'STOPPING THE BUS?'[1]

Community-School-University Partnership Symposium

A Summary Report

Cape Town | 14 & 15 March 2018

Schools Improvement Initiative (SII)
Centre for the Community School (CCS)

The University of Cape Town (UCT)

by Daniel Hartford

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[1] The phrase, 'Stop the Bus,' became a common refrain over the course of the two-day symposium with the 'bus,' an analogy for the education system, and the question of how to fix it (stop/slow/repair-in-motion/etc.) the subject of much debate.

BACKGROUND:
In 2013 NMU hosted a visit involving UCT SII and SDU staff members. This created an opportunity for constructive engagement between education faculty members from both institutions as well as CCS staff, principals and teachers involved in the Manyano project[2]. This conversation continued during discussions at SAERA in 2017 where it was agreed that a follow-up meeting would be valuable to continue the discussions that were started and to critically reflect on some of the issues that were raised both during the conference sessions and in informal conversations. It was agreed that in order to continue this conversation, the building of an alternative symposium culture that is inclusive and dialogical, and that opens the space to all voices in ways that encourage the sharing of ideas and deepens our collective understanding is paramount. The Community-School-University Partnership Symposium held over the 14th and 15th of March, 2018 is the result of this collective commitment and has provided a participatory and interactive forum for critical engagement and the sharing of experiences from multiple stakeholders in their respective university-school-community partnerships.

AIMS
The symposium sought to address key questions:
- Why have we established partnerships with schools, to what end(s) and for what purpose(s)?
- What are the various research methodologies we employ/intend employing in our work?
- How does our work contribute to the broader project of engaged scholarship at our respective universities?
- How can we extend our thinking about decolonising approaches to university-school-community partnerships?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
From the start, the symposium welcomed (and generated) an honest, critical, complex and *messy* reflection on key challenges at the centre of community-school-university partnerships. This conversation grew to recognise the imperative to critique, deconstruct and rethink not only the existing education landscape but also to review, with urgency, the *purpose* of education within the persistent and profound inequalities in South African society.

In this sense the conversation occurred at various levels. These included situating symposium participants' collective work within the broader societal contradictions, and in terms of the asymmetrical power imbalances between stakeholders. Within respective school partnerships, stakeholders broadly saw the value that has emerged through collaboration, the sharing of knowledge in a community of practice, the co-production and co-ownership of research, and support amongst and between partners.

Participants, acutely aware of the responsibility to contribute meaningfully towards addressing systemic educational crises, grappled with how the partnerships and the work could do this. As a result, the discussion that developed over the course of two days formed a critical interrogation of existing practices and partnerships, and opened the space for examining the nature of partnerships going forward.

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[2] Self-organizing network of 14 schools in the Nelson Mandela Bay, support by the Centre for the Community School.

Key Findings

- There was no consensus on what a 'community school' *is*.
  - In time, a 'community school' should be identifiable by its *purpose*.
- More than collaboration and support, partnerships have the potential to be spaces of critical reflection, solidarity and empowerment.
  - 'reciprocity', 'mutuality' & 'tolerance' are considered to be inappropriate words in the context of partnering across inequality and enduring socio-historical divisions.
- It is important to challenge societal notion of 'success' at school – academic achievement alone is not enough.
- Programmes must target all students, not a select few.
- The tendency of universities and the Education Department to work in silos places strain on other partners.
- Partnerships should be expanded to include more stakeholders.
- When partners' intentions change, it is important to communicate those changes.
- There is fatigue with constant reflection without significant action – it is agreed that we need to do both.
- The role of the partnerships is to agitate for change – with universities forwarding a decolonial "new paradigm" agenda, lobbying national government and supporting communities and schools in co-constructing research.

OVERVIEW – DAY 1

Welcome
Prof Mamokgethi Phakeng | UCT, DVC

> *"Our jobs are jobs of privilege; the privilege to tell others what they don't know."*

UCT's incoming Vice Chancellor Professor Mamokgethi Phakeng opened the symposium, welcoming Eastern Cape colleagues to UCT. She congratulated SII for winning UCT's 2017 Social Responsiveness Award and reiterated the value of the initiative's work as being "of critical importance to our country, our continent and our world." After recognising the crisis in education as a problem that must be addressed, Professor Phakeng then put to the group: "the only challenge you have, is how you are attending to that problem?"

In this she identified a problematic trend that has characterised partnerships between university 'experts' and school teachers. Through scholarship, and Monitoring and Evaluation reports the message that "our teachers are not able," is consistently emphasised in the public domain in a manner that affirms the expertise of the expert and reiterates teachers' failings. It is this, stressed Prof Phakeng, that is unequal in partnerships between schools, communities and universities. She explained that if we say that "'it is community in school and school in community' […] what that means is that we are them and they are us". Continuing, she emphasised that in seriously incorporating this ethos into our work and committing ourselves to equitable partnerships, "the way we work with them [community] should say that too."

Prof Phakeng ended by challenging symposium participants to robustly interrogate this relationship and ask difficult questions of themselves and each other within their respective partnerships over the next 2 days. Acknowledging that it takes a lot for teachers to allow the university into their space and practice, she asked that participants reflect on this. When these spaces are opened up to experts, "what do we do once we are in there with what we get out of that?" And moreover, "how do I make my being there […] much more valued?" Concluding, Prof Phakeng reiterated the

challenge: "so I hope that 'school in community and community in school' also means 'what do we do with what we know when we get there'."

Overview of the Three Projects: CCS, SII & SDU's UCT-in-Eden

CCS _ Bruce Damons
"If you are sitting here and you are comfortable, then you have to panic."

Before introducing the CCS, Bruce began his presentation by welcoming the critical and unapologetic engagement with the centre's work and philosophy. He located the CCS within NMU, under the 'School for Education Research and Engagement' which is based on the Missionvale Campus, where it neighbours the surrounding informal settlements. Bruce continued to sketch the centre's sustaining philosophy as one that recognises education: as a public good; as comprising not only of the formal, but also the integration of informal and non-formal forms of education; as being the responsibility of all, "from the Gogo in a shack looking after 8 children to the professor who has a parking bay…at the university". While broadly, CCS staff are committed to improving education so that "*all* learners can achieve, rather than a select group," Bruce explained that the ideological and practical realisation of this outcome is contested within CCS and that between colleagues there are disagreements which emerge through robust and critical dialogue.

Bruce further outlined CCS's attitude towards school partnerships:
- "Teaching and learning should be organic, co-constructed and multifaceted."
- Knowledge is not confined to universities only – teachers, principals and parents are the co-constructors of this knowledge.
- "We believe that everything that emerges from our social engagement should suit everyone" – schools, universities and communities.
- Informed by the socio-political-historical context of South Africa, CCS aims to work with schools that reflect the injustices and inequalities of this past.
- CCS is mindful of developing generic, one-size-fits-all programmes – it is the "co-construction of knowledge" of a *particular* partnership in a *particular* context that must inform what it is done.
- "We are mindful of power" and of the importance of undermining the perception that universities are the seat of power and everyone else has no knowledge to contribute.
- Co-creating scholarship is central to CCS's work. Empowering communities/schools to create their own documents and asking 'how can we help you?'

SII _ Jon Clark
"You've got to see the school as part of the community and the community as part of the school."

Jon opened by locating the SII within the School of Education at UCT, under the Schools Development Unit. He noted that unlike staff in the CCS, the SII does not face the same pressures around scholarship and a constant need to publish. Continuing, Jon described the work of the SII as being a real commitment to the sometimes weary concepts of "'partnerships' – easily said; [and] 'collaboration' – easily spoken about." Being mindful of power dynamics between the university and schools has been particularly challenging in this regard, especially in a context where apartheid's spatial legacy geographically mimics this divide in Cape Town. In this sense, the approach underpinning the work of the SII's school partnerships "is about working together, and it's about trying to find a way between schools and universities – mindful of all the power dynamics – of how we can actually have some kind of relationship where we are helping each other".

Going on to outline the SII's main focus, Jon explained that "it's all about learning […] the focus is ultimately on the classroom." To this end the SII is involved in a range of programmes that address

teacher professional and school organisational development within their school partnerships. In addition, Jon highlighted some of the unique attributes that distinguish the SII's work:

- A close working relationship with the Metropole East Education District (MEED) has proven invaluable.
- Needs addressed by the SII are "school identified".
- The "principal's communities of practice" has been particularly effective – empowering partner school principals through shared experience.
- Service-learning through student volunteers and staff engaged scholarship in "professional practice schools" has seen PGCE, OT and social development students placed in partner schools – benefiting both schools and practice.
- Establishing wellness centres, setting up school libraries and supporting library assistants.

Jon concluded highlighting the successes of the 100Up programme which supported 254 students in 2017 with a university enrolment rate of 88%. He clarified that while the 100Up programme is an important aspect of the SII's work, it is the shorter, outreach component of their activities. The *real* work, as Jon described it, is in the longer-term, sustained relations and a "commitment to collaboration which isn't a rhetorical commitment; we really do believe it."

SDU_*Anthea Roberts*

"Respect is something that has to be foremost in our minds all the time because you don't want to impose values on people when they are not the values people want."

Anthea introduced the UCT-in-Eden schools project as targeting the rural/semi-rural/peri-urban context around three towns in the Eden Karoo Municipality: George, Knysna and Oudtshoorn. She described the complexity of this environment where places of extreme natural beauty are juxtaposed with the harsh realities of informal settlements and poverty. This complexity is intensified by divisions within communities that are split along the lines of language and race and is complicated further by a strong sense of rural-based identity which manifests in a wariness of urban people who hold divergent agendas and values. It is for this reason that Anthea emphasises the need for sensitivity and respect in the SDU's engagement with communities and schools. Much of the SDU's work in this environment is about navigating the complex divisions and maintaining strong community relations.

Unique attributes and challenges of the UCT-in-Eden programme outlined by Anthea include:

- Links with health sciences and the involvement of medical interns in SDU schools.
- Like the SII, the SDU enjoys a strong working relationship with the District.
- "There's this intense dependence on the community, on people in the community" in order for the programme to run successfully.
- Communication is a big challenge as many teachers don't use email.
- The Design School at UCT is involved in supporting research at SDU partner schools.
- SDU runs a 'microcosm' of the 100Up programme where "kids with potential" are selected.
- The SDU hosts an annual teacher seminar where teachers gather to share and collaborate as well as a Maths, Science and Language competition for learners.

Plenary

Participants were split into four groups with each group – as much as possible – having a representative of the respective partners: principals, university staff, community volunteers, district officials, students and NGOs. Groups were asked to reflect on two questions before reporting back in plenary.

There was broad consensus amongst groups in identifying the core value of partnerships: mutual learning and the sharing of professional practice (amongst and between schools and universities); support provided to principles through a community of practice with other principles and university staff; alleviation of pressure in Human Resources at the District level and guiding the District on how/where to focus their efforts; the provision of safe spaces for critical thinking and rethinking practice; improvement of learning as well as learner wellbeing, health and safety; the benefiting of school learners and university students through changes in the practice of university students in their engagement in schools.

Additional values mentioned by groups were:
- In some instance, teachers felt encouraged to improve their qualifications.
- The perception of knowledge – where knowledge is from and who produces it – has changed.
- Improved leadership in schools.
- Social workers recognised holistic learner wellbeing through working with learners, teachers and parents.
- Site coordinators recognised improved student interest in extra-curricular activities.

'What is the potential value of the partnerships going forward?
In envisioning the value of future partnerships, groups frequently mentioned the words 'deconstruct', 'rethink', 'change', 'challenge' and 'expand'. In particular, groups recognised the need to: come up with "a new paradigm" around how schools are receiving support from partners; improve synergy between and amongst partners (and their internal departments); strengthen inter-sectoral collaboration and challenge the tendency of departments to work in silos; challenge the DOE and think outside of the existing policy framework; challenge the curriculum; expand partnerships to include more stakeholders.

Additional proposals included:
- Encouraging teachers to critically reflect on curriculum and policy.
- Replicate successes across schools.
- Challenge 'the language issue' at universities.
- Motivate more schools to join/develop partnerships.
- Better empower communities.
- "Think beyond university outcomes and build in community-orientated programmes."
- Scale up and better capacitate social work across sites.

Understanding the Concept of the Community School – Rethinking School Partnerships in the South African Context

Neziswa_ *Community School Volunteer*
"A community school is a home in a school, and a school in a home."

Neziswa's presentation described the strength of a school where the community is part of the school and the benefit this has had for teachers, school safety and social workers. She described how before community members volunteered at the school, the teachers that "come from over there," would drive around the community when a child got sick, looking for that child's home. Now, because the volunteers know which neighbours are the child's parents, they escort the child home, and in so doing, take a load off teachers' shoulders. This partnership has also seen great improvements in safety at the school. Where other schools in the area have issues with young gangsters and break-ins, Neziswa's school, Sapphire Road Primary, does not have the same problems. Gangsters are known to the community and when the community *is* the school, the

gangsters do not enter the school grounds. In the evenings, the school is also protected by elderly people who neighbour the school, who sometimes patrol in the early hours of the morning. Lastly, community volunteers' knowledge of children's home life has provided social workers with valuable contextual information in supporting learners.

Tarsisio_*University Staff*

"The donkey is not going to speak because if it tries to speak, it will get a whack."

Tarsisio's presentation added complexity to the idea of school-university-community partnerships and encouraged the group to critically reflect on their practice of partnering. He asked questions of the concepts of 'community' and 'partnerships' and challenged the group to interrogate assumptions that such 'partnerships' are mutually beneficial and an inalienable good. He asked whether we are describing 'community' or 'communities' and 'partnership' or 'partnerships', stressing that "there are different strands and layers of communities." Describing the South African context as divided by race, gender and extreme wealth and deprivation, Tarsisio asserted that "the nature of the partnership that is going to emerge, will be invariably determined by these dynamics – "we cannot run away from that." It is in this context that he encouraged a reflection on the historical and ethical implications of partnering saying that the questions we must ask are: "how fair is it?", "how just is it?", "which partnership?", "whose partnership?" Invoking the image of an overloaded donkey as a metaphor for the community carrying the material, social and psychological injustices of the past, Tarsisio said, "are universities not riding on communities – which are donkeys, which are already overloaded with excessive baggage – and yet we say we are traveling with them."

Nadeema_*CCS*

"If we are not looking at our partnerships critically we run the risk of perpetuating the very problems we are trying to dismantle."

Nadeema echoed Tarsisio's emphasis on complexity and positionality and introduced the imperative for 'critical justice' to the notion of school-community-university partnerships. She explained that posing questions of "for whose interests" and "why" to the idea of partnership is vital to dismantling power dynamics and undermining the continuation of historical injustices. If, by describing partnerships for a better education as a 'public good', she asked how it is possible to attain this 'public good' without maintaining the current – unjust – status quo and without reinforcing hierarchies of oppression. With this in mind, Nadeema spoke of the need to re-orientate justice as a public good and pursue a commitment to 'critical justice' that recognises "equity over equality, empowerment not charity." Motivating for increased activism, Nadeema said it is not enough to say "how do we make this a little bit better," and urged participants to be bold in saying, "this is not working, let's change it". She concluded by posing a challenge to the group. Asserting the need to "build those areas where we are not critical in our work," Nadeema asked participants to reflect on the question of "how do we build criticality in our work?"

Plenary
As before, participants returned to their respective groups and addressed two questions before reporting back in plenary.

What is your understanding of the Community School?
Groups agreed that no two schools and no two communities are the same and thus, a 'community school' is unique in every context, and impossible to define. This was captured in the idea that "a learner is in a class, which is in a school, which is in a community." Despite agreeing that there is no clear definition of a 'community school', groups broadly supported the overlapping characteristics and values that a community school should have: Neziswe provided an analogy, describing 'the community' as a hall, and 'the school' as a feeling of safety within the hall; others commented that 'a community school' should include all schools in the community; another group described "an

open institution where other stakeholders are welcomed and play a particular role"; another group described the school as the very centre of a community, more so than people's homes or religious institutions; and lastly, the community school was explained as a notion of belonging, involvement and collective ownership that is expressed by the community towards the school in that community. In addition to these descriptions, there were also calls to deconstruct assumptions about the community school which were well received by the group:

- The deficit assumption that a 'community school' is a black school in a township is wrong.
- There is no generalizable 'checklist' for the community school.
- The 'community school' is not limited to the community as students travel from other areas/communities to attend that school.
- What role does the school play in building a more cohesive society?
- "You don't have to have a child to be a parent" – this idea was raised to emphasise the importance of empowering parents in the community through the school.

What do you think should be the university's role in supporting the Community Schools?
Groups criticised universities for "standing on the side until they are requested to help," and for having "dominion over the pie" in their partnerships with other stakeholders. One group said that until there is agreement on the definition of 'a community school', it is not clear what the role of the university should be. The role of the university as an agitator and change maker in disrupting existing practice was identified as a being a leading role for universities to play within partnerships. In becoming equal, value-adding and *disruptive* partners, universities were encouraged to:

- Co-construct knowledge with humility. The university can take a leading role in generating and creating new knowledge but they must recognise where that knowledge is from.
- Start with the needs of the school when engaging.
- Understand their own university community, and the internal departments and silos first.
- Use their leverage as big institutions to challenge government.
- Lobby government to bridge the disconnect between tertiary, secondary and primary levels.
- Move away from the mind-set of associating 'the community' with poverty.
- Educate teachers about peer-support programmes, first aid and psycho-social support.
- Assist in those schools that have teachers that only teach certain subjects. The focus on subjects that are not taught will provide students with more opportunities for tertiary study.
- Communicate with all stakeholders through university governing bodies.

Reflections on the Day
"We don't know what a community school is yet." This was a key reflection emerging from the day which opened up a series of broader questions about what should be at the centre of the 'the community school' and ultimately, what the purpose and intent of the education project is? The discussion that followed addressed these two themes:

The Centre of the Community School | *"Can we afford NOT to centre the child?"*
Nadeema and Tarsisio described the problem of a fixed centre at the middle of 'a community school'. Asking if it is the "centre of the periphery or the periphery of the centre?", they depicted the multi-layered complexity of the space, suggesting an "ebbing in and ebbing out" of different permutations and combinations of partnerships that reflect the centre. But even in this complex, multi-layered and shifting analogy, the question was asked about what is foregrounded in the partnership and what is pulled back and lost from sight? Jerome proposed a definition that has to centre the child and asked, "can we be bold enough to say that if the learner is not at the centre, then who else?" Jon supported this notion saying "schools exist because learners come to school," and Camila reminded the group of the home context and complexity of each child saying that in

centring the child, "we shouldn't discard what comes with the child." Patti, while agreeing that "the child is at the centre," asked if there is a way to accommodate both the centring of the child and a more complex understanding of the centre through the varied intersections of partnerships that support the learner in a community school.

<u>Stopping the Bus</u> | *"What are we actually doing with the education project?"*
In response, and initiating a broader discussion about the purpose and "the concept of school and schooling," Bruce said, "we are holding a child at the centre, but for what purpose?" "What are we saying when we boast about the 5 kids that make it to tertiary education – what about the 95%?". The idea that schools should be preparing students for tertiary education was dismissed as a misnomer as universities are full and "we are preparing graduates for a life without jobs." Nonceba reiterated this assessment of the purpose of education saying that a focus on academic results alone does a disservice to the learner in the current context: "So you get an A, and then what?" Jon agreed, pointing out the damage done by the colonial construct that is "a preoccupation with tertiary education that drives the whole system." Nadeema also emphasised this point, warning against perpetuating cycles of disadvantage through the current education system and asking how education becomes relevant to the communities that learners graduate into? Tarsisio encouraged an emphasis on recognising and building responsible citizenry amongst students. Nadeen too challenged what "society sees as success in education", criticising the absence of a broader purpose in matric results and university degrees. Taking up Jerome's challenge Nadeen asserted "yes we can be bold" in centring the learner. She suggested that in holding the complexity, multiple partnerships and the child at the centre, "every single thing that we do, [in] every single partnership, we must ask: 'will the learner benefit?'"

Trevor presented a vision of 'a community school' that challenged the current interpretation. Imagining a school as a centre for organisation, a place of learning uninhibited by a timetable where the learner is not only the child but anyone seeking education. In this sense, the 'community school' is one in which the school addresses the needs of the community in which it is located. In challenging the existing paradigm and overhauling the curriculum, Trevor said, **"we need to stop the bus."** Responding to this, Bruce encouraged the move past idealism and towards pragmatism and towards "bringing the new," echoing the warning of the youth who say, "if you don't start thinking, we will think over you."

OVERVIEW – DAY 2

A Critique of the University-School-Community Literature

Patti_*SII*

> *"If 'mutuality' and 'reciprocity' serve to mask the social dynamics, it means that these words are silencing some voices and empowering others."*

Patti began day two, presenting and problematizing the danger of uncritically adopting the taken-for-granted words that are used in partnerships, and the power of these words in unequal contexts. Importing the Western, US-based model into the South African context, has seen the words 'reciprocity' and 'mutuality' emphasised in the context of school partnerships. Yet, as Patti explained, the assumptions that underpin the use of these words in America cannot be extended to the South African context of partnership between UCT and a school in Khayelitsha. By assuming a level of 'sameness' or an equivalence between partners, the words assume that the value and the 'product' of partnership are the same, and in so doing, neglect to account for the differences and divisions that form the context of partnership. In recognising the blind spots that such words

construct, Patti asked, "what are the language shifts we can make, to describe our work differently?" and, "what does it mean to authentically partner across contexts of difference?" Proposing an answer to this, she underscored the importance of placing value on words like 'solidarity' rather than 'reciprocity'. In this way, it is possible to recognise the structural inequalities and inherent differences that exist between partners, removing expectations of sameness, allowing for the collective empowerment of all and establishing authentic partnerships that are committed to social justice and transformation.

Nombulelo_*Principal*

"Universities cannot see themselves as separate entities, because you <u>are</u> in the community, and therefore it means you must do something within the community you are in."

Nombulelo began her presentation outlining the context of her school, where 80% of parents in the surrounding township are unemployed and hope has gone: "If on the news there is rape, that raped child is in a school; if we are talking about domestic violence, that child is in a school – all the ills of society are in the school." It is in this context that universities seek partnerships that are often insensitive to the school and community. Nombulelo expressed how "universities need to acknowledge that circumstances and context are not a one-size-fits-all," describing the tendency of universities to arrive with pre-conceived ideals, prescribing documents and time-frames that are not co-constructed and treating schools as if they are "just guinea-pigs" for research. This leaves a feeling of resentment within schools, especially when that research is not shared. She described a sense that universities are sometimes "showcasing" when they come to schools with funders to have their partnership glorified, "rather than focussing on meaningful interactions and relations." Nombulelo asked that different university departments communicate amongst themselves to avoid the repetition and conflicts of interest that result from operating in silos. She asked that universities stop choosing the elite few students to work with, saying that programmes must target all. Nombulelo concluded by affirming her commitment to working in partnerships that have lifted some weight from her shoulders, describing the value that universities bring through knowledge and expertise, but emphasising that "we need to find each other, we need to find common space."

Camila_*Teacher*

"Do we realise that in working together, we become part of each other's communities?"

Camila began her presentation with an example of an unequal university-school partnership. She described a literacy peer-programme that was run in partnership with a university, where, only after the programme was completed did it emerge that a partner at the university had been completing a PhD. In response she asked, "how do we work in collaboration if the one partner doesn't know what the other partner is expecting or bringing?" Camila proceeded to emphasise the importance of intentionality in our work, questioning "why are we doing this work?" She encouraged university partners to interrogate whether their intentions have changed over time from when they first entered schools to where they are now. Camila then asked participants to reflect on their roles within school-community-university partnerships: "are we as separate entities really engaging with our communities?" "Do we know who our communities are?" "Do we understand the power that we have within our own spaces?" She proceeded to ask questions of the practical outcomes of university partnerships, asking of the SII, "how are you using your students to put back into the community?" Addressing CCS, she said, "how are you making sure that whatever you are putting in there is going to be sustained?" How will the learners cope if a person is taken away? Are there people in the university that can take over [your roles]?"

Jabu_*CCS*
"I think the secret in order for us to engage properly with our communities [is], we need to shut up."

Jabu started by framing his presentation from the perspective of a community member and university employee. He described how in his community, when referring to heaven, "you are not allowed to point your finger upwards." The same fear, Jabu says, is true when referring to universities: "this space is scary for our people." The division between the university and the community is not strengthened through the university's actions. Jabu expressed his concern over the distrust and disrespect shown by the university towards the very community it claims to want to partner with for the better. When community protests occur, the university sends him an SMS to say it is not safe to come to work, implying that members of his community "are animals." It is this division and tension that excludes the very voices of those that the conversation is about: "There is a child who stays in those shacks, where is that child here? They are not here. Do we hear that voice? It is absent."

Discussion

Nadeema responds to Patti's presentation saying that "the ability to name our world gives us control." She says that academics are bullies with words and ideas and that they must stop wanting to define something and let go when they go into schools and communities.

Janis, speaking from a leadership and management perspective, said that there is a very strong lack of learner voice in what we do. She asked, "how much are our communities the researchers and how much are our communities the scholars? – because they know."

Nadeen first responded to the idea of intentions changing, saying that certainly they have changed but what is missing is the transparency around shifts in intention that is not being communicated. When intentions shift for the university, that must be communicated to the school and community. Second, Nadeen echoed the challenge of working in silos as being a problem that she has encountered with MEED. She asked why MEED cannot work collaboratively?

In response to Camila's question, "are universities doing enough to ensure their programmes are sustainable," **Bruce** replied "No, we are not doing enough." He said that while they do not have the answers, they are prepared to 'shut up', let go of certainty, and sit with everyone and listen. "We are friends; it doesn't make us enemies to ask tough questions."

In response to the same challenge from Camila, **Jon** describes the degree of humility he has learnt in working with partners. Intentionality, he agrees, should be challenged but he also recognises the horrible 'perception problem' that UCT has which leads to assumptions about the intentions of the SII.

Anthea described the *messiness* of the space and encouraged digging deeper, past amorphous descriptions of the community, to recognise more stakeholders in the communities within communities as well as in government.

<u>What are the various research methodologies we employ/intend employing in our work?</u>

Jerome_*Principal*
"Start with the end in mind: what do we want to achieve with our partnership?"

Jerome started by noting the overlapping themes that were emerging through the seminar. Describing the core function of the university as 'community engagement.' He went on to recap what research, and particularly 'qualitative participatory active research', should look like in schools:

- Practical problem solving.
- Collaboration.
- Reflective process.
- The need to analysis the data with partners in the places where that data was collected.
- Community should be centred in the schools.
- Results must benefit the community and research must be conducted ethically and in a mutually acceptable framework.

Flagging tensions to guard against, Jerome reiterated the danger of power imbalances in partnership and recognised that in all research there is an agenda. He asked "whose agenda is being driven more?" and whether this agenda reflected the needs of the individual or the needs of society. Calling for the simplifying of over-complicated language, Jerome described how, "we are struggling to implement something that we all seemingly understand." He closed by emphasising the need to cut out the language and work backwards from a simple question: "what do we want to achieve?"

Discussion

Bruce liked the idea of beginning with the end in mind but recognised that 'the end' can also emerge through process. In this he advocates for welcoming the "*messiness*" of the process, as it is the space in which the best lessons are learned. Going further Bruce said, "we mustn't be apologetic about a deliberateness of a social justice solidarity way of working with one another."

Janis agreed, noting that it was new that schools were critiquing universities in this way and supporting the creation of space between partners to "rest in uncertainty."

Nadeema built on this saying academics should redefine what powerful research is by offering support to the students, teachers and community members who are "the real researchers in communities."

Nombulelo described the research that informed decisions at her school reiterating the call to universities to play a supporting role in the production of existing knowledge.

How can de-colonial perspectives extend our thinking about university-school-community partnerships?

Antithesis
by Bukelwa Kumalo

Good evening, my name is Colonial Perspective.
I am right, you are wrong. It's scientifically proven.
Research! My favourite word, another euphemism for "not doing anything"
Now how about a description?
I am theory: "the act of saturating 21st century curriculums with knowledge from 1957.
I am known by many names, Violence aka Dompas aka Caledon Code
Give me all your problems, I will do my best to write you a 30 page article that does not solve any of them and if I really wanna be fancy I do it in a book chapter.
So globalize me...

Good afternoon, I believe I came just in time.
My name is Decolonial Perspective
Let's begin by exchanging I for we because
We're all about
Collaboration
Equal participation

Action
Reflection, and all the other "tions" that exist given they base themselves on inclusion rather than exclusion.
Work with us, not for us...
Talk with us, not at us..
Soon you shall discover that we actually have the solutions to our problems
Our lived experiences are our theoretical frameworks
Umntu ngumntu ngabantu
Ndingayitsho ngeSintu xa ndithanda
Ulwimi lwam lwamkelekile

Our voices are open,
our minds are critical,
our hands and feet are ready to work...

So tell coloniality to move out of the way.

Discussion

Keith likened the depiction of the university to Jabu's input where the university's role in relation to the community is seen as a philanthropic gesture, rather than as an equal partner.

Nadeen reflected on Bukelwa's poem saying that the challenge is not only for the colonialists to change but is just "as much to the disempowered as to the empowered" to change.

Nadeema spoke of the need to deal with consciousness in the groups' work and advocated for a "shift to critical justice orientated work" which addresses people's intentions and actions.

Tarsisio_*University Staff*

"'Tolerance' – a liberal and [..] charitable term, but pretty much mischievous."

Responding to the question, "why do we want to look at decolonial perspectives?" Tarsisio sketched the context of settler-colonial rule in South Africa which propped up white supremacy and privilege, limited opportunities and marginalised and silenced the voices of those consider to be 'other'. It is important to understand then, he said, that any talk of 'partnerships' is built on this unequal basis. Tarsisio continued to ask how decolonial perspectives relate to university-school-community partnerships, and emphasised how it is not a coincidence that power imbalances in current day university partnerships conform to the same imbalances and divisions that were manufactured by the colonialists. In the decolonisation of education broadly, he proposed:
- Recognising the deficits in cognitive education and "challenging the knowledge parochialism created by the Eurocentric western paradigm of knowledge."
- Inclusive participation of previously excluded groups.
- "Recognising the authenticity and richness of non-western epistemological frameworks."

Moreover, in deconstructing coloniality in existing partnerships, Tarsisio highlighted the compelling "moral imperative" to challenge colonial names, symbols, iconography and language that perpetuate exclusivist, white and privileged ways of thinking and knowledge production. In closing Tarsisio raised the importance of distinguishing between 'decolonising' and 'Africanising', saying that "knowledge based on African values and traditions should be placed alongside other contexts." Lastly, in deconstructing the enduring colonial infrastructure, he said that what is essential, "is to recognise the experiences of colonisation as not being simple and singular."

Discussion
Keith asked how much are we (as the department) still colonised in the ways we show respect, wear uniforms etc.? And, "are our communities ready to be decolonised?"

Janis mentioned the reflective process in partnerships and asked, "do we ever hear somebody telling us to stop doing what we're doing because it's rubbish – we don't."

Jerome spoke of the need to have both parties, more than just the university, ready to decolonise.

What are the implications of community involvement and student service-learning or professional practice for university-school-community partnerships?

University students, community workers, teachers and principals from the Eastern Cape and the Western Cape reflected on the above question. The themes emerging from their presentation are represented by province.

Eastern Cape

Nomonde, a teacher, was grateful for the role that social work students have played at her school. The relationship benefits the teacher – taking a weight off their shoulders; the university student – improving their practice through experiential and practical learning; the school learner – who benefits from the pyscho-social support; and the community at large.

Nombulelo, a principal, echoed this impact but challenged the university to improve the calibre of students that they send to schools – many of whom are lacking in basic administrative skills. She also raised the issue of ethics and confidentiality saying that while the support provided by social work students was valuable for the 6 months they attend the school, when they left, the information about the children they have been working with leaves with them. This makes it difficult for Nombulelo to continue supporting the child.

Bukelwa, a student teacher, described the humbling and challenging experience of working on and revising a safety and security document in community until it was eventually accepted when the community said, "our ideas are represented here." In this, she was required to be more than a teacher and saw how schools become places not just for education but to tackle broader community concerns. She expressed frustration about the lack of support offered to student teachers by the university and underlined the need for student teachers to be trained in first aid, additional languages, inclusive education and teacher wellness. She critiqued the university curriculum which inadequately prepares student teachers for a "fairy land," when the actual experience of working in schools is very different.

Nomthandazo, a student teacher, described her experience of starting a reading club at her school and the challenges that come when working in classes with 50 – 60 students. Through the assistance of parents, she was able to manage the large classes but this has also presented challenges as many of the parents are unable to read and write in English. Nomthandazo spoke of the need to bring more parents into the conversation by educating them and empowering them in their volunteer roles.

Taffie, a site coordinator, described the challenge of re-energising a run-down rural school with very little resources. With the help of community volunteers, she was able to fix her classroom, run reading programmes and start the *"'Diamonds in the Rough Club' ~ with just a little polishing we will sparkle even under the night skies*." Taffie explained how she supported volunteers from her own pocket which she can no longer afford to do. With more support from the university, the 4 core volunteers could be remunerated on an ongoing basis.

Western Cape

Jess, an OT student, described the participatory techniques and collaborations that inform her practice saying "we as therapists aren't the experts, so who are we to decide what a community we don't live in needs?" With school learners, she, along with her colleagues, implemented an intervention that addressed bullying by drawing younger learners into positions of responsibility.

Jess spoke of the importance of always asking herself "who do our occupations serve?" – so as to be always mindful of how her actions can liberate or reinforce oppressive power structures.

Babalwa, a 4th year social work student at UCT, described how she was selected to be part of the 100Up programme before moving to another scholarship programme at UCT. She explained how, through the SII, she was placed at COSAT in her third year to complete her social work practical there. Babalwa spoke of her happiness at returning to Khayelitsha and adding value through her social work in the place where she grew up.

Yandisa, a community volunteer, described his passion for mentoring grade 6 students and how his dream of becoming a lawyer changed to that of becoming a teacher after he started volunteering at the school. "Watch and see what I'm going to do with those Gr 6 learners, you'll be amazed."

Alice, a 4th year speech therapy student, described how her school placement challenged her expectations and made her aware of how much power she had within the school. She spoke of the value it added to her own practice and development: "when you recognise something is going wrong, that's the good thing; when you think something's going right, that's when you're in trouble."

Discussion

Tembeka discussed how in working in schools, "your own direct experience, even though you think it is relevant, it is never relevant enough." She recounted how she started the wellness centre at COSAT and thought that her experience and her familiarity (as a black, Xhosa speaker) would neutralize the power dynamic. Tembeka explained how she has had to recognise her relative sense of power in the school and the perception of her as a person with power in her work.

Tarsisio commented on the description of some parents as 'illiterate' saying that there are many forms of literacy. In the context of partnerships, there is a lot that parents can contribute and their experience and knowledge should be valued in partnership, regardless of their standing in western education. **Jess** echoed the value that parents bring to partnerships: "There is a lot of literacy these parents do possess which is not being valued by the curriculum." **Cathy** described the work that the School of Education does with their students before they undertake their teaching practical. She proposed that in deconstructing and decolonising, it should be with language first as "how is it that the one resource that children bring into the classroom, there language, is not considered useful?" **Nadeema** proposed the importance of addressing the language issue in universities in order to build solidarity in community partnerships.

Janis asked, how do we overcome confidentiality issues in order to be able to assist learners once social worker students have completed their practical period at the school and left? **Tembi** and **Patti** explained the difficulties of navigating the process around ethics and confidentiality between the SII social worker, MEED, teachers and parents.

Tarsisio commented that universities must be wary of being gatekeepers around the formation of partnerships and the communicating of information, describing the bureaucracy that stifles processes between teachers, students, parents and social workers.

Bruce enquired about the scalability of projects, warning that "by trying to do good, we can create nodes of destruction." By resourcing one school in a context of depravation, that school can become a target. Rather than "creating labs," programmes must be sensitive to scaling all, together.

The Way Forward

Again, participants were divided into five small discussion groups. This time, rather than divide stakeholders evenly across all groups, each group was comprised of one of the stakeholders. Groups were asked to discuss actionable outcomes and come back to plenary with *"one concrete thing that you want to emerge from this conversation?"*

Students: *"Improving relationships with parents."*
Through: focusing on the parent-child relationship; knowledge and awareness; trust; collaboration; and positive feedback of learner behaviour to parents.

University Staff: *"Creating reflective spaces, at all levels, with all voices."*
To understand more of who we are and who each other is, is the way we need to proceed. Within and between each other. Between universities and within groups and stakeholders.

Metro East Education District, Principals and Teachers: *"Closer relations between the Education Department, schools and Higher education institutes"; "Protocol for volunteers"; "Collaboration between CCS & SII"; "Start Across Province Collaboration in Districts, Schools and Communities."*

NGOs: *"Stop the bus, get more partners in to reflect and hear different voices, and start the bus again."*
Stopping the bus is important so that when it starts again, we know what to continue with.

Community Volunteers: *"All the three stakeholders getting to know each other."*
The university must first go out with the school to get to know the community as "we are working together but we don't know each other."

CONCLUSION

"When do we transcend from reflection to action" was a question repeatedly asked as the symposium came to an end. Alive to the urgency of the crises, some argued that there was no time to 'stop the bus' to reflect, and that the bus has to be fixed while it is in motion. All agreed that there is a need to grow the conversation to a larger, national discussion, and supported the suggestion that the SII and the CCS take the process forward towards an *"Imbizo on* community-school-university partnerships*,"* to be held in Nelson Mandela Bay. It was also agreed that the *Imbizo* would have a clear agenda, involve more stakeholders nationally and seek to engage different levels of government.

The two days of intense dialogue and presentations took significant steps forward in identifying the areas of convergence and divergence between partners, in recognising the pressing imperative for change and in exploring how partnerships, held together by solidarity and empowerment, can envision alternative paradigms and "bring the new."