch-and-release basis. Despite its good intentions, its fish handling practices were generally poor and many of the fish that released during the leagues did not survive, said Professor Potts.

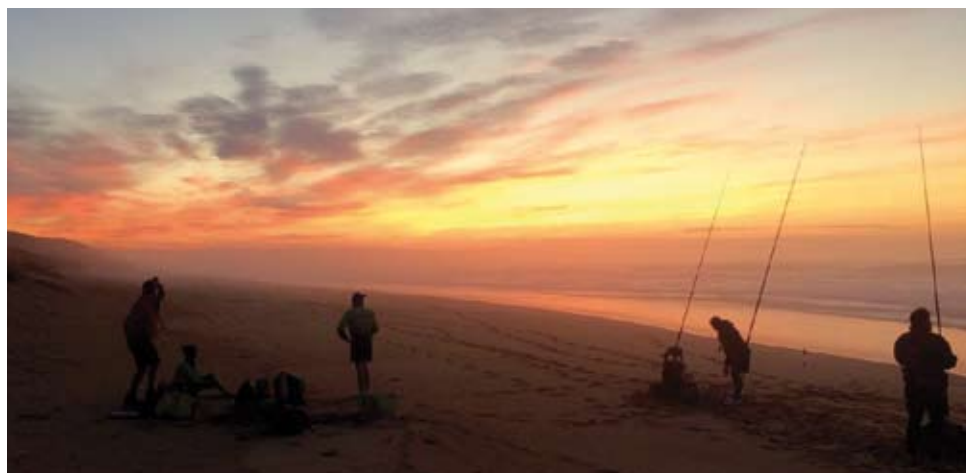
The research team immersed itself into the competitive recreational angling culture and joined DIFS technician David Drennan – who was already participating in the RASSPL. Professor Potts, Matthew Parkinson, Dr Amber Childs and Alexander Winkler were the first to sign up as members in 2012 and began participating in the monthly league events. [The team assisted the league in improving its fish handling practices through example and formal education, ultimately minimising the mortality of fish captured during league competitions.](#) It also developed a simpler computer-based scoring system for the complicated league competitions. In return, the research team obtained a massive amounts of detailed, valuable research information from the angling league. Competitive angling provides excellent information on the size structure of fish populations as well as catch and effort information, which are incredibly useful for monitoring the stock status of captured species, says Professor Potts. The league records also provided vital information on the smaller, often ignored species and juveniles of the large species.

The group has been able to assist in policy and rule changes to improve fish handling techniques and, consequently, fish survival rates. Professor Potts says the increased survival of released fish will have a considerable impact on fish populations. For example, in just eight competitions hosted by six franchises around the country in the 2016/2017 season a total of 4 928 fishes with a mass of about 5 421 kg were captured. Improved handling practices means most would have survived. Former RASSPL managing director, the late Mike Pautz, who was also a world Champion and multiple Springbuck Rock and Surf Angling representative, last year described the team's contribution as invaluable and said they had become an integral component of the league's conservation drive.

Over the course of just one year, the team's engagements directly influenced approximately 500 individual anglers, and that they, in turn, will influence the behaviour of other anglers. The research team has also incorporated an engaged research project that takes place during the national competition, where the DIFS honours class is introduced to community engagement practices each year.

[The research results from their engagement work feeds back into a number of other recreational fisheries research projects, including the WWF "Fishtory" and "Catch Report" projects.](#) This research is leading the way in terms of understanding the mechanisms that drive improvements in angler catch-and-release behaviour.

Adrienne Carlisle



Opening a channel for communication

MobiSAM is a citizen engagement initiative that began as a research project investigating the use of mobile phones for increasing citizen participation in local government, as well as tools for social accountability monitoring. Initiated in 2011, with funding from the Ford Foundation, MobiSAM came into being as a result of the extremely poor water provision in Makana Municipality. Professor Hannah Thinyane of the Department Computer Science and Ms Debbie Coulson believed that a lack of communication between citizens and the municipality was exacerbating the poor service delivery, and began to develop ways of increasing meaningful citizen interaction with local government, through creating communication channels that permit efficient reporting of service delivery problems.



Between 2011 and 2014, challenges to the project included the lack of local government responsiveness to issues reported on MobiSAM, coupled with a lack of reporting from marginalised communities in Makana Municipality. The placing of Makana Municipality under administration added to the difficulties in engaging local government officials in the project. In 2015 and 2016, MobiSAM expanded, bringing in [Professor Caroline Khene](#) as co-director, and a new holistic approach to implementation that incorporated a more sociotechnical stance. This focused on building citizen education, working on building government responsiveness, and in getting marginalised groups more involved.

MobiSAM is currently a web-based application that is compatible for both desktop computers and mobile phone browser interface. A mobile application for smartphones is set to be released in 2018. The project also makes use of social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, and incorporates an SMS and 'Please Call Me' function.

All reports via the supplementary platforms are recorded on the web application, creating an archive of evidence-based data for future collective engagement with government. Citizens can report on all service delivery problems, such as water, roads, sanitation, electricity and stray animals. The MobiSAM application also permits all registered users (citizens, CSOs,



media houses and municipalities) to monitor reported cases and to provide public or private comment on reported issues. Reported problems can be collated and presented visually in graph or map form. The communication channel functions well as a two-way dialogue, allowing the Municipality, as well as private citizens and other stakeholders, to send messages using the service.

MobiSAM has developed key partnerships with local civil society groups such as the Kowie Catchment Forum, the Institute of Water Awareness, the Black Sash, Makana Coalition, the Unemployed People's Movement (UPM), Upstart Youth, and the Grahamstown Residents Association (GRA) – which has taken over the monitoring and management of Facebook reports. Local media such as Grocotts Mail and Rhodes Music Radio have supported MobiSAM activities and assisted in creating awareness of the initiative. Champions in local government have been vital to the success of MobiSAM and engagement with Municipality employees and leadership is constant and ongoing.

In respect of MobiSAM's connection with the academic project, it is still run from within the Information Systems Department. Members of the team include academics, researchers and community members. The co-directors of the project sought to develop it based on a University Service Model for community engagement and local government, and it applies a holistic approach towards technology development and stakeholder engagement; strategy formulation and both civic and government capacity building are incorporated. There has been one PhD, one Master's, and one Post Doctorate completed based on MobiSAM research, and the project has also contributed to the development of case study material for teaching students at the Honours level, who can now critically engage with real-life developments in the field of information systems in the public and South African context.

Jeannie McKeown





Blurring the lines between town & gown – making Higher Education accessible

Hubs that focus community engagement efforts



The Rhodes Community Engagement Office (RUCE) has led a process of creating two concentrated hubs of development located in Joza, Grahamstown. The two hubs, the Assumption Development Centre and the Joza Youth Hub, have been established in partnership with non-government organisations and other actors from civil society.

The **Assumption Development Centre (ADC)** was established in 2014 on the premises of what was previously the Assumption Clinic. The Sisters of the Assumption approached RUCE for suggestions on how to revitalize the space now that government clinics had taken over the provision of primary health care. A needs analysis was done and Economic Development was identified as a priority area by the local community. RUCE became a founding partner of the ADC, along with the Ubunye Foundation, GADRA Education, St Mary's Development & Care Centre, and the Assumption Sisters. The Grahamstown Business Forum has also since joined as a partner, providing internships and matching the employment requirements of local businesses to the training that is provided at the Centre.

With the stated aim of addressing skills development and employment opportunities, three programmes were established by the ADC: Youth Life Skills, Enterprise Development, and Savings Groups. Bearing in mind that one-third of young South Africans are unemployed, the strategy has been to focus on recent Matriculants who did not meet entry requirements for further tertiary training.



The post-school development programme - for approximately 60 – 80 young people per year - consists of the Thabiso Life Skills course (including elements such as Self-Development and Responsible Citizenship) as well as the provision of Computer Skills and a course in Professional Communications (offered by Rhodes University). These same young people are encouraged to get involved in savings groups, through an initiative called SaveAct, and to use their savings towards further training goals. Provision is also made for getting their families involved in saving, so that the young person's home environment is improved.



With regard to Enterprise Development offered by the ADC, a certain amount of micro-enterprise training and support is provided to the surrounding community. Examples of these small businesses include a soap-making initiative, a laundry service and a catering business. Students doing the Postgraduate Diploma at the Rhodes Business School assist with this programme, and mentorship is provided by the Grahamstown Business Forum.

The current Project Co-ordinator, Masonwabe Nduna, a Grahamstown local and Rhodes Graduate, joined the ADC family via the Community Engagement Office, and the Rhodes IT Department has done all the networking and

setting up of the computer infrastructure at the Centre. Further involvement by the University includes monthly sessions run by the Rhodes Law Clinic, and the Rhodes Business School who work at an organizational level with the ADC staff. In this way, both students and programme participants benefit from the activities at the Centre and the engagement is deemed by all involved to be mutually beneficial.

The **Joza Youth Hub**, located centrally in Joza, is home to a collective of six NGOs working with young people in the area. These organisations include the **Village Scribe Association**, who run a small computer lab with assistance from the **CIAO project** and **Rhodes Journalism staff**; the **Raphael Centre's eye clinic**, in conjunction with **Davies Optometrists**; the **Joza Reading and Chess Club** for primary school children (twice a week); the **Upstart youth project**; and the **Access Music Project (AMP)**, which forms the 'anchor tenant' of the Hub.



The core programme of AMP is the offering of music studies to between 30 and 40 high school learners annually, with the aim of equipping them for a wide range of options within the music and creative arts industry. Learners are offered instrumental tuition in saxophone, trumpet, trombone, violin, cello, bass guitar, drum kit, voice or flute, as well as courses in sound technology and music theory. Together, they play

as an orchestra in local music events and at the National Arts Festival, engaging in a wide range of genres. In these activities they are assisted by staff from the International Library of African Music (ILAM) at Rhodes University, as well as teachers and professional musicians from the University and local private schools.

AMP also provides a foundational music programme to about 120 primary school learners through ensemble teaching for marimbas and drum kit, as well as one internship a year to a learner who has completed their music studies through the project. This consists of intensive training, mentoring, and the opportunity to partake in the production of shows and build up a network in the industry.

Project Director Gareth Walwyn - himself an ex-Rhodian - considers AMP "**an academic response to a social issue.**" Student volunteers from Rhodes (mostly Music students) act as teaching assistants in the foundational programme and the sound technology course, and also play in the AMP orchestra in order to boost and mentor the young learners.

RUCE provides organizational support to the Hub, and facilitates the rendering of certain services, such as the counselling sessions offered to learners from the area by Psychology Masters students. University staff members are also involved in general activities undertaken at the hub, such as providing leadership to Upstart, and organizing bandwidth and Internet connectivity through the Telkom Centre of Excellence in the Computer Science Department.

Cathy Gush



Photo: L.Feiter



Creating pathways of hope

The Vice Chancellor's Education Initiative aims to strengthen public schooling in Grahamstown. The initiative is an attempt at a more strategic, co-ordinated and cohesive approach to the issue of creating greater access to Rhodes for the historically disadvantaged young people of the town.

"The Vice Chancellor's Education Initiative was born out of a belief that the future of Rhodes is intimately bound up with the future of Grahamstown," says Diana Hornby, Director of Community Engagement at Rhodes.



Careful and detailed monitoring is a key element of the initiative. Programme managers stress the importance of measuring and assessing outcomes in order to determine the impact of the interventions, as well as establishing what adjustments need to be made. Already, the number of historically disadvantaged Grahamstown students enrolled at Rhodes has grown exponentially over the last five years.

The Initiative consists of a core set of projects, focussed on mentoring, tutoring, science education, school leadership. The flagship mentoring programme, entitled *9/10ths*, is aimed at Grade 12 learners and was inspired by the adage that successful education is nine-tenths mentoring and support. In 2018 there are 168 Grade 12s being mentored by Rhodes student volunteers in three historically disadvantaged local high schools. Selection of the student mentors already starts in November of the previous year and strict selection criteria are applied: students must have a good track record of volunteering and a written application and motivation is required.

The learner participants of *9/10ths* are provided with nine input sessions per semester on an individual basis. This includes planning and the setting of personal goals, analysing their exam results and working out what is needed in order to qualify for tertiary studies, as well as information on how to learn through the use of summaries and other tools. Detailed records are kept in order to track the individual progress of pupils and to facilitate a practice of reflection on the part of student mentors.



Almost every Bachelor pass produced at the three partner schools in 2017 was a learner from the *9/10ths* programme, while the number of Bachelor passes tripled from 16 to 52 in 2017. Of these learners, 26 are enrolled as fully-fledged first year students at Rhodes in 2018, while 7 are part of GADRA's Bridging Programme. As part of this bridging programme, the Rhodes University VC has facilitated a process whereby students on

the programme can do two school subjects (to improve their marks) and one University subject (Psychology), and can enter a full first year at Rhodes the following year if they pass.

As part of the initiative, the *Mobile Science Lab* is being operated with third-year B.Sc students who work with teachers to ensure that they are up to speed with the practical requirements of the high school syllabus. This constitutes a service-learning component for the students, but there are also students running Science Clubs on a voluntary basis.

Another major component of the initiative is the **High Impact Supplementary School (HISS)**, which runs annually before Grade 12 supplementary exams are written. HISS aims to give Matriculants who have not achieved the desired results, another chance at obtaining marks that will enable them to qualify for university entrance or other tertiary studies. Making use of excellent local teachers, as well as group work and self-study mechanisms, it is an intensive programme run over four weeks in five subject areas, in preparation for the supplementary examinations that are written in March.

While the initiatives have largely been directed at three particular schools - on the basis of leadership, commitment and the concomitant chance of success - the **Leadership Programme** being run by the Rhodes Business School is open to the principals and deputies of all Grahamstown schools. Westaway explains that this relates to key elements of the strategy-facilitating centres of excellence in under-resourced communities, while developing and supporting effective communities of practice across the schooling system. **"It's the government's job to get everyone through – our interventions have to be more targeted,"** said Dr Westaway.

Rhodes University students play an integral part of the initiative, and Hornby says she has been very encouraged by the level of involvement from Rhodes student volunteers. Dr Ashley Westaway, who heads up GADRA Education, one of the key partners in the initiative, says, **"students clamour to be on the programme,"** and he thinks it might be because Dr Mabizela talks about it at various fora on campus. Although the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Sizwe Mabizela, does not particularly want it to be known as 'his' initiative, those involved with the implementation of the initiative have no hesitation in attributing the success of the project to the strong, hands-on leadership he provides. According to Dr Westaway, **"the amazing thing about it is the scale of the operation – it's impressive. The University provides transport, and large numbers of students and pupils are involved on a weekly basis, which requires strong student leadership and good logistical input."**

The key focus now is towards the sustainability of the initiative. Dr Westaway is of the opinion that some of the work needs to be properly institutionalised into the University processes, through service-learning projects and bodies of research work that can be funded through the National Research Foundation. Dr Westaway also points out that it is all part of a bigger education movement in Grahamstown, which includes a range of NGOs: **"It's quite unique what we've been able to galvanise as a collective."**

Cathy Gush



Intsomi Ambassadors – spreading the word

The issue of children's literacy development in South Africa is of serious concern, given that South African children have performed very poorly with regard to literacy levels in international benchmark testing as well as in national assessments. Nearly 80% of children at Grade 4 level were unable to read for meaning, according to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) done in 2016. The study found that some of the factors contributing to these poor results were the lack of reading resources in homes, as well as the lack of strong home-school partnerships where parents took up the role of co-educators, or even primary educators at the preschool stage.



In light of this it was decided that, in addition to programmes aimed at supporting high school pupils, the Vice-Chancellor's Education Initiative should include an element of parental engagement with Rhodes workers. A parent support programme called the **Intsomi Project** was brought to life, consisting of workshops and resources for the parents of school-going children at various levels – from Early Childhood Development through to secondary school. Extra-mural learning opportunities are also provided to the children through projects such as the Khanya Maths and Science Club, which is run by the Chemistry Department. The Intsomi Project reflects the strategic intent of the initiative, which is to create strong communities of practice – parents forming a critical one of these.

In 2015, the Rhodes Community Engagement Office enlisted the help of **NEHAWU** to recruit parents for the support programme, and a group of 26 parents signed up. The parent participants chose the name Intsomi, to signify that they wanted to rekindle the practice of traditional storytelling in their homes.

The Intsomi Project essentially involves each parent getting a colourful shweshwe bag filled with six children's reading books every two weeks to take home and read with their children. These books were especially selected according to the age, ability and interests of the children. Care was taken to select books and stories that would be relevant and interesting for South African children, and home languages spoken by the participants was also taken into account. For the younger children, there would be more isiXhosa books and only a few English books, while for the older children there would be mostly English books.





As part of the reading programme, workshops were held for the parents on issues of children's literacy development and how they could support this at home, and parents were issued with word games to take home as additional resources. There was also input on issues such as establishing routines and where to find literacy resources in the media and online.

Out of the group of 26 parents, a representative group of seven parents were chosen to become part of a participatory action research process that would look at ways of spreading the home literacy practices to other homes in their communities, and so benefit more children. These parents became known as the Intsomi Ambassadors, and they became the co-learners of a Masters' student in Journalism and Media Studies.

The research explored how the principles and techniques of development support communication and those of communicative ecologies could be applied to explore, enhance and disseminate those qualitative changes in behaviour within households that positively affect children's literacy development. In the process, it aimed to explore whether media representations that reflect the stories of parents trying out new literacy practices can create authentic, endogenous messages that resonate with people in similar circumstances, and can stimulate debate around the issue.

The parent participants in the Intsomi Project came to realise that books in the home combined with adult encouragement adds up to keen readers. They have derived much pleasure out of their new home literacy practices, while at the same time getting to know their children better, and seeing better results from their children at school.



With support from the Rhodes Journalism School and senior students, the Intsomi Ambassadors participated in the making of posters, video clips and radio shows that told their literacy stories to targeted communities in Grahamstown. The group also started their own Facebook page – [Intsomi Parents Grahamstown](#) – and have a number of plans for the future with regard to literacy initiatives and activism in their areas.

And so, in Grahamstown East, some of the Intsomi parents from Rhodes University have started a quiet revolution – one that involves books, stories and children. These are not extra-ordinary people. They are mothers and fathers along with the rest of their community, but they have committed to one thing – reading with their children every day, and they are so convinced of the value of what they have been doing, that they want to tell others about it.

The Intsomi Project has grown to include over a 100 parents at Rhodes, but the effects are likely to be felt even wider in the communities where they are residing.

Cathy Gush

Looking to the future

At times during the past year one may have been excused for thinking that the Rhodes University campus had been taken over by school pupils. This was quite intentional. In an attempt to make Rhodes an accessible place for bright young minds, the University embarked on a number of initiatives to expose high school pupils to exactly what is on offer, while in the process involving a large number of students, academic and support staff.

Dr Joyce Sewry of the Chemistry Department and Ms Kim Weaver, responsible for Community Engagement in the Science Faculty, have run an annual Science Open Day since 2016, with attendance of between 300 and 400 learners. This involves staff and about 200 volunteer students from all the Departments in the Science and Pharmacy Faculties.

Grade 9 learners are invited from all the schools in Grahamstown and the surrounding districts, with the specific intention of fostering an interest in the sciences and influencing their subject choices. *The event is made possible through a partnership with bodies such as the SA Academy of Science and Technology Advancement, the SA Institute of Aquatic Biodiversity, the Dept. of Basic Education, and local newspaper Grocott's Mail.*

Each of the 21 Departments in the two faculties, as well as the Albany Museum and the Amakhala Foundation, are invited to present a workshop, a talk or an activity. In addition, the Careers Centre at Rhodes offers a talk on subject choices. A range of venues around the campus are utilized, and this also helps to expose the learners to all the different disciplines and fields within Science.

The Science Open Day is designed to coincide with the Eskom Expo, with Science Faculty students helping to prepare learners at historically disadvantaged schools for participation. Some 22 Postgraduate Science and Pharmacy students act as mentors and spend one afternoon a week from March to August with two to four learners each at one of five local high schools. Computer facilities on campus are made available for processing results, printing, etc. The aim of this exercise is to foster rigorous scientific enquiry and encourage an excitement about Science, especially in schools that are poorly equipped for these activities. In 2017, two learners went on to the National Science Expo and one obtained a bursary for further study.

A further initiative designed to draw in potential young scientists, is the Science Internship Programme. This is a three-week programme for Grade 10 and 11 learners, who are selected on the basis of their Life Sciences marks and a written motivation. One staff member in each Department takes responsibility for the interns, and they shadow various postgraduate or staff researchers.





The coordinators feel that these programmes provide an important opportunity for the University to share its human and knowledge resources, and for making Rhodes and Science accessible to everyone. In turn, it provides an opportunity for Rhodes students to go to schools and work on their science communication and demonstration skills. Although it largely operates through volunteers at the moment, they are of the opinion that there is scope for service-learning as well.

Inspired by the success of the Science Faculty's Open Day, the Dean of Commerce, Professor Dave Sewry, decided that the Commerce Faculty should take the lead and arrange an event that would speak to all potential new students in the field. Professor Sewry felt strongly that it should be Rhodes taking the first step, because "how else will learners know about it?" By way of illustration, he related an anecdote of years gone by when he was in junior school and a Professor of Physics, Jack Gledhill, came to visit and sat on the floor with them and said, "Let me tell you what is exciting about my work at the university."



Invitations were extended to high schools in Grahamstown, Port Alfred, Queenstown and East London to send between 10 and 15 pupils for a day of interaction with members of staff from all the different Faculties on campus. Professor Sewry was determined that the Rhodes campus should be dressed and ready for the occasion, looking its best and that learners should experience a real slice of "University life". For this reason, the event was held on a week-day and the participants had lunch in one of the residences. The day started with a short welcoming address by the Vice-Chancellor, Dr Sizwe Mabizela, after which the learners watched a four-minute video about the spirit of Rhodes and were then addressed by the Deans of the various Faculties. After tea, learners split into breakaway sessions, according to their preferences, and a range of interesting activities were laid on for the smaller groups.

A competition was run prior to the day, in which learners had to write an essay about what they would do if given a grant of R10 million. The winner of this competition was announced during the plenary session, and received book prizes sponsored by the GBS Mutual Bank.

Professor Sewry believes that the success of the event was due to its targeted nature and not just having whole classes or large groups visiting. Plans are afoot to make this an annual occurrence.



Cathy Gush



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