

**Educational Research for Social Change (ERSC)****Volume: 5 No. 1, April 2016****pp. 144-147****ersc.nmmu.ac.za****ISSN: 2221-4070****Book Review****A Participatory Paradigm for an Engaged Scholarship in Higher Education: Action Leadership from a South African Perspective****by Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, Lesley Wood and Ina Louw****Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense, 2015. 238 pp.****ISBN: 978-94-6300-182-3 (paperback)***Ansie Elizabeth Kitching,**North-West University*

Engaged scholarship in higher education has become an important topic within the South African higher education context over the past two decades. The Joint Education Trust, in response to the White Paper on the Transformation of Higher Education (Department of Education, 1997), launched the Community—Higher Education—Service Partnerships (CHESP) initiative in 1999. The aim of the partnership was to assist South African higher education institutions to conceptualise and implement community engagement as a core function of the academy. The impact of this initiative although significant, according to Lazarus, Erasmus, Hendricks, Nduna, and Slamet (2008), only scratched the surface of embedding community engagement in South African higher education and therefore further development was proposed. Mwaniki (2010) emphasised the need for community engagement to “be re-cast as a core function of the university into mainstream academic discourse” (p. 410). However, publications in the field of community engagement in South Africa and Southern Africa are still limited.

This book addresses this need for more resources in the field of community engagement in the South African higher education context and complements other recent publications in the field (e.g., Erasmus & Albertyn, 2014). The main focus of the work is on the facilitation of action leadership in scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) in higher education. The book is written by three scholars who are experienced in community-engaged research in both the international and the national arenas. Ortrun Zuber-Skerritt, from Australia, has been involved in the international field of action research for 25 years. Her collaboration with Lesley Wood and Ina Louw, who both have extensive experience in the field of action research for professional development and community-based research in the South African higher education context, leads to this formidable collaborative effort to facilitate academic leadership that will contribute to authentic social change through an engaged scholarship.

The main argument presented is that more inclusive and participatory paradigms and methodologies, which challenge entrenched views that the creation of knowledge is the prerogative of academia,

should be applied in higher education. The authors argue that scholars in higher education should actively engage with society as action leaders who facilitate social change in communities through their teaching and community-based research. Their argument might come across to academics less familiar with the approach, as a rejection of traditional forms of knowledge creation. However, the intention is not to do away with all traditional forms of knowledge creation, but to create a space for approaches aimed at the development of personal viability of academics to engage, through the curriculum, with the challenges in their communities and reinvent knowledge that is necessary for the academy to remain relevant in the 21st century (p. 132). The book logically guides academics to obtain an understanding of scholarship as the integration of the three core aspects of higher education, namely, research, teaching, and engagement. Discussion starters and reading lists at the end of each chapter add value to the work.

The authors first introduce the philosophical and methodological assumptions of the approach and suggest new pathways for a more inclusive understanding of knowledge creation that recognises the valuable knowledge that community members possess for improving their own social circumstances, and therefore challenges the notion of dependency on academics as experts. Concurrently, a sound theoretical framework, which Anette Wilkinson (in the foreword, p. viii) considers non-negotiable, is presented as the basis for understanding and developing the reflective practice of action leadership for engaged scholarship. The framework includes aspects of phenomenology, experiential learning theory, action theory, strengths-based theory, grounded theory, and critical theory.

The participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) paradigm developed by Zuber-Skerritt (2005) is then proposed as offering suitable ways to navigate these new educational pathways for improving and sustaining life in the 21st century. The philosophical assumption of the approach is juxtaposed with learning in traditional systems to present a clear understanding of what the shift between the two approaches entails. The authors extensively discuss the PALAR approach with specific reference to links with other action research methodologies, the affective-socio-cognitive approach applied in PALAR, and compare the approach with learning principles developed in neuroscience. The application of the approach in various contexts, with reference to associated successes and challenges, gives the reader more insight into the applicability of the approach.

Following the extensive explanation of PALAR as an approach, the development of a scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) in South Africa in the current format is problematised. The authors suggest that SoTL needs to be repositioned to form part of an engaged and integrated scholarship. They suggest how the PALAR processes of professional learning and development will enhance collaboration and critical reflection in academic contexts.

In the second part of the book, the authors convincingly argue that due to rapid change in South African higher education, an alternative paradigm of learning, teaching, research, knowledge creation, and action leadership is needed—and that academics need help and professional development to prepare them for their roles and new challenges. The PALAR approach is proposed to assist in this endeavour of training academics to become action leaders who are engaged with their community—based on two South African case studies in which the approach was applied in academic leadership development. Based on the empirical evidence from these case studies, a model of academic leadership was developed. The model presented in Chapter 6 (p. 109) emphasises the importance of integrating the heart, head, and spirit in a holistic way in order to become engaged scholars who understand the value of both the soft and the hard methodologies (p. 93).

In the third part, two workshop programmes conducted in South Africa illustrate the application of the model to develop the capacity of academics to enhance the scholarship of teaching and learning.

The profound shifts in the academics' thinking about how student learning can be improved clearly presents evidence that the PALAR approach is valuable in 21st century university contexts.

The application of a participatory paradigm will significantly contribute to social change in South African communities if academics accept the challenges of finding new pathways to a more inclusive understanding of knowledge creation, and apply approaches such as PALAR. In my own work in school communities, the application of the PALAR approach transformed my understanding of research as an instrument of social change. My students and I have discovered a vehicle to address what the authors refer to as the epistemological inequalities by allowing communities in which we conduct research to share and implement their own solutions. The approach also aligns with the principles of community psychology (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010) that emphasise the participation of the community in which the researchers engage as a condition for sustainable change and social justice. The approach furthermore allows engagement with the complexity of the challenges that need to be addressed because it promotes a process-orientated approach that enables academics to apply the basic principles of complex interactive theory as applied to human behaviour (Jörg, 2009; Shaw, 2002; Stacey, 2001, 2007) in community-engaged work (Burns & Worsley, 2015).

To add even more value to this extensive work, the authors reflect on their own collaborative effort as they progressed through their work—a clear indication that they practice what they preach in terms of integrating the heart, head, and spirit. A must-read for all academics in South African higher education—irrespective of their current stance towards engaged scholarship—who want to be relevant in the 21st century higher education playing field, which is clearly no longer situated in the ivory tower. We, as academics, need new pathways to reconnect with broader society.

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