

RHODES UNIVERSITY, MAKHANDA, SOUTH AFRICA

*Educating for life and a living*

5-7 MAY

2026

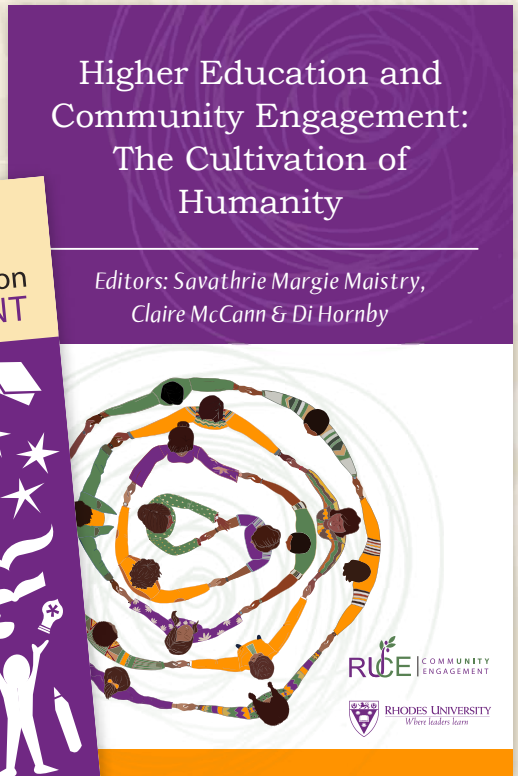


# INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CONFERENCE

*Higher Education Community  
Engagement: Reparative Futures for  
the Cultivation of Humanity*



RECENT RUCE PUBLICATIONS



The African journal of Higher Education Community Engagement may be accessed at <https://journal.ru.ac.za/index.php/AJHECE/>



## MESSAGE FROM THE LOCAL ORGANISING COMMITTEE



### Local Organising Committee

From top left: Ms Diana Hornby, Dr Margie Maistry, Ms Claire McCann, Ms Loranda Faltain, Ms Charmaine Avery and Dr Gamuchirai Chakona

On behalf of the Local Organising Committee, it is our great pleasure to welcome you to the 9th International Community Engagement Conference hosted by Rhodes University in Makhanda. This conference gathers scholars, practitioners, students, and community partners at a significant moment for higher education and for our broader society, as we reflect on our histories, engage the challenges of the present, and build momentum towards more just and humane futures. Guided by this year's theme, *Higher Education Community Engagement: Reparative Futures for the Cultivation of Humanity* and exploration of the following questions: *What are the purposes of higher education institutions, and the knowledge communities they nurture, in the twenty-first century? How can higher education community engagement promote the cultivation of humanity?*, we hope the conference will provide a meaningful space for critical dialogue, collective reflection, renewed purpose and a commitment to a few actionable outcomes.

This conference is also an important opportunity for the sector to continue building a stronger body of knowledge in the scholarship of engagement. Such scholarship is essential if we are to position community engagement not as an optional or peripheral activity, but as a discipline of growing significance and as a core function of higher education. Community engagement enriches and strengthens the academic project by giving deeper purpose and contextual relevance to research, teaching, and learning, while advancing the public and common good. In this regard, the conference contributes not only to scholarly exchange, but also to the ongoing work of affirming the place of community engagement within the life and purposes of higher education institutions.

We extend our sincere appreciation to all presenters for the excellent quality of the abstracts submitted, which has resulted in a rich and thought-provoking programme. Your contributions reflect the depth, diversity, and growing maturity of the field. We thank you too for your presence here and for your willingness to engage generously in the important conversations that will unfold over these three days. It is through such dialogue across institutions, sectors, communities, and geographies that we strengthen practice and deepen our understanding of the meaning of a reparative university committed to building just and humane futures.

We are equally grateful to every delegate who has joined us. At a time when questions of justice, humanity, knowledge, and institutional purposes are so pressing, this gathering matters. May these days together affirm the value of listening carefully, thinking critically, and working collectively. We hope that the conference will inspire not only reflection, but also courage and commitment for the work ahead.

We warmly welcome you and wish you a stimulating, enriching, and rewarding conference.

**Diana Hornby and Local Organising Committee**

## WELCOME MESSAGE FROM THE DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR

On behalf of Rhodes University, it is my great pleasure to welcome you to the 9th International Community Engagement Conference, organised by the Rhodes University Community Engagement (RUCE) Division and hosted in Makhanda, Eastern Cape, South Africa.

This year's theme, "**Higher Education Community Engagement: Reparative Futures for the Cultivation of Humanity**," invites us into a deeply reflective and purposeful space. It calls on all of us to re-examine the role of higher education in a world marked by deepening inequality, fragmentation, and enduring historical injustice, and to consider how our institutions might contribute more meaningfully to building just and humane societies.

At Rhodes University, Community Engagement is understood as a core academic function, embedded in teaching and research. It is grounded in relationships of mutuality, respect, and reciprocity, and guided by the recognition that knowledge is co-created with communities rather than transferred to them. This conference reflects our commitment, bringing together scholars, practitioners, students, and community partners to engage in dialogue that is both critical and generative.

The conference foregrounds the idea of a reparative university – one that not only acknowledges its historical complicity in injustice, but actively works towards healing, restoration, social justice, and transformation. Through the lens of Ubuntu, we are reminded that our humanity is bound up with one another, and that cultivating humanity requires relational, ethical, and accountable forms of engagement.

Over the next few days, I encourage you to engage openly and thoughtfully with the ideas, experiences, and questions that will emerge. This is a space not only for reflection, but for imagining and shaping new possibilities, where universities act as partners in co-creating knowledge, advancing social justice, and strengthening the public good.

A special welcome to our keynote speakers and all the delegates who have travelled from afar to grace this important conference. Your presence here affirms a shared commitment to building more connected, compassionate, equitable and sustainable futures.

I extend my sincere gratitude to the organisers, partners, and participants who have made this conference possible. I wish you a stimulating and enriching conference.

**Professor 'Mabokang Monnapula Mapesela**  
*Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affair*



## VICE-CHANCELLOR'S DISTINGUISHED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AWARD FOR 2025

It is our distinct honour to announce the recipients of the 2025 Vice-Chancellor's Distinguished Community Engagement Award, **Ms Monique Purcell**, together with the Faculty of Pharmacy team: **Ms Lynda Bryant, Sr Lynette van Dyk and Sr Emily Repinz**.



**Left to right:** Sr Emily Repinz, Ms Monique Purcell, Dean of Pharmacy – Professor Sandile Khamanga, Sr Lynette van Dyk and Ms Lynda Bryant

This prestigious award recognises academics who have built meaningful, sustained partnerships that advance teaching, learning, research which contribute to the public good.

The award is conferred in recognition of the Sakh'impilo Community Engagement Learning Initiative, an exemplary, curriculum-embedded programme that brings accessible, preventative primary healthcare to underserved communities across Makhanda and the surrounding rural areas.

Importantly, this work stands on a strong foundation. Its origins trace back to 1996, when the Pharmacy Community Engagement Programme was first conceptualised by Professor Sue Burton. This work was later deepened and expanded by Ms Wendy Wrench and Professor Sunitha Srinivas, whose contributions were recognised with the very first Vice-Chancellor's Distinguished Community Engagement Award in 2008. Today's awardees have built on this legacy with vision and commitment, taking the programme to scale by introducing a new dimension – a purpose-built mobile health unit – named Sakh'impilo, meaning “building healthier communities.”

At the heart of the initiative is this mobile healthcare platform, which operates on a weekly cycle and reaches communities where access to healthcare is limited. It provides a comprehensive package of services including screening, health promotion, maternal and child health, support for communicable and non-communicable diseases, and, more recently, on-site prescribing and dispensing of essential medicines through a Primary Care Drug Therapy component.

In 2025 alone, hundreds of patients were served, with many referred for further care, demonstrating both the reach and clinical significance of the programme.

Central to the success of Sakh'impilo is its partnership with the Eastern Cape Department of Health. This is not a model that seeks to replace or duplicate the work of government, but rather to complement and strengthen it – through a knowledge partnership grounded in mutual respect, co-creation, and shared accountability. Together, the University and the Department of Health are able to extend services, strengthen referral pathways, and enhance public health outcomes in ways that neither could achieve alone.

Equally significant is the programme's sustainability. Because it is fully embedded in the Pharmacy curriculum, it is not dependent on individual champions, but is institutionally anchored and continuously renewed through each cohort of students. Academic staff, clinical supervisors, and Department of Health professionals work together in a coordinated, interprofessional model that strengthens both student learning and service delivery.

This sustained, faculty-led approach enables relationships of trust to deepen over time and ensures continuity of care and engagement. It stands in contrast to fragmented, short-term interventions, demonstrating instead the power of long-term, coherent programmes that grow, adapt, and endure.

For Rhodes students in their third and fourth year of study, Sakh'impilo offers a transformative learning experience, one that develops clinical competence alongside ethical practice, social accountability, and a deep understanding of the lived realities of the communities they serve.

Sakh'impilo is a powerful example of what becomes possible when universities commit to sustained, collaborative, and purposeful engagement. It embodies excellence in teaching and learning, strengthens research, reinforces public health systems, and contributes meaningfully to more just and responsive forms of care.

It is, quite simply, work that changes, and saves lives.

In many ways, this initiative gives expression to the vision of Rhodes University itself, a university that is deeply anchored in its place, committed to the public good, and dedicated to cultivating graduates who are not only knowledgeable, but socially conscious and ethically grounded. It reflects an institution that understands its role not as separate from society, but as inextricably connected to it, working in partnership to address inequality, advance human dignity, and contribute to a more just and caring world. Through programmes such as Sakh'impilo, Rhodes University affirms its commitment to engaged scholarship, to relational ways of working, and to the co-creation of knowledge and solutions that matter.

We congratulate this exceptional team from the Faculty of Pharmacy, Ms Monique Purcell, Ms Lynda Bryant, Sr Lynette van Dyk and Sr Emily Repinz on their outstanding contribution to the revitalisation of health care in our city.

**Diana Hornby**  
*Director CE*

## CONCEPT NOTES ON PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS TO BE HELD ON MONDAY 4 MAY 2026

Workshops (1 & 2) will run from 12:00 to 17:00 with a coffee/tea station and light lunch supplied. BOOKING FOR THE WORKSHOPS IS ESSENTIAL – email Loranda at [l.faltain@ru.ac.za](mailto:l.faltain@ru.ac.za) to reserve your place. The workshops follow on from each other.

### Background

A brief informal discussion on the need to develop a generic training programme for the South African context took place among a few friends/colleagues at the MUT conference on the Scholarship of Engagement held in Durban in November 2025. These two preconference workshops are a consequence of that discussion.

### Workshop 1: CESA Facilitation Team

#### Co-Developing a Generic Training Programme for Community Engagement in Higher Education

From the HEQC's (2004) basic definition of community engagement (CE), the majority of higher education institutions have over the years established their individual conceptualisation of CE, which reflects their specific contexts and history. However, common to the various delineations of CE, is the understanding that CE is being increasingly recognised not only as a core institutional function, but as a transformative space for advancing social and epistemic justice, reciprocity, community and human development, among others. Yet, the preparation of students and academics for meaningful engagement remains uneven, often lacking a coherent ethical and philosophical grounding.

This concept note responds to the need for a training or preparation framework that is not only technically robust, but also ethically grounded in the cultivation of humanity. Drawing on the African philosophy of Ubuntu – with its emphasis on relationality, dignity, interdependence and interconnectedness, this initiative seeks to foreground community engagement as a practice of becoming fully human through others.

In alignment with universal human values such as respect, empathy, responsibility, justice, and care, the proposed training/preparation programme aims to move beyond instrumental approaches toward a more humanising, reflexive, and socially responsive praxis. In this framing, community engagement is not simply a methodological or institutional requirement, but a pedagogical and ethical project oriented toward the cultivation of humanity in both students and academics.

## Purpose of the Workshop

The purpose of this 2-hour workshop is to **initiate the co-development of a generic, values-driven training programme framework** for community engagement, grounded in Ubuntu, universal human values, and the cultivation of humanity, which can be adapted across the different contexts.

## Workshop 2: CESA Facilitation Team

### Towards a Monitoring & Evaluation Framework for Community Engagement in South African Higher Education

As a core function of higher education, CE is central to transformation, social responsiveness, and the public good. However, while CE practices have expanded, monitoring and evaluation systems remain underdeveloped, inconsistent, and often informal across institutions.

Current challenges include:

- Lack of a standardised M&E framework
- Weak integration of CE into teaching, learning, and research evaluation systems
- Difficulty measuring social impact, reciprocity, and knowledge co-production
- Limited inclusion of community voices in evaluation processes

Without a coherent M&E system:

- CE remains marginal in institutional performance systems
- Impact is under-recognised and under-reported
- Opportunities for co-learning, accountability, and transformation are lost

This workshop responds to the need for a shared, adaptable, and context-sensitive M&E framework grounded in:

- Ubuntu philosophy (relational accountability, mutuality)
- Social justice and transformation imperatives
- Engaged scholarship and co-creation of knowledge

## Workshop Purpose

To collaboratively explore and outline the core components of a Monitoring & Evaluation system for community engagement that is:

- Contextually relevant to South Africa
- Adaptable across institutions
- Grounded in ethical, participatory, and transformative principles

## TUESDAY 5 MAY 2026: DIALOGUE TOPIC

### *Higher Education Institutions as Reparative Universities: The Inclusion of Human Values Education in Community Engagement Policies for the Cultivation of Humanity*

In a context marked by deepening inequality, persistent racialisation, ecological precarity, social fragmentation and corruption, there is an urgent need for universities to embed human values education explicitly within community engagement policies. While community engagement is manifested in a variety of forms, its transformative potential lies in cultivating ethical dispositions that affirm human dignity, reciprocity and solidarity. Drawing on Ubuntu philosophy, which foregrounds relational personhood, mutual care and interdependence – our humanity is bound up with the humanity of others – universities are called to move beyond technocratic engagement toward a pedagogy of shared humanity. Without an intentional grounding in values such as respect, peace, compassion/love, justice, integrity and accountability, community engagement risks reproducing paternalism and asymmetrical power relations. Integrating human values education into policy frameworks ensures that engagement practices nurture critically conscious and caring graduates who recognise race and other social categories as socially constructed, challenge structural injustice, and act in ways that advance the common good. In this sense, community engagement becomes not merely a strategic function of the university, but a moral project oriented toward reparation and the cultivation of humanity in fractured societies.

### Questions for the Panel

1. If we take seriously the idea of the university as reparative, what shifts, among others, must occur in the culture, systems and governance of the institutions?
2. How can human values education be embedded in community engagement policy in ways that transform practice rather than become another compliance requirement?
3. In contexts marked by racialisation and inequality, how do we prevent community engagement from reproducing paternalism and asymmetrical power relations?
4. What would it mean to operationalise Ubuntu not as symbolism, but as an epistemic and ethical foundation for engagement?
5. How might we evaluate whether community engagement is genuinely cultivating critically conscious and caring graduates, rather than simply producing employable ones?

## DAY 1 PROGRAMME • TUESDAY, 5TH MAY

<b>08:00 – 09:00</b>	<b>Main Venue:</b> Thomas Pringle <b>Registration:</b> Monument Building, Lucas Avenue, Makhanda
<b>09:00 – 09:10</b>	<b>Conference Welcome:</b> Rhodes University Community Engagement Division Director: Di Hornby
<b>09:10 – 09:30</b>	<b>Opening of Conference:</b> Professor Sizwe Mabizela, Vice-Chancellor, Rhodes University
<b>09:30 – 10:30</b>	<b>Keynote Address:</b> Professor Andre Keet: Deputy Vice Chancellor for Engagement and Transformation: Nelson Mandela University <b>Title:</b> The Transformative-Responsive University in Techno-rational Times
<b>10:30 – 11:00</b>	<b>Tea, Coffee and Refreshments:</b> The Yellowwood Terrace
<b>11:00 – 12:00</b>	<b>DIALOGUE:</b> <i>Higher Education Institutions as Reparative Universities: The inclusion of Human Values Education in Community Engagement policies for the Cultivation of Humanity</i> <b>PANEL:</b> Professor Vhonani Ntshendama, Professor Andre Keet, Dr Rajesh Tandon, Professor Busisiwe Nkonki-Mandleni, Professor Tim Eatman and Professor Darren Lortan <b>Facilitator:</b> Sakhe Ntlabezo
<b>12:00 – 12:25</b>	<b>PRESENTATION SESSION 1</b>
<b>Venue 1</b> Level 2: Thomas Pringle	<b>Samuel Fongwa</b> , CODESRIA and University of the Free State <b>A1 Exploring university community engagement as reparative justice</b>
<b>Venue 2</b> Level 2: Ntsikana	<b>Zanele Boti</b> , Council for Higher Education <b>A2 Reframing the Evaluation of University-Community Engagement as a dialogic and co-constructed process: Towards Reparative and Humanising Practices in South African Higher Education</b>
<b>Venue 3</b> Level 2: Atherstone	<b>Megan Campbell, Lerato Mota, Liyabona Notuku</b> , Rhodes University <b>A3 Measuring the Impact of A Community-Engaged Service Learning Initiative: The ADC Counselling Hub case-study</b>
<b>Venue 4</b> Level 1: Council Chamber	<b>Ian Nell, Michelle Smal</b> , STADIO <b>A4 Co-creating the reparative university: Community engagement tapping into the philosophy of Ubuntu – Insights from the GRIT Case Study</b>
<b>Venue 5</b> Ground Floor: Visitors Centre 1	<b>Martina Jordaan</b> , University of Pretoria <b>A5 Digital Horizons: Evaluating the Impact and Sustainability of Global E-Community Engagement</b>
<b>Venue 6</b> Ground Floor: Visitors Centre 2	<b>Chikumbutso Ndaferankhande</b> , Rhodes University <b>A6 Empowering Young Voices: Critical Pedagogy and Decolonial Climate Storytelling in Malawi Secondary Schools</b>

**12:25 – 12:50 PRESENTATION SESSION 2**

**Venue 1**  
Level 2:  
Thomas Pringle

**Mziwamadoda Badi and Nombini Potwana**, Ubunye  
*A7 Developing voice in Early Childhood Development Centres in rural areas of Ngqusha Municipality*

**Venue 2**  
Level 2:  
Ntsikana

**Angela James, Ashnie Mahade, Ncamisile Mthiyane, Nora Saneka, Kate Baker, Gail Strydom, Romany Roberts, Bilikish Vawda, Mari van der Merwe, Patsy Pillay, Tara Rosser, Priscilla Edmonds, Chantal Snyman**, University of Kwazulu Natal, Durban Inner City & South ECD Forum, New Beginnings, GROW ECD, Be Sustainably Yours, VVOB  
*A8 When the Community calls: Collective Action as a Framework for Social Transformation*

**Venue 3**  
Level 2:  
Atherstone

**Pillay Trishka and Manyatsa Jugen**, Mangosuthu University of Technology  
*A9 Advancing Food Safety Through Community Engagement: A Case Study of Informal Traders Surrounding Mangosuthu University of Technology*

**Venue 4**  
Level 1:  
Council Chamber

**Andrew Todd**, Rhodes University  
*The pain of a new idea: experiences in service learning*

**Venue 5**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 1

**Samuel Obeng Kwarteng and Emanuel Matlala**, Durban University of Technology  
*A11 Effectiveness of University-Supported Community Enterprises in Mitigating Local Unemployment and Poverty in KwaZulu Natal*

**Venue 6**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 2

**Kate Bryan**, St Andrews College, **Theodor Geswindt**, Rhodes University, **Joyce Sewry**, Rhodes University, **Vincent Smith**, Stellenbosch University  
*A12 Academic enrichment program: Linking learners to universities through sustainability*

**12:50 – 13:50 Lunch: Monument Restaurant**

**13:50 – 14:50**

**Main Venue:** Thomas Pringle  
**KEYNOTE ADDRESS:** Professor SALEEM BADAT, Former Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes University. He is currently a Research Professor in the Department of History at the University of the Free State.  
**Title:** *Reparative Justice, Community Engagement and the Contemporary University in South Africa*

**14:50 – 15:50**

**LAUNCH OF Professor BADAT'S BOOK: The Roads to Rhodes University and Beyond: Adventures in Knowledge and Activism (2026).** UKZN Press  
**Anchor:** Professor Sam Naidu

**15:50 – 16:15 PRESENTATION SESSION 3**

**Venue 1**  
Level 2:  
Thomas Pringle

**Grey Magaiza**, University of the Free State, **Margie Maistry**, Rhodes University  
*A13 Reparative Pedagogies: Community Engagement and the Social Reconstruction of Race*

**Venue 2**  
Level 2:  
Ntsikana

**Mvuzo Ponono and Quatro Mgogo**, Rhodes University  
*A14 Suluma usophula, faki sandla – using barter system as alternative frame for development*

**Venue 3**  
Level 2:  
Atherstone

**Angi Jones**, Rhodes University  
*Service Learning: The power of an hour*

**Venue 4**  
Level 1:  
Council Chamber

**Erika Swart**, STADIO  
**A16** *Conceptualising a Community-Engaged Work-Integrated Service Model for Reparative Futures? Graduate Employability and Social Impact in a Private Higher Education Institution*

**Venue 5**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 1

**Samantha van Schalkwyk**, University of the Western Cape  
**A17** *Community-engaged learning as epistemic and relational repair at the University of the Western Cape*

**Venue 6**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 2

**Emanuel Matlala, Samuel Kwarteng, Mbalenhle Khumalo, Teshani Sewnunan, Arshad Latiff**, Durban University of Technology  
**A18** *Reparative Community Engagement in South African Higher Education: A Systematic Review (2020-2025)*

## 16:15 – 16:40 PRESENTATION SESSION 4

**Venue 1**  
Level 2:  
Thomas Pringle

**Darian Smith**, HSRC  
**A19** *Mobilizing “Community Fathers” in co-creating safe spaces within the Wentworth community, South of Durban*

**Venue 2**  
Level 2:  
Ntsikana

**Lungile Ngwenya**, Nelson Mandela University  
**A20** *Reflexive Dialogue: Elevating Silenced Voices in Social Work Practice*

**Venue 3**  
Level 2:  
Atherstone

**Jonathan Campbell**, Rhodes University  
**A21** *Relationship-Centred Lawyering and Its Impact on Service-Learning in Clinical Legal Education*

**Venue 4**  
Level 1:  
Council Chamber

**Sam Naidu and Lindani Sifanele**, Rhodes University  
**A22** *Reading Clubs: Conserving Reading Cultures and Reading Communities*

**Venue 5**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 1

**Lindsay Kelland**, Rhodes University  
*Philosophy as a way of life: mentoring and the practice of freedom*

**Venue 6**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 2

**Noel Pearse, Matolwandile Mtotywa, and Heide Kuhlane**, Rhodes University  
**A24** *A systematic review of community well-being*

## 16:40 – 17:05 PRESENTATION SESSION 5

**Venue 1**  
Level 2:  
Thomas Pringle

**Janice Limson, Ronen Fogel, Lwazikazi Madikiza**, Rhodes University  
**A25** *Engaging Communities in Biotechnology in Higher Education: Bridging the gap between Research and Societal Impact*

<b>Venue 2</b> Level 2: Ntsikana	<b>Zuko Gqadavama, Sesona Yedwa</b> , Inkululeko and Makerere University and Rhodes University <i>A26 Universities as Socially Entrepreneurial Anchor Institutions: Belonging, Ubuntu, and Co-Creating</i>
<b>Venue 3</b> Level 2: Atherstone	<b>Jo-Anne Vorster, Nikki Green, Anthea Adams and Masixole Booï</b> , Rhodes University <i>A27 Learning from and with community partners: towards a decolonial pedagogy</i>
<b>Venue 4</b> Level 1: Council Chamber	<b>Rosaline Sebolao</b> , University of the Free State <i>A28 Cultivating Change: The Humanities students' journey into Entrepreneurial mindset through Community Engagement</i>
<b>Venue 5</b> Ground Floor: Visitors Centre 1	<b>Tshegofatso Bennia Makube</b> , Rhodes University <i>A29 An Afrocentric approach to implementing musicking as a community creative-arts wellness programme in marginalised communities in Eastern Cape South Africa</i>
<b>Venue 6</b> Ground Floor: Visitors Centre 2	<b>Aqeelah Hendrickse, Revando van Wyk, Michelle Pieters</b> , Stellenbosch University <i>A30 Student volunteering; a tool of cultivating a transformative student experience</i>

**17:30 – 19:00****COCKTAIL EVENT & LAUNCH OF UNESCO UNITWIN NETWORK**

The UNITWIN Network on the Futures of Education, Epistemic Justice, and the Knowledge Commons (EpiNet) seeks to transform global knowledge systems by addressing deep-rooted inequalities in education.

**Professor Sizwe Mabizela** – Vice Chancellor Rhodes University

**Professor George Openjuru** – Vice Chancellor Gulu University, Uganda,

**Dr Rajesh Tandon** – PRIA, India,

**Professor Budd Hall** – Victoria University, Canada.

**Music Entertainment:** Professor Boudina McConnachie and team, Rhodes University Music Department.

## DAY 2 PROGRAMME • WEDNESDAY, 6TH MAY

08:00 – 08:30

**Main Venue:** Thomas Pringle  
**Registration:** Monument Building, Lucas Avenue, Makhanda

08:30 – 08:45

**Welcome and Introduction to Guest Speaker:** Professor 'Mabokang Monnapula Mapesela, DVC Academic and Student Affairs

08:45 – 09:45

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS:** DR RAJESH TANDON, Founder-President of Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), Co-Chair UNESCO Chair in Community Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education  
**Title:** *Youth Citizenship, Ecologies of Knowledge & Higher Education: Pathways to Transformation*

09:45 – 10:10

**PRESENTATION SESSION 1**

**Venue 1**

Level 2:  
Thomas Pringle

**Eureta Rosenberg**, Rhodes University  
**A31** *The CO in co-creation: Short, but not always sweet*

**Venue 2**

Level 2:  
Ntsikana

**Bakhusele Mathupha and Angela James**, University of Kwazulu Natal  
**A32** *Educating about Agroecology: application of knowledge and actions with communities in Eastern Cape*

**Venue 3**

Level 2:  
Atherstone

**Lesley Wood and Bibi Bouwan**, North West University  
**A33** *Relational Resilience: Ubuntu-Informed Community-Engaged Research with NEET Youth*

**Venue 4**

Level 1:  
Council Chamber

**Heide Kuhlane**, Rhodes University  
**A34** *Narrative Meaning-Making as Reparative Practice: Structured Introspection and Humanisation in In-Service Teacher Education*

**Venue 5**

Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 1

**Kanya Padayachee**, University of the Free State  
**A35** *Reparative Futures for the Cultivation of Humanity: Integral Education for Early Childhood Development Practitioner Pedagogy*

**Venue 6**

Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 2

**Phumzile Xulu, Samuel Ntsanwisi**, Durban University of Technology  
**A36** *Universities as Anchor Institutions Advancing Equity and Belonging through Early Experiential Exposure to Film and Television*

**Venue 7**

Ground Floor:  
Monument  
Gallery

**Masakhe Market (all day)**

10:10 – 10:40

**Tea, Coffee and Refreshments:** The Yellowwood Terrace

10:40 – 11:05

## PRESENTATION SESSION 2

- Venue 1**  
Level 2:  
Thomas Pringle  
**Claire McCann and Nwabisa Nkani**, Oxford University, UK and Rhodes University  
*A37 Holding and making worlds together: Reflections on a digital storytelling project on the experiences of students between university and community in Makhanda*
- 
- Venue 2**  
Level 2:  
Ntsikana  
**Merie Sutherland**, STADIO  
*A38 Dialogic Attunement: Empathy as a Tool for Building Reciprocal Community-Academic Partnerships*
- 
- Venue 3**  
Level 2:  
Atherstone  
**Chantelle August-Mowers, Samantha Hoffman**, Two Oceans Graduate Institute  
*A39 Creating a culture of civic engagement through the Science Module: A practical initiative*
- 
- Venue 4**  
Level 1:  
Council Chamber  
**Fatima Abdulla, Flavia Obakeng Matlou**, EDUVOS  
*A40 The role of ubuntu in cultivating volunteerism within South African non-governmental organisations*
- 
- Venue 5**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 1  
**Otilia Chiramba, Callie Grant**, Rhodes University  
*A41 Developing a whole-school leadership culture: A participatory case study in a South African township school*
- 
- Venue 6**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 2  
**Boudina McConnachie, Sambeswiwe Mavela**, Rhodes University  
*A42 Anchoring Rhodes University in the Community: A Study of Two Music-Based Community Engagement Teaching and Learning Projects in Makhanda, South Africa*
- 
- Venue 7**  
Ground Floor:  
Monument  
Gallery  
**Masakhe Market (all day)**

11:05 – 11:30

## PRESENTATION SESSION 3

- Venue 1**  
Level 2:  
Thomas Pringle  
**George Ladaah Openjuru and David Monk**, Gulu University, Uganda  
*A43 Knowledge Democracy for the Cultivation of Humanity: K4C Programme and the African Regional Centre*
- 
- Venue 2**  
Level 2:  
Ntsikana  
**Olivier Bondéelle**, Université de Paris-Est Créteil, France  
*A44 Médiations In People's History: A Survey On Participation*
- 
- Venue 3**  
Level 2:  
Atherstone  
**Jessica Cockburn**, Rhodes University  
*A45 Centring shared humanity and interdependence in sustainability teaching and research: the role of relational reflexivity*
- 
- Venue 4**  
Level 1:  
Council Chamber  
**Zinhle Mbili; Philile Sithole**, Mangosuthu University of Technology  
*A46 Cultivating Humanity from Within: Ubuntu and Reparative Volunteering in Higher Education*

**Venue 5**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 1

**Kavita Behara**, Mangosuthu University of Technology  
*A47 Decolonizing STEM Education in South Africa: A CHAT-Based Review of Community Engagement as a Catalyst for Curriculum Reform*

**Venue 6**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 2

**Sandile Phakathi, Nwabisa Malimba, Thando Mpolweni, Athenkosi Yalo and Thandolwethu May**, Rhodes University, TEM Mrwetyana & Khutliso Daniels  
*A48 Bridging the Gap in Economics Academic Literacies: Reflections on a Rhodes University-Makhanda High Schools Community Engagement Project*

**Venue 7**  
Ground Floor:  
Monument  
Gallery

**Masakhe Market (all day)**

## 11:30 – 11:55 PRESENTATION SESSION 4

**Venue 1**  
Level 2:  
Thomas Pringle

**Gernus Terblanche, Karen Venter**, University of the Free State  
*A49 Bridging Theory and Practice: Co-Curricular Student Engagement for Reparative Futures in Higher Education*

**Venue 2**  
Level 2:  
Ntsikana

**Nosipho Nxumalo**, North West University  
*A50 Community engagement and Fractured Ubuntu: A Reflexive Account of a Doctoral Research Journey in Community Based Research*

**Venue 3**  
Level 2:  
Atherstone

**Mabitsela Choene Rose Lelaka, Constance Matshidiso, Muleya Emmison**, University of the Free State and University of Johannesburg  
*A51 Preparing for Ethical and Socially Responsible Community Development Practice through Work-Integrated Learning*

**Venue 4**  
Level 1:  
Council Chamber

**Claire McCann**, Rhodes University  
*A52 Staying with the trouble: Reflections on participation, power, and messiness in community-engaged research*

**Venue 5**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 1

**Vince Ndou**, Mangosuthu University of Technology  
*A53 Bridging Theory and Practice: Agricultural Extension Students Advancing Food Security through School Garden Development in uMlazi and uMbumbulu, Durban, South Africa*

**Venue 6**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 2

**Nthatsi Nkoebele**, University of the Free State  
*A54 Co-creating Student-Community Collaborations: Community Development Praxis through the Lens of Ubudlelana at a South African University*

## 11:55 – 12:20 PRESENTATION SESSION 5

**Venue 1**  
Level 2:  
Thomas Pringle

**Monique Purcell**, Rhodes University  
*A55 Transformation in Critical Service-Learning: The Sakh'impilo Mobile Healthcare Experience*

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**Venue 2** **Eugene Machimana**, University of Pretoria  
 Level 2:  
 Ntsikana **A56 Transformative university-community partnerships and institutional change in South African higher education**

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**Venue 3** **Shulamye Vuyolwethu Ntsoeu**, Rhodes University  
 Level 2:  
 Atherstone **A57 Co-producing Estuarine Knowledge: Citizen Science and Engaged Eutrophication Monitoring in the Swartkops Estuary**

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**Venue 4** **Enver Lottering & Nikki Green**, Rhodes University  
 Level 1:  
 Council Chamber **A58 Beyond Language as Access: Mother-Tongue Leadership and Epistemic Belonging through "Projek Bereik"**

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**Venue 5** **Yoliswa Sikhosana**, HSRC  
 Ground Floor:  
 Visitors Centre 1 **A59 How are Engaged Research Methodologies operationalised in academic and research settings in Low and Middle Income countries?**

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**Venue 6** **Dizline Mfanozelwe Shozi, Busisiwe Nkonki-Mandleni and Dudu Thobile Mbhele**, Mangosuthu University of Technology  
 Ground Floor:  
 Visitors Centre 2 **A60 Community Engagement for Nation-Building: Applying Communities of Practice and Ubuntu in MUT's Mandela Month and Schools & Community Cup Programmes**

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**Venue 7** **Masakhe Market (all day)**  
 Ground Floor:  
 Monument  
 Gallery

**12:20 – 12:45 PRESENTATION SESSION 6**

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**Venue 1** **Tugce Ataci, Laura Lema Silva**, Université Paris-Est Créteil (UPEC), France  
 Level 2:  
 Thomas Pringle **A61 Scientific transmediation for community engagement and societal impact: The case of the "Constellations for Plural Peace" project**

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**Venue 2** **Keabetswe Charmyne Modise**, Central University of Technology  
 Level 2:  
 Ntsikana **A62 Examining how dialogic partnerships between higher education institutions, communities and students create shared inquiry spaces for inclusive higher-education planning**

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**Venue 3** **Melusi Dlamini**, Rhodes University  
 Level 2:  
 Atherstone **A63 Learning in/through the landfill: Service learning and reparative pedagogies in South African Anthropology**

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**Venue 4** **Lorraine Makena**, University of Pretoria  
 Level 1:  
 Council Chamber **A64 Bridging the Digital Divide Through Collaborative Ecosystems in Mamelodi**

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**Venue 5** **Aroriso Sibanda, Noncaba Khumalo, Heila Lotz-Sisitka**, Rhodes University  
 Ground Floor:  
 Visitors Centre 1 **A65 Advancing Education for Sustainable Development through Co-Engaged Research and Social Learning in a Professional Learning Community**

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**Venue 6**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 2

**Sisonke Mawonga**, Rhodes University  
**A66** *Speaking Proximity: Multilingual Practice and the University as Anchor Institution*

**Venue 7**  
Ground Floor:  
Monument  
Gallery

**Masakhe Market (all day)**

**12:45 – 13:45**     **Lunch:** Monument Restaurant

**13:45 – 14:45**

**Main Venue:** Thomas Pringle  
**KEYNOTE ADDRESS:** DR SHARLI PAPHITIS, Senior Research Fellow, King's College, London's Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology and Neuroscience  
**Title:** *What Does It Mean to Cultivate Humanity in Higher Education Now? On Practising Being-Human in a Precarious, Technologically Mediated World*

**14:45 – 15:45**

**Tea, Coffee and Refreshments:** Thomas Pringle  
**LAUNCH OF BOOK AND SPECIAL EDITION OF JOURNAL** by Professor Sizwe Mabizela, VC, Rhodes University  
**TITLE:** *Higher Education and Community Engagement: The Cultivation of Humanity*. Eds. Savathrie Margie Maistry, Claire McCann & Di Hornby. Online, Open Access. Rhodes University Library Platform  
The African Journal of Higher Education Community Engagement (AJHECE) Online Special Edition: Selected papers from MUT Conference on the Scholarship of Engagement held in Nov 2025

**15:45 – 16:10**     **PRESENTATION SESSION 7**

**Venue 1**  
Level 2:  
Thomas Pringle

**Siphamandla Mncwango**, University of the Free State  
**A67** *Drivers and constraints of engaged scholarship in higher education*

**Venue 2**  
Level 2:  
Ntsikana

**Ashley Westaway, Kelly Long**, GADRA Education  
**A68** *Innovating to understand and address the fundamental challenge of literacy in Makhanda*

**Venue 3**  
Level 2:  
Atherstone

**Nikki Green**, Rhodes University  
**A69** *It Takes a Network: Literacy as Dialogic Community Engagement in Makhanda*

**Venue 4**  
Level 1:  
Council Chamber

**Eugene Machimana, Innocent Chauke and Pontsho Masele**, University of Pretoria  
*Moja Gabedi: Transforming a neglected site to an innovative hub for community engagement and transdisciplinary research*

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**Venue 5**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 1

**Mncedi Eddie Magade**, iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu  
*A71 Co-Creating Community Knowledge through Media, Literacy and Creative Publishing: A Community-Based Participatory Research Study of Student Learning and Community Partnerships in East London*

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**Venue 6**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 2

**Rev Chis Nkomo**, Mamelodi Historical Society and the University of Pretoria  
*A72 Reflections on Digitally Preserving the History of Mamelodi: A Dialogic Partnership between the Mamelodi Historical Society and the University of Pretoria – A Community Partner Reflection*

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**Venue 7**  
Ground Floor:  
Monument  
Gallery

**Masakhe Market (all day)**

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**16:10 – 16:35 PRESENTATION SESSION 8: STORYTELLING**

**Venue 1**  
Level 2:  
Thomas Pringle

**Flip Schutte**, STADIO  
*A73 Learning to Listen Before Acting: A Story of Listening Circles, Community Engagement, and Gender-Based Violence*

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**Venue 2**  
Level 2:  
Ntsikana

**Ntethelelo Sibiyi**, Rhodes University  
*A74 Reflection on Diabetology elective course: Driving diabetes care and awareness in Makhanda community whilst fostering student learning and development*

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**Venue 3**  
Level 2:  
Atherstone

**Belinda Pakati, Stirling Blunden**, University of Pretoria  
*A75 Cultivating Humanity Through Youth-Led Community Engagement: Reflections from the Just Leaders Programme at the CSA&G*

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**Venue 4**  
Level 1:  
Council Chamber

**Moorosi Leshoele**, University of the Free State  
*A76 Endogenous Development in Africa: Lessons from Burkina Faso and Rwanda's Community Development Girinka Programme*

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**Venue 5**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 1

**Simphiwe Lynette Mahlangu, Nthuseng Mokoena**, University of Pretoria  
*A77 Engaging for Change: Showing Up is Showing Love*

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**Venue 6**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 2

**Abraham de Villiers, Kerri-Lee Schneider**, STADIO Higher Education  
*A78 A Community-Engaged (CE) and Social Impact (SI) Approach to Improved Literacy Outcomes for All: Strengthening Early Childhood Education Through an HEI and School Partnerships*

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**Venue 7**  
Ground Floor:  
Monument  
Gallery

**Masakhe Market (all day)**

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16:35 – 17:00

**PRESENTATION SESSION 9: STORYTELLING**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Venue 1</b><br/>Level 2:<br/>Thomas Pringle</p>         | <p><b>Damaris Kiewiets, Keith Cloete</b>, University of the Western Cape and Department of Health and Wellness, Western Cape Government<br/><i>A79 A living model of dialogic partnership: Co-governance, co-inquiry, and legacy-making in community engagement</i></p>      |
| <p><b>Venue 2</b><br/>Level 2:<br/>Ntsikana</p>               | <p><b>Leah Shibambo</b>, STADIO<br/><i>A80 Reimagining Community Engagement in Distance Learning: A Case Study from the STADIO School of Policing and Law Enforcement.</i></p>   |
| <p><b>Venue 3</b><br/>Level 2:<br/>Atherstone</p>             | <p><b>Ntandazo Dlatu, Zanexololo Klaas, Ntombekhaya Tisani</b>, Iyunivesithi Walter Sisulu, Rhodes University<br/><i>A81 Reframing Research Practice: A Comparative Analysis of Conventional and Engaged Approaches to Purpose, Process, and Community Relationships</i></p> |
| <p><b>Venue 4</b><br/>Level 1:<br/>Council Chamber</p>        | <p><b>Noxolo Manyati</b>, Rhodes University<br/><i>A82 Closing The Gap Between Community Radio and its Audience: Exploring the value of Audio Diaries</i></p>  |
| <p><b>Venue 5</b><br/>Ground Floor:<br/>Visitors Centre 1</p> | <p><b>Sakhile Fakude, Sambesiwe Mavela, Rudi Olivier, Sinesipho Geelbooi</b>, Rhodes University<br/><i>A83 Echoes of Hope: Rethinking the Sound of Giving</i></p>  |
| <p><b>Venue 6</b><br/>Ground Floor:<br/>Visitors Centre 2</p> | <p><b>Ayanda Khoza</b>, Rhodes University<br/><i>A84 Universities as Anchor titutions: Reparative Community Engagement and the Cultivation of Humanity in South African Higher Education</i></p>   |

18:30 – 21:00

**Gala Dinner at the Fountain, Monument**

**WELCOME: DVC A&SA Professor 'Mabokang Monnapula Mapesela**

Join us for a memorable evening of music, dining and celebration at our Conference Gala Dinner. Enjoy the vibrant sounds of the local band Amalahle as we share good food, great company and lively conversation with fellow conference delegates. It promises to be a joyful night of connection and entertainment – one not to be missed!

## DAY 3 PROGRAMME • THURSDAY, 7TH MAY

- 07:45** **Arrival:** Monument Building, Lucas Avenue, Makhanda
- 08:00** **Welcome:** Programme Director: Sakhe Ntlabezo
- 08:05** Rhodes University Chamber Choir, Choral Performance (Mixed Repertoire)
- 08:25** Move to Breakaway Rooms for Presentations

## 08:30 – 08:55 PRESENTATION SESSION 1

- Venue 1**  
Level 2:  
Thomas Pringle  
**Heila Lotz-Sisitka, Monde Duma**, Rhodes University  
**A85** *Learning in and from transdisciplinary, co-engaged research methodologies : a focus on cultural historical activity theory research*
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- Venue 2**  
Level 2:  
Ntsikana  
**Sakhe Ntlabezo**, EDUVOS  
**A86** *Ubuntu, Knowledge Democracy, and the Cultivation of Humanity in Community-University Partnerships*
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- Venue 3**  
Level 2:  
Atherstone  
**Lian May, Monica Canca, Claire McCann**, Oxford and Rhodes University  
**A87** *From bridges to pathways: Narrative portraits of community engagement in Makhanda*
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- Venue 4**  
Level 1:  
Council Chamber  
**Vuyelwa Moyo, Boudina McConnachie**, Rhodes University  
**A88** *Dialogic Partnerships Through Sound: An Ecomusicological Approach to Community-Engaged Knowledge Production.*
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- Venue 5**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 1  
**Nyx McLean, Sakhe Ntlabezo, Jodey-Lee Malgas**, EDUVOS  
**A89** *Research for Real-World Impact: Institutionalising Community-Based Participatory Research in a Private Higher Education Context*
- 
- Venue 6**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 2  
**Taryn Pereira-Kaplan, Kira Erwin**, Rhodes University and Ground Work  
**A90** *Scholar-Activist Dialogic Partnerships for Environmental Justice*

## 08:55 – 09:20 PRESENTATION SESSION 2

- Venue 1**  
Level 2:  
Thomas Pringle  
**Diana Hornby**, Rhodes University  
**A91** *From Universities as Anchor Institutions to Reparative Anchor Institutions: Implications for conceptualizing universities as Anchor Institutions in South Africa.*
- 
- Venue 2**  
Level 2:  
Ntsikana  
**Jeffrey Sipiwe Mkhize, Nereshnee Govender, Gift Mheta, Andrea Alcock, Nonhlanhla Khumalo**, Durban University of Technology and University of Zululand  
**A92** *Universities as Anchor Institutions for Social Repair: Academic Writing Development and Transformative Learning in a KwaZulu-Natal Correctional Facility*
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- Venue 3**  
Level 2:  
Atherstone  
**Jason Oberholster**, University of Pretoria  
**A93** *Equipping Architectural Graduates for Complex Urban Integration of Migrants and Refugees: Dialogic Partnerships, Participatory Development, and Collaborative Urban Citizenship*

**Venue 4**  
Level 1:  
Council Chamber

**Jonathan Davy, Kai Manie, Gosia Lipinska, Laura C. Roden, Karine Scheuermaier, F. Xavier Gómez-Olivé, Raphaella Lewis, Swantje Wells, Yvonne M. Milton, Teagan L.Y. Niemand, Noel Reddy, Dale E. Rae, Lived Experience Experts of the SleepCHAMPzzz, Rhodes University**

*A94 From advisors to advocates – reflections on embedding lived experience in the study of teen sleep and mental health*

**Venue 5**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 1

**Sakhe Ntlabezo, EDUVOS and Dr Andile Mtotywa, Rhodes University**

*A95 Toward Participatory Advancement: Repositioning Resource Mobilisation through Dialogic Partnership*

**Venue 6**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 2

**Monica Canca, Bahle Maqina, Rhodes University**

*A96 From a Reparative Perspective: Building Transformative Leadership in Students through Community Engagement*

**09:20 – 09:45 PRESENTATION SESSION 3**

**Venue 1**  
Level 2:  
Thomas Pringle

**Noel Pearse, Rhodes University**

*A97 Community engagement and leadership development*

**Venue 2**  
Level 2:  
Ntsikana

**Bruce Damons, Oyama Soga, Nomthandazo Pukwana, Pushetji Leshilo, Neo Maruma, Amy De Raedt, Nelson Mandela University**

*A98 Designing Relational Food Governance: Student Agency and Reparative Institutional Architecture*

**Venue 3**  
Level 2:  
Atherstone

**Nolly Shelle, Vatiswa Joni, Nikki Green, Rhodes University**

*A99 Sustaining Youth Employment and Community Wellbeing: Role of a University-Based Centre as an Anchor Institution in Early Childhood Development*

**Venue 4**  
Level 1:  
Council Chamber

**Adams, A (RU), Williams, S (CPUT), Muhuro, P (UFH), Kanise, F (CHE)**

*Awakening critical consciousness through dialogical engagements*

**Venue 5**  
Yellowwood  
Terrace

**Poster Presentation in the Yellowwood Terrace** (see list below)

**Venue 6**  
Yellowwood  
Terrace

**Poster Presentation in the Yellowwood Terrace** (see list below)

**09:45 – 10:15 Tea, Coffee and Refreshments: The Yellowwood Terrace**

**10:15 – 11:15 KEYNOTE ADDRESS: PROFESSOR TIM EATMAN, Inaugural Dean of the Honors Living-Learning Community and Professor of Urban Education at Rutgers University-Newark, USA**

**TITLE: Publicly engaged scholarship: prophetic Imagination and civic love**

## 11:15 – 11:40 PRESENTATION SESSION 4

**Venue 1**  
Level 2:  
Thomas Pringle

**Claire McCann**, Oxford University  
**A121** *From enclosure to path-making: A conceptual framework for higher education community engagement*

**Venue 2**  
Level 2:  
Ntsikana

**Lauren Rembach and Michelle Smal**, STADIO  
**A122** *Reparative Interdisciplinary Community Engagement: An Ubuntu-Informed Model for Socially Responsible Higher Education in South Africa*

**Venue 3**  
Level 2:  
Atherstone

**Monica Canca**, Rhodes University  
*Collaboration as a reparative tool: Fostering collective learning to address systemic issues*

**Venue 4**  
Level 1:  
Council Chamber

**Matolwandile M Mtotywa**, Rhodes University  
*Collaboration as a reparative tool: Fostering collective learning to address systemic issues*

**Venue 5**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 1

**Jerit Dube**, University of the Free State  
**A125** *Co-production of Knowledge through Engaged Research Practices in QwaQwa*

## 11:40 – 12:05 PRESENTATION SESSION 5

**Venue 1**  
Level 2:  
Thomas Pringle

**Timothy Stanton, Diana Sánchez Betancourt, Darian Smith**, HSRC & Stanford University  
**A127** *Strengthening Impact of Community-Engaged Research: Experience and Insights of Scholars at the Human Sciences Research Council*

**Venue 2**  
Level 2:  
Ntsikana

**Nina Frölich**, Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) Germany  
**A128** *Cross-Pollinating Knowledge Gardens: Criteria for Transformative Partnerships in Higher Education*

**Venue 3**  
Level 2:  
Atherstone

**Mpumi Makinana**, The Learning Trust  
*Bridging two worlds: How a Community of Practice became a space where the afterschool sector and Rhodes University learned together*

**Venue 4**  
Level 1:  
Council Chamber

**Melanie Mans and Sasha Wessels**, EDUVOS and University of Witwatersrand  
**A130** *Dialogical Partnerships in Non-Placement Work-Integrated Learning as a bridge for strengthening Community-Oriented Design Projects in Graphic Design Education at a South African Multi-Campus Private Higher Education Institution*

**Venue 5**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 1

**Ncomeka Sineke, Ntandazo Dlatu, Wezile Wilson Chitham, Teke Apalata and Lindiwe Modest Faye**, Walter Sisulu University  
**A131** *From Hotspot Households to Structural Introspection: Data-Driven TB Risk Stratification as Reparative Community Engagement in Rural Eastern Cape*

**Venue 6**  
Ground Floor:  
Visitors Centre 2

**Anil Lonappan and Bibin Mohan George**, Mangosuthu University of Technology  
**A132** *Work Integrated learning as a Pedagogical Strategy in Engineering Education: Curriculum, Assessment and Industry Engagement*

<b>12:05 – 12:30</b>		<b>PRESENTATION SESSION 6</b>	
<b>Venue 1</b> Level 2: Thomas Pringle	<b>Sambesiwe Mavela</b> , Rhodes University <i>A133 Empowering Communities Through Music Education: An Exploration of Two Non-Profit Music Projects in the Eastern Cape, South Africa</i>		
<b>Venue 2</b> Level 2: Ntsikana	<b>Emanuel Matlala</b> , Durban University of Technology <i>A134 Mapping community engagement for the cultivation of humanity: A scoping review of South African scholarship (2020-2025)</i>		
<b>Venue 3</b> Level 2: Atherstone	<b>Iain Paterson and Kim Weaver</b> , Rhodes University <i>A135 Co-learning through community engagement activities in Cactus control</i>		
<b>Venue 4</b> Level 1: Council Chamber	<b>Kamvelihle Buwa</b> , Rhodes University <i>A136 Translating with Care: Rhodes University as an Anchor Institution through isiXhosa Translation of Sexuality Education Resources</i>		
<b>Venue 5</b> Ground Floor: Visitors Centre 1	<b>Divya Singh, Flip Schutte</b> , STADIO <i>A137 From Start-Up to Anchor Institution: Embedding Community Engagement as Reparative Practice at STADIO Higher Education</i>		
<b>Venue 6</b> Ground Floor: Visitors Centre 2	<b>Cathy Gush</b> , Lebone Centre <i>A138 Ecosystem Partnerships for Literacy Development: promoting community participation in reading through partnership networks</i>		
<b>12:30 – 13:00</b>		<b>Consolidation of Conference Presentations</b>	
		<b>Vote of Thanks</b>	
<b>14:00</b>		<b>Packed Lunch</b>	

## POSTER PRESENTATION IN THE YELLOWWOOD TERRACE

**TL Manje, R Demana, TH Mathe & P**

**Tshiambara**, University of Pretoria

**A100** *Final-Year Community Nutrition*

*Students' Critical Service Learning Engagement*

*on Overweight and Obesity in the Melusi*

*Community: Heathy Living Hub in Tshwane,*

*South Africa*

**Pesadean Hendricks**, North West University

**A101** *Community Engagement Intervention in*

*the Intermediate Phase: Students reflections*

*through a storyboard.*

**Dineo Mokoena**, University of the Free State

**A102** *Exploring the role of social entrepreneurship*

*in youth development in rural context: A case*

*study of Maluti-A-Phofung (MAP) municipality*

**Tabisa Booii & Wellington M. Hokonya,**

Rhodes University

**A103** *Engaging the Community in Family Maths*

*Workshops: Siyakhana: Enhancing Quality*

*Teaching of Literacy and Numeracy in ECD*

**Mbekezeli Nxumalo, Dr Poka and Sivuyile**

**Madikizela**, Rhodes University and

Mrwetyana High School

**A104** *From Outreach to Reparative Partnership:*

*Reframing Mathematics Service-Learning*

*through Ubuntu*

**Zandile Mnisi LaMvuleni**, Rhodes University

**A105** *Dialogic Partnerships in Motion: Rhodes*

*University and Book Dash Advancing Literacy*

*Through Community Engagement*

**Estella. Z. Jingxi, Nomfundo. L. N. Ndlovu and**

**S'thembile Mzimela**, Mangosuthu University of  
Technology

**A106** *Dialogic Partnerships in Higher Education:*

*Strengthening University-Community*

*Collaboration*

**Darren Lortan, Darian Smith**, Durban

University of Technology

**A107** *Mitigating STEM attrition through CUP's*

**Samantha van Heerden**, Rhodes University

**A108** *Uncovering Work and Learning Pathways*

*for Climate Adaptive Labour: Lessons and*

*Reflections on Work the World Needs*

**Lwazikazi Madikiza**, Rhodes University

**A109** *A community engaged water testing*

*facility: a multi stakeholder initiative enhancing*

*agency around water quality and use*

**Lindiwe Modest Faye**, Walter Sisulu

University

**A110** *Structural introspection through*

*community-engaged clinical governance:*

*Reparative tuberculosis care in rural Eastern*

*Cape South Africa*

**Marlé van Eyk, Annarie Paterson,**

**Sophumelela Katelo**, Nelson Mandela

University, Inscape Education Group,

Sophumelela Youth Development Programme

**A111** *Reimagining Research Through Community*

*Engagement: Advancing Equity and Knowledge*

*Co-creation via Community-Based Participatory*

*Research*

**Wandile P Mvulane**, Rhodes University  
*A112 Green Learn to Earn in a just transitioning South Africa: A focus on skills and livelihood*

**Lindiwe Modest Faye, Urgent Tsuru, Ntandazo Dlatu, Mojisola Clara Hosu, Teke Apalata**, Walter Sisulu University  
*A113 Ubuntu and the Reparative University: Community-Engaged Knowledge Production for Latent Tuberculosis Infection Awareness in Rural Eastern Cape*

**Ngaka Martin Mosia**, University of the Free State  
*A114 A systematic review of universities' community engagement as reparative approach: A framework for the cultivation of humanity in the higher education sector*

**Joseph Radebe**, Vaal University of Technology  
*A115 Community Engagement as a Practical Tool for Community Development and Social Justice: A Case from the Vaal University of Technology (South Africa)*

**Ntandazo Dlatu**, Walter Sisulu University  
*A116 Decolonising TB Education: Reparative Engagement and Knowledge Democracy in Rural South Africa*

**Erin Anthonie**, Ateneo de Manila University  
*A117 Moms living The Live: How Nanay Live Sellers of the Samahan Ng Nagkakaisang Pamilya Ng Pantawid (SNPP) Experience And Understand Tik Tok Live Selling*

**Maso Nduna**, Assumption Development Centre (ADC)  
*A118 ADC Model for Socio-Economic Development: a Community Partner Perspective*

**Sibusiso Trevor Tshabalala**, Mangosuthu University of Technology  
*A119 Transforming an Invasive Pest into a Regenerative Resource: A Social Innovation Approach to Enhancing Soil Fertility and Smallholder Livelihoods in Ejozini Municipality, South Africa*

**Nkejane Gloria**, Durban University of Technology  
*A120 Community-Driven Indigenous Knowledge Documentation: Strengthening Local Participation through the National Recordal System in the Free State*

**NOTE:** Due to the numbers of abstracts received, if any accepted abstracts or posters are not reflected on the programme please contact Di Hornby: [d.Hornby@ru.ac.za](mailto:d.Hornby@ru.ac.za), 046 6037228/9

## DAY 1 PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

**Samuel Fongwa** – CODESRIA and University of the Free State

**A1** *Exploring University Community Engagement as Reparative Justice*

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This paper explores the transformative role of African universities as anchor institutions in promoting community engagement to nurture humanity, support socioeconomic development, and advance reparative futures. It begins by acknowledging the extractive nature of colonial and post-colonial higher education systems, which aimed to strip African communities of their language, values, resources, cultures, and epistemologies. Although African universities have the potential to act as stable, place-based entities that contribute to economic growth, social transformation, and the addressing of historical and structural inequities and challenges, many continue to prioritize global, neoliberal agendas at the expense of their immediate and extended communities. The proposed framework advocates for universities to serve as catalysts for inclusive regional development, restoring social, cultural, and economic values within their communities, cities, and regions. The case of Sol Plaatje University (SPU) in Kimberley exemplifies both the potential and challenges of university-community engagement in contexts marked by economic disparities and legacies of marginalization. SPU's impact-ranging from its contribution to local and provincial GDP, entrepreneurship training, and access support for disenfranchised communities-highlights strategies to bridge university-community divides and foster transformative development. These contributions themselves underscore the reparative role of the university in society. However, limited community and institutional buy-in, along with challenges in institutional growth, emphasize the need for deeper reparative approaches that prioritize inclusive participation and empowerment not only of external communities but also of internal university stakeholders. To consolidate the social transformative and sustainable development role of higher education and foster reparative futures, African universities must institutionalize community engagement through an anchored approach that leverages the socio-economic capacity of the university while safeguarding institutional autonomy and academic freedom.

**Zanele Boti** – Council for Higher Education

**A2** *Reframing the Evaluation of University-Community Engagement as a Dialogic and Co-constructed Process: Towards Reparative and Humanising Practices in South African Higher Education*

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In South Africa, community engagement is positioned as a core mandate of public universities, yet the ways in which it is evaluated often remains technocratic, compliance-driven, and insufficiently attentive to relational processes, ethical responsibilities, and community-defined indicators. The study draws on findings from a qualitative doctoral study that I am currently conducting across three South African public universities located in three provinces. It examines how institutional evaluation

frameworks shape, enable, or constrain the reparative potential of university-community engagement. As a researcher embedded within the South African higher education sector, I approach this study from both an insider and critical standpoints. My positionality is informed by the philosophy of Ubuntu, the notion of the reparative university, and scholarship on knowledge democracy which foreground the dialogic and co-constructed approaches rather than technocratic evaluation models. Empirically, the study draws on existing literature, policies and frameworks, together with in-depth qualitative data collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews with institutional actors responsible for community engagement. The preliminary findings reveal a persistent disjuncture between the social responsibility of universities and the way evaluation is practiced. While institutional frameworks emphasise outputs, reporting, and reputational indicators, they frequently marginalise relational, ethical, and community-defined dimensions of value. As a result, community engagement risks reproducing extractive practices rather than contributing to healing, reciprocity, and the cultivation of shared humanity. The paper argues that evaluation itself is a critical site of repair, and that it must be reconceptualised as a reparative practice, one grounded in reciprocity, dialogue, and shared humanity. Reframing evaluation as a dialogic and co-constructed process enables communities to be recognised not only as knowledge co-creators, but also as participants in the evaluation rather than beneficiaries or sites of intervention only. Such an approach aligns evaluation with the broader project of the reparative university, one that acknowledges and confronts epistemic injustice, and commits to humane futures. The study concludes by proposing principles for a reparative evaluation framework that foregrounds Ubuntu, reciprocity, relationality, co-creation, and shared humanity, when evaluating the impact of community engagement in South African higher education.

**Megan Campbell, Lerato Mota, Liyabona Notuku – Rhodes University**

**A3** *Measuring the Impact of a Community-Engaged Service Learning Initiative: The ADC Counselling Hub case-study*

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The impact and benefit of engaging in Community-Based Service Learning (CBSL) for participating university students is well established, but there is less empirical evidence demonstrating the benefit for the communities engaged in these service learning activities. This presentation addresses the gap by providing evidence of the impact of a CBSL initiative implemented at the Assumption Development Centre (ADC), Counselling Hub in Joza. Functioning as a skills training and small business development centre, the Joza ADC grows entrepreneurship and business skills development in a community-sensitive manner. The ADC Counselling Hub is a complementary service within the ADC that offers mental healthcare support, provided by 12 student psychologists and 6 intern counselling psychologists each year. Drawing from annual reports and utilisation statistics recorded since its inception in 2022, the authors demonstrate consistent and increasing utilization rates for individual counselling (from 39 clients in 2022 to 131 in 2025) and workshop attendance (from 327 individuals in 2022 to 581 in 2025). In a sub-sample of between 20-30 clients per year the study presents a 4-year trend of self-reported psychological distress and self-harming risk reported by Joza community

members accessing services at the Counselling Hub, and the change in distress affected as a result of these services. Findings suggest that not only is the service growing markedly (demonstrated by increased utilization rates and requests for diversity of services), but also significant alleviation of psychological distress and self-harming risk within the client sample who completed outcome measures of distress before and after services received at the ADC Counselling Hub.

**Ian Nell, Michelle Smal – STADIO**

*A4 Co-creating the Reparative University: Community engagement tapping into the philosophy of Ubuntu-Insights from the GRIT Case Study*

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Globally, higher education institutions are increasingly under pressure to review their social goals in light of structural inequalities and the ongoing dehumanization that often receive little attention in academia. This contribution seeks to explore the potential for co-creating a university in search of recovery. The latter exploration will be undertaken by looking at the potential for shifting community engagement (CE) from a transactional model of service to an ethical relationship based on the philosophy of Ubuntu. History teaches us that universities have been directly or indirectly complicit in promoting injustice and maintaining colonial and apartheid epistemologies that marginalize indigenous knowledge. By using a restorative lens, this dynamic can be transformed by requiring institutions to acknowledge these historical wounds. At the same time, higher education institutions must seek to facilitate active processes of healing and humanization in modern society. Ubuntu offers an ontological framework of interconnectedness-‘I am because we are’-to transform universities. It shifts community engagement from paternalistic ‘benevolent coercion’ and ‘cultural safaris’ toward reciprocity, recognition, and shared responsibility. This demands moving from knowledge economy instrumentalism to democracy, with communities as co-creators, power redistribution, institutional anchoring in research/appointments/purchases, and confronting colonial legacies in curricula. A case study at STADIO Higher Education with the acronym GRIT (Gender Rights in Technology) will be used to illustrate how Ubuntu-driven actions – rooted in practices of care and mutuality – provide a blueprint for transformative justice that addresses the systemic causes of harm. The GRIT case study was conducted using a qualitative, participatory action research design, drawing on document analysis, focus group discussions, and reflective interviews with community partners and student participants. Data were analysed thematically through an Ubuntu lens, prioritising co-interpretation and member-checking to ensure community voices shaped the findings. Ultimately, the co-creation of a restorative university through Ubuntu allows for the emergence of a restorative future, positioning academia as a participant in collective acts of remembrance and restoration. Reflexivity was maintained throughout the research through ongoing journaling, peer debriefing, and transparent acknowledgement of the author’s institutional and cultural situatedness.

**Martina Jordaan**-University of Pretoria

**A5** *Digital Horizons: Evaluating the Impact and Sustainability of Global E-Community Engagement*

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The digital transformation of academic outreach has given rise to e-community engagement, an innovative virtual framework that facilitates collaborative partnerships between universities and global interest groups. This study utilises a qualitative case study methodology, drawing on reflective practice and program evaluations from the University of Pretoria's Mamelodi Campus. By leveraging online channels to exchange specialised knowledge, the model serves as a vital alternative to traditional face-to-face interaction, effectively transcending geographical boundaries. The analysis is grounded in Activity Theory (AT), which illuminates the systemic "friction" encountered during the transition to a virtual environment. Participants must navigate significant hurdles, including limited internet bandwidth, time zone differences, and gaps in digital literacy. Through the lens of AT, these hurdles are identified as inner contradictions within the activity system that must be resolved to achieve sustainable outcomes. However, the benefits-ranging from heightened student civic involvement to the development of critical global problem-solving skills-outweigh the logistical challenges. As the lead practitioner and an insider-researcher, the researcher's positionality acknowledges both the institutional goals of the Mamelodi Campus and the power dynamics inherent in university-community partnerships. This paper provides a comprehensive analysis of the successes and obstacles encountered, offering evidence-based recommendations. Key focus areas include robust infrastructure investment, specialised training, and the adoption of flexible, culturally adaptive communication strategies. Ultimately, the paper argues that the scalability and inclusivity of e-community engagement are essential for fostering sustainable societal development and meaningful social impact in an increasingly interconnected world, provided that institutions remain committed to overcoming technical barriers through proactive innovation.

**Chikumbutso Ndaferankhande** – Rhodes University

**A6** *Empowering Young Voices: Critical Pedagogy and Decolonial Climate Storytelling in Malawi Secondary Schools*

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The climate crisis is both a global concern and a profound educational challenge, particularly in contexts marked by inequality and the politics of whose knowledge counts. This paper presents findings from the engaged research project Empowering Young Voices, conducted in Karonga District in northern Malawi within the broader southern African context. Drawing on Critical Pedagogy and Decoloniality, the study positions young people not merely as recipients of climate education but as co-creators of climate knowledge through the writing of climate fiction grounded in their own experiences and imaginations. The study involved a purposive sample of six secondary school learners from Karonga District who had previously participated in an environmental storytelling competition within a community-based literacy initiative. Their prior engagement with environmental storytelling positioned them well to participate in the narrative-based inquiry undertaken in

this research. The learners participated in three collaborative workshops conducted in 2025. Data were generated through students' speculative climate stories, workshop dialogue, reflective journals, and semi-structured interviews and analysed thematically to explore how learners articulated local climate experiences, future imaginaries, and intergenerational responsibility. Researcher positionality formed an important aspect of the study. As a Malawian researcher working with students in his home country while undertaking postgraduate study at Rhodes University, the author adopted a reflexive role as both facilitator and co-learner. The research was conducted in collaboration with teachers and formed part of the Malawi Writers Union (MAWU) Secondary Schools Reading Initiative, creating a dialogic learning space that recognised students' creative productions as legitimate forms of knowledge. Findings suggest that students' co-authorship of climate futures enabled them to articulate nuanced understandings of relationality, resilience, and hope, demonstrating the potential of youth storytelling as a form of engaged knowledge production that can contribute meaningfully to climate education.

**Olwethu Mkalipi, Nombini Potwana – Ubunye**

*A7 Developing Voice in Early Childhood Development Centres in Rural Areas of Ngqusha Municipality*

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This engaged research examines how community-led, play-based learning disrupts epistemic injustice in rural Early Childhood Development (ECD) centres, contributing to the conference's discourse on reparative engagement and cultivating humanity through Ubuntu philosophy. Epistemic injustice, the systematic exclusion of marginalised communities from knowledge production, manifests acutely in rural Eastern Cape ECD contexts, where externally imposed pedagogies often silence local voices and devalue indigenous ways of knowing. In this paper, we report that centering local voices and cultural contexts in ECD challenges dominant narratives and knowledge hierarchies. Since 2019, Ubunye Foundation's Isisekelo Programme (Education for Life) has partnered with ECD practitioners in the Ngqushwa Municipality. Grounded in Ubuntu's relational ontology-umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (a person is a person through other persons)-this community-owned initiative positions rural practitioners as knowledge creators rather than passive recipients. Programme Working Groups (PWGs) comprising community-selected members identify needs, design interventions, and evaluate outcomes, embodying what Fricker (2007) terms "epistemic justice" by restoring communities' hermeneutical authority. The play-based learning framework from Van Oers (2013) was adapted as he centres children's socio-cultural historical realities through locally relevant stories and materials. This adaptation exemplifies reparative engagement: rather than importing Western pedagogies comprehensively, practitioners critically transform them to honour children's lived experiences and indigenous knowledge systems. Play becomes a vehicle for cultivating humanity, developing children's agency, cultural identity, and critical consciousness within their communities. As researchers embedded within the community, our positionality is central to this work. We occupy both insider and outsider positions: witnessing transformation while recognising the privileges as an educated community facilitator and as a ECD practitioner and PWG member. Our

lived experiences and collaborative approach inform our commitment to amplifying marginalised voices and advancing reparative engagement in ECD. This paper analyses how practitioners implement culturally responsive play-based learning using the Ubunye I-Monitor App for continuous evaluation. It examines practitioner experiences, challenges encountered, and strategies for extending learning to homes. By foregrounding rural ECD practitioners as epistemic agents, this research demonstrates how community-led approaches can disrupt colonial knowledge hierarchies and cultivate humanising pedagogies rooted in Ubuntu.

**Angela James, Ashnie Mahadew, Ncamisile Mthiyane, Nora Saneka, Kate Baker, Gail Strydom, Romany Roberts, Bilkish Vawda, Mari van der Merwe, Patsy Pillay, Tara Rosser, Priscilla Edmonds, Chantal Snyman** – University of Kwazulu Natal, Durban Inner City & South ECD Forum, New Beginnings, GROW ECD, Be Sustainably Yours, VVOB

**A8** *When the Community Calls: Collective Action as a Framework for Social Transformation*

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Globally, Community engagement is enacted in varied contexts with different groups of people, working together to solve a problem experienced. In South Africa, the White Paper on the Transformation of Higher Education (1997, p. 11) mandates Institutions of Higher Learning to “demonstrate social responsibility...and their commitment to the common good by making available expertise and infrastructure for community service programmes”. Community engagement with action is an evolving practice with multiple influences. The community experiences many social issues in the educational space, particularly in early childhood development (ECD) and it is the action of individuals at the local level who can make a difference and effect meaningful change. This paper explores the transformative programme developed in partnership between a university and community group to address ECD matters. Experiential learning as the theoretical framework informed the design and methodology of the study. Community engagement with action is an evolving practice shaped by multiple social, organisational, and contextual influences. In the ECD sector, these influences intersect in ways that require stakeholders to collaborate across diverse roles, actions and resource conditions. This qualitative study explores how members of a university and a community group, thirteen KwaZulu-Natal ECD Collaborative Forum members, understand and enact community-engaged action in response to emerging needs within the local ECD ecosystem. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews, and analysis of collaborative documents. Findings show that community calls-expressed through practitioner concerns, challenges experienced, served as key drivers of joint action within the forum. Participants describe the space as a platform for coordination, mutual support, and shared problem-solving, enabling more coherent responses to community needs. The study highlights the role of trust-building, relational dynamics, and local histories in shaping effective collaboration, alongside institutional and resource-related constraints. Overall, the research demonstrates that meaningful community-engaged action in the ECD sector is dynamic and negotiated, requiring adaptability, collective commitment, and continuous learning. The study contributes to broader conversations on civic engagement, collaborative governance, and multi-stakeholder partnerships in South African ECD practice.

**Pillay Trishka, Manyatsa Jugen** – Mangosuthu University of Technology**A9** *Advancing Food Safety Through Community Engagement: A Case Study of Informal Traders Surrounding Mangosuthu University of Technology*

This paper highlights critical service learning through collaboration between MUT BSc Environmental Health students and eThekweni municipality stakeholders to address unsafe food systems in the informal sector. The project responds to public health concerns affecting vulnerable populations, including food safety risks and pesticide poisoning outbreaks. Within the higher education context this community engagement initiative contributes to SDG 3: good health & wellbeing and SDG 8: decent work and economic growth. The objective of this initiative was to enhance informal food traders' knowledge on food & chemical safety. The study employed a cross-sectional study design involving 23 informal trading sites in Umlazi, Durban. The study was implemented in 2 phases from February to December 2025. In phase one, the eThekweni Municipality Environmental Health and Vector control units together with the National Department of Agriculture, provided training to 77 MUT students, equipping them with knowledge and capacity to facilitate health education. Phase 2 required students to apply knowledge to conduct curriculum-based academic projects. Students conducted site visits using inspection checklists to assess food safety and vector control, and delivered health education to informal traders, fostering active knowledge facilitation rather than passive learning. Inspection report findings were used to reinforce training sessions. Findings indicated poor hygiene practices as well as infrastructural challenges, including limited access to potable water, improper food storage, overcrowded working conditions, and ineffective waste management. Poor waste management practices contributed to pest infestations, thereby increasing the risk of foodborne illness. The project culminated in a training session hosted by the MUT for informal food traders. Results highlight that adopting good hygiene practices, supported by adequate infrastructure, is essential to improving food safety. This initiative shows that university-municipality collaboration can simultaneously improve public health and empower informal traders through mutually beneficial, practical engagement. The project remains sustainable by enrolling new BSc Environmental Health students each year, ensuring continuity through annual registration.

**Mengyu Liu, Ronghuai Huang** – Beijing Normal University**A10** *Reframing Digital University-Community Engagement: A Communicative-Structural-Subjective (CSS) Reparative Model*

Amid accelerating digitalisation, universities are increasingly positioned as drivers of innovation and economic growth. However, digital engagement between universities and communities often reproduces epistemic hierarchies and unequal power relations, where universities act primarily as knowledge providers while communities remain marginal participants. Drawing on research on digital education and university-community collaboration in rapidly digitalising higher education contexts, this paper proposes a Communicative-Structural-Subjective (CSS) reparative framework to rethink digital university-community engagement. Grounded in critical social theory and the tra-

dition of communicative rationality, the CSS model conceptualises digital engagement as a process of relational and institutional transformation rather than technological enhancement. The framework consists of three interrelated dimensions. The Communicative (C) dimension focuses on epistemic dialogue, emphasising the co-production of knowledge and the recognition of diverse knowledge systems. The Structural (S) dimension addresses institutional arrangements, highlighting the need for participatory governance, more equitable decision-making processes, and sustainable partnership mechanisms between universities and communities. The Subjective (S) dimension considers relational agency, reframing the university not as an expert authority but as a collaborative actor within a shared community of practice. By integrating these dimensions, the CSS framework shifts the understanding of digital engagement from service delivery toward epistemic justice and mutual learning. Digital platforms are therefore viewed as potential infrastructures for dialogue and collaboration, provided that they are embedded within participatory governance and ethical accountability. Conceptually, the paper contributes to debates on community engagement by connecting digital transformation with reparative institutional change. It argues that universities can act as anchor institutions of epistemic democracy only when communicative dialogue, structural redistribution, and relational subjectivity are developed simultaneously. In this way, the CSS model offers a framework for reimagining digital university-community engagement as a practice of repair rather than expansion.

**Samuel Obeng Kwarteng, Emanuel Matlala** – Durban University of Technology

*A11 Effectiveness of University-Supported Community Enterprises in Mitigating Local Unemployment and Poverty in KwaZulu Natal*

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Unemployment and poverty remain persistent socio-economic challenges in many communities in KwaZulu-Natal despite numerous government and development initiatives. In response, universities have increasingly expanded their roles beyond teaching and research to include community engagement through the establishment and support of community enterprises. However, limited empirical evidence exists on the effectiveness of university-supported community enterprises in generating sustainable employment and reducing poverty at the local level. This study investigates the effectiveness of university-supported community enterprises in mitigating local unemployment and poverty in KwaZulu-Natal. The study is grounded in Human Capital Theory and Social Capital Theory. These frameworks explain how universities build entrepreneurial skills and provide institutional networks that enable community enterprises to access resources and markets, thereby improving productivity, employment opportunities and long-term enterprise sustainability. A multi-site case study analysed four community enterprise projects (2021-2025) using secondary data from provincial labour force surveys ( $n=3,600$  households), municipal poverty indices, university programme records and 15 peer-reviewed studies. Statistical analyses included chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) tests and paired t-tests at a 5% significance level ( $\alpha = 0.05$ ). The results indicate moderate socio-economic improvements in participating communities. Employment rates increased by an average of 18%, while average household income rose by 15% over the study period. Collectively, the enterprises generated 450 direct

employment and contributed to an average annual income increase of R12,500 per participating household ( $p < .01$ ). Furthermore, multidimensional poverty indices showed a 9% reduction in poverty within project catchment areas. The findings indicate that university-supported community enterprises are moderately effective in creating employment and reducing poverty. The university's greatest impact lies in capacity building which develops transferable skills, entrepreneurial mindsets and stronger local networks. However, sustainability challenges still remain which highlights the need for improved strategic transition planning to strengthen long-term developmental impact.

**Kate Bryan** – St Andrews College, **Theodor Geswindt** – Rhodes University, **Joyce Sewry** – Rhodes University, **Vincent Smith** – Stellenbosch University

#### *A12 Academic Enrichment Program: Linking Learners to Universities Through Sustainability*

Sustainability is defined as the “development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987, p.16). While widely used, sustainability discourse is often abstracted from the lived realities of youth and inequalities shaping their sense of environmental agency. Universities, as producers of sustainability research, can function as knowledge enclaves, generating insight without meaningful engagement with the communities within which they are situated. To act as anchor institutions, universities should cultivate relational spaces of shared inquiry that position young people not merely as recipients of expertise, but as emerging contributors to knowledge and social transformation. Exploring this possibility, secondary school learners in Makhanda participated in a laboratory-based enrichment programme at Rhodes University. The project was conceptualised not simply as outreach, but as an experiment in institutional anchoring: opening university laboratories as dialogic spaces where tertiary and school-based understanding of sustainability could meet. Learners completed baseline surveys assessing their understanding of sustainability. They then participated in a series of laboratory experiments facilitated by postgraduate students. Throughout the programme learners completed reflective surveys, and postgraduate facilitators participated in a focus group discussion reflecting on their experiences. The laboratory component investigated different approaches to plastic depolymerisation, comparing mechanochemical techniques with conventional reflux-based methods. The programme concluded with a discussion exploring both experimental outcomes and broader understanding of sustainability. Initial responses revealed surface-level conceptions of sustainability centred primarily on recycling. Several learners characterised sustainability as a privilege, linking environmental practice to socioeconomic security. A recurring theme was a perceived lack of individual agency, suggesting that sustainability is experienced not merely as a technical issue, but as socially mediated. The study argues that positioning universities as anchor institutions requires more than extending access-it demands intentional pedagogical and institutional practices that cultivate belonging, critical reflection, and social responsibility. Opening laboratory spaces to sustained engagement and structured dialogue, the programme demonstrates how teaching and research can develop alongside communities creating learning opportunities and positive social impact.

**Grey Magaiza** – University of the Free State, **Margie Maistry** – Rhodes University

**A13** *Reparative Pedagogies: Community Engagement and the Social Reconstruction of Race*

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Race is a social construct, and it continues to organise material inequality, institutional culture and social belonging while simultaneously increasing spiritual poverty in post-apartheid South Africa. In this paper, we propose that higher education must strongly expose the fiction of biological race and move toward reparative pedagogies that confront the structural durability of racialisation, racism and its epistemic embeddedness in academic practices. On a global level, the false premise that race exists and on which racism thrives, needs to be challenged, deconstructed and destroyed. We propose that community engagement has the potential to mitigate racism through dialogical humanisation and transformative relational praxis for the cultivation of humanity. We draw on the integration of the Four Worlds Model, decolonial scholarship and Freire's notion of humanisation as a framework to guide reparative pedagogies through community engagement, thereby positioning the university as a space not merely of critique but of ethical and epistemic responsibility for the reconstruction of society. We utilise dialogic responses from students in the first module titled Higher Education and Community Engagement of the newly introduced PG Dip (Higher Education Community Engagement) at Rhodes University, as an illustration of reparative pedagogy, albeit in a small way, through community engagement. As a small-group activity, eleven students were intentionally placed in groups to foster diversity and asked to critically discuss and present ways in which universities and other 'development' role players can contribute to mitigating racism for the cultivation of humanity in South Africa. We claim this exercise as a reparative pedagogy and a minute start to critically challenge the notion of 'race', confront the dehumanisation of racism and seriously consider how we can mitigate its harm from a higher education institutional perspective through the platform of community engagement.

**Mvuzo Ponono, Quatro Mgogo** – Rhodes University

**A14** *Suluma usophula, faki sandal-Using Barter System As Alternative Frame For Development*

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Development studies has been criticised for being grounded in neoliberalism and free-market capitalism (Patel and North, 2022), for holding an ontological position that centres value accumulation and the commodification of resources and labour (Fine and Saad-Filho, 2014). And for anchoring a vertical welfarism that positions the affluent as benefactors and the disadvantaged as recipients. Mainstream critiques have called for development that is bottom-up, people-centred, participatory, and inclusive (Gudynas, 2021). Postdevelopment scholarship has gone further, exposing the asymmetrical nature of development efforts – even in participatory form (Kothari and Cooke, 2001) – arguing that development is rooted in Western models of industrialisation that produce the very underdevelopment it purports to address (Paul, 1997; Mauro, 2022). Postdevelopment scholars have therefore called for a fundamental reimagining of the ontological foundations of development (Sachs, 1992). Existing attempts to address this asymmetry in the context of higher education – notably university-community partnership and critical service-learning literature – have made important procedural

advances toward more inclusive and participatory engagement. However, these frameworks remain ontologically compromised. Even in their most progressive forms, the university retains its implicit positioning as initiator, resource-holder, and knowledge-broker (Butin, 2010). As Tuck and Yang (2012) caution, engagement frameworks that leave institutional power intact risk becoming sophisticated performances of inclusion. Grounded in post development theory, the paper argues that genuine dialogic partnership requires the creation of shared spaces where academic and community knowledge meet on equal terms – what Santos (2014) calls an ecology of knowledges – grounded in Ubuntu’s relational ethic of mutual recognition (Ramose, 1999), and a deliberate rejection of uni-directional expertise-transfer (Connell, 2007). How such symmetrical, knowledge-respecting partnerships can be practically and conceptually grounded remains under-theorised. This paper proposes that indigenous African barter practices are more than an economic phenomenon but a generative philosophy of reciprocal being and exchange. The barter system, understood through this African frame, proposes a horizontal axis of exchange as a conceptual model for university-community engagement. This horizontal axis deliberately displaces the vertical logic of development – whether top-down or bottom-up. Unlike reciprocity frameworks in existing partnership literature that remain structurally tethered to Western institutional logic, this model grounds epistemic reciprocity and cooperative partnership in an African relational ontology – locating the foundation for addressing shared social need not in institutional goodwill or teaching but in mutual exchange.

**Syra Marie Norin A. Petalio, Ma. Criselda Dana P.** – Buñag-Ateneo de Manila University (Philippines)

**A15** *Bridging Gaps, Closing Divides: Reflections on Service-Learning and Community*

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The NSTP 12-Bigkis Program (Bigkis) is one of the programs of the Office for Social Concern and Involvement (OSCI) of the Ateneo de Manila University. It is also part of the Integrated Ateneo Formation (InAF) Program, which is a systematic approach to student formation. Bigkis promotes service-learning initiatives in tie-up with the SocSc 13: The Economy, Society, and Sustainable Development Class. This is also being done in adherence to the Philippine Republic Act 9163 or the National Service Training Program (NSTP) Act. The NSTP Act seeks to promote civic consciousness by mandating Philippine college students to finish a service component. Through Bigkis, students connect with different partner communities for various projects, research, or services anchored on their specific degree programs. During the first semester of SY 2025-2026, 36 3rd Year BS Computer Engineering and BS Electronics Engineering undergraduates conducted an innovative tutorial engagement series with 40 students from identified public high schools in Marikina City. They covered topics on C++, Arduino Uno, Mechatronics, and 3D-Printing over 4 sessions and worked with partner coordinators from the aforementioned schools to create materials that would fit the skillsets of the high school students. This study chronicles their experiences and draws on their shared reflections, exploring themes that mirror the intention of Bigkis to build relationships and connect people, understanding that humans are interconnected and have similarities despite all the things that set them apart. With reflections and insights from both undergraduates and high school

learners, this explores their thoughts on the Philippine education system, their experience of science education, and having engagements that harness skills and knowledge they are developing through their courses, and the paths they can explore moving forward. This presentation provides a look into the student experience in service-learning as a form of engaged citizenry, echoing the call to be professionals for and with others that the University forms and invites them to be. With the reports of the country's Second Congressional Commission on Education, this becomes increasingly urgent, as the Philippines moves to address the various issues it has found affecting the quality of education its students receive.

**Erika Swart – STADIO**

***A16 Conceptualising a Community-Engaged Work-Integrated Service Model for Reparative Futures? Graduate Employability and Social Impact in a Private Higher Education Institution***

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Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to demonstrate meaningful social responsiveness while addressing graduate employability and work readiness. In response to these dual imperatives, this paper presents the conceptualisation of a structured Community-Engaged Work-Integrated Service (CE-WIS) model being developed within the School of Administration and Management at STADIO Higher Education, South Africa. The model provides a mechanism for higher education institutions to contribute to reparative futures by fostering reciprocal and socially responsive community engagement. The author's positionality as a programme coordinator involved in the model's development informs both its design and the research lens applied. This practitioner-researcher perspective provides insight into institutional processes and partnership dynamics, while reflexivity ensures critical engagement with the data and situates the initiative within broader debates on engaged scholarship and reparative approaches to higher education-community partnerships. Currently in its design and alignment phase, the initiative seeks to formalise partnerships between the institution and selected non-profit, charitable, and community-based organisations. The model facilitates mutually beneficial engagement in which senior students provide voluntary, short-term services aligned with their academic disciplines, while partner organisations offer supervised workplace exposure, mentorship, and practical skills development. The institution assumes a coordinating role to ensure ethical engagement, alignment with learning outcomes, and sustainable partnerships. The project is positioned within broader discourses on engaged scholarship, work-integrated learning, and social responsiveness in higher education, with attention to the opportunities and constraints of private higher education institutions outside traditional public-sector frameworks. Although still in the conceptualisation phase, a research component is embedded in the model design. A mixed-methods approach will explore stakeholder expectations, perceived value, and early outcomes through document analysis of memoranda of understanding (MOUs), student reflections, and semi-structured interviews with partner organisations and academic coordinators. The paper argues that deliberate institutional design, rather than ad hoc volunteer initiatives, is essential for achieving both educational value and meaningful community impact.

**Samantha van Schalkwyk** – University of the Western Cape

**A17** *Community-Engaged Learning as Epistemic and Relational Repair at the University of the Western Cape*

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South African higher education remains shaped by colonial and apartheid legacies that have historically marginalised community knowledge and positioned universities as sites of epistemic authority rather than reciprocal learning. The Community Engaged Learning Programme (CELP), run by the Community Engagement Unit (CEU) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), was developed as a social justice-oriented response. This paper positions community-engaged learning (CELP) as a reparative pedagogy within a deeply unequal South African context. It argues that CELP, which is grounded in critical pedagogy, knowledge democracy, and co-creation, can function as a form of epistemic and relational repair by repositioning student and civil society communities as co-producers of knowledge and embedding lived experience within the curriculum. Simultaneously, it advances dialogic partnerships that rebuild trust, redistribute authority, and cultivate ethical responsibility among students. In this way, CELP becomes not merely a mode of engagement, but a reparative institutional practice within a deeply unequal post-apartheid context. The paper draws on CELP facilitators' reflections to examine how the programme cultivates critical consciousness, ethical awareness, and humanising encounters across difference. Findings indicate significant shifts in how students understand education, knowledge, and leadership. Students move from individualised and instrumental views of higher education toward an understanding of education as a public good and a vehicle for social responsibility. Their engagement with communities challenges deficit narratives, affirms lived experience as valid knowledge, and fosters humility, care, and accountability. The programme supports students' development of their own agency while scaffolding their preparation to enact meaningful social impact beyond the university and beyond their careers. The paper further situates CELP within an adapted framework of Boyer's scholarship model, demonstrating how the programme contributes to Scholarship of Engagement for Societal Impact (SoE-SI). By integrating learning, reflection, and community-based application, CELP offers an institutional model for embedding reparative engagement within the core academic project. The paper concludes by arguing that community-engaged learning, when intentionally designed, can act as a reparative practice that bridges epistemic divides, humanises university-community relationships, and cultivates ubuntu-oriented student graduates.

**Emanuel Matlala, Samuel Kwarteng, Mbalenhle Khumalo, Teshani Sewnunan, Arshad Latiff** – Durban University of Technology

**A18** *Reparative Community Engagement in South African Higher Education: A Systematic Review (2020-2025)*

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Community engagement (CE) in South African higher education has increasingly been framed as a vehicle for transformation, social justice, and the cultivation of humanity. However, the extent to which CE practices function as genuinely reparative engagements remains under-examined. This

study presents a systematic review of peer-reviewed and policy literature published between 2020 and 2025 to critically assess how community engagement in South African universities embodies reparative, Ubuntu-informed and justice-oriented practices. Guided by the PRISMA framework, 82 records were identified across major academic databases, of which 36 met inclusion criteria. The review focused on empirical studies addressing engaged research, critical service learning, social innovation and institutional transformation within South African universities. The findings reveal three dominant patterns: while CE rhetoric increasingly invokes Ubuntu, reciprocity and co-creation, many institutional practices remain compliance-driven and output-oriented; transformative models are emerging where partnerships are dialogic, community-defined priorities shape research agendas and students are positioned as co-learners rather than service providers. Lastly, limited evidence exists of deep structural introspection addressing colonial epistemologies and institutional power asymmetries. The review identifies a conceptual gap between aspirational discourse on reparative futures and measurable institutional transformation. While examples of socially responsive anchor institutions are evident, few studies document longitudinal societal impact or institutional accountability mechanisms. The paper concludes that for CE to contribute meaningfully to reparative futures and the cultivation of humanity, South African universities must move beyond transactional engagement toward relational, historically conscious, and structurally transformative practices. It recommends embedding Ubuntu-informed principles into monitoring frameworks, strengthening community-defined evaluation criteria, and aligning CE with institutional transformation agendas. This review contributes evidence-based insights into how South African higher education can reposition community engagement as a site of healing, accountability, and human flourishing.

**Darian Smith** – Human Science Research Council (HSRC)

*A19 Mobilizing “Community Fathers” in Co-creating Safe Spaces within the Wentworth Community, South of Durban*

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Wentworth, a township south of Durban, is plagued by intergenerational violence, poverty, and social disintegration. Historically shaped by apartheid spatial planning, the area continues to suffer from high levels of unemployment, substance abuse, and gang activity. Violence often perpetuated by young people seeking identity and belonging has become normalized. A significant challenge within the community is the absence of fathers due to poverty, substance abuse, and broken family structures. Research shows that children growing up without engaged father figures are at greater risk of psychosocial problems, substance use, and involvement in crime. This study explores the transformative role of “Community Fathers”, men who, regardless of biological ties, actively mentor, support, and guide young people in fostering safer, more cohesive communities. Employing a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach within a qualitative framework, the research engages over 50 local men in sustained dialogue to understand their lived experiences on violence, its structural root causes, and their collective agency in disrupting cycles of harm. The researcher’s positionality as a community insider sharing the same cultural memory and biographical landscape as participants, enabled rare levels of trust and relational depth grounding the findings in authentic community

experience rather than extractive observation. Central to the study's conceptual architecture is Jim Stovall's Ultimate Gift Framework, whose twelve foundational gifts which include love, work, problems and friendship were repurposed as a living tool through which participants examined what they never received, what they could now offer, and how intentionally gifting these values to young people constitutes a radical act of peacebuilding. This is theorised alongside Johan Galtung's distinction between negative peace (the mere absence of violence) and positive peace (the active presence of justice and flourishing). Lederach's relational peacebuilding further anchors the findings, foregrounding trust, dignity, and long-term transformation as the true architecture of peaceful communities. Together, these frameworks illuminate how Community Fathers move beyond surviving violence towards constructing peace by offering grassroots, community-owned models of collective care and relational healing in a community history defined by trauma and exclusion.

**Lungile Ngwenya** – Nelson Mandela University

*A20 Reflexive Dialogue: Elevating Silenced Voices in Social Work Practice*

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Social work in South Africa remains shaped by colonial and apartheid legacies that continue to influence knowledge production, professional identity, and everyday practice. Despite policy commitments to social justice and developmental welfare, social workers frequently experience managerialism, bureaucratic control, and resource scarcity that silence professional voice and constrain ethical agency. These conditions call for forms of engagement that are not merely reflective, but reparative. This presentation focuses on how Reflexive Dialogue was used as a dialogic partnership to elevate silenced practitioner voices and co-construct a guiding framework for ethical and empowered communication in social work practice. Situated within the theme of Dialogic Partnerships, Nelson Mandela University conceptualised Reflexive Dialogue as a collective, inclusive space of shared inquiry between the university and social work practitioners. Rather than positioning the university as expert and practitioners as recipients, the Dialogue created a reciprocal platform where academic and practice-based knowledge met in mutual respect. Grounded in critical pedagogy and informed by an Ubuntu ethic of relationality, the initiative sought to cultivate critical consciousness, solidarity, and renewed professional agency. The presentation draws on insights generated through the 2025 Reflexive Dialogue involving campus supervisors, field supervisors, and practitioners across diverse practice contexts. The Dialogue culminated in the co-construction of a guiding framework that conceptualises speaking in social work as an ethical, relational, and political act. The framework foregrounds sustained self-reflexivity, requiring social workers to interrogate privilege, positionality, motives, and potential harm or benefit. It recognises that voice is mediated by power by highlighting who speaks, to whom, within which seat of authority, and at what cost. It further engaged tensions between authenticity and strategic adaptation in professional communication. Solidarity, collective alignment, and deliberate pacing emerged as enabling conditions, while hierarchical structures, unexamined assumptions, fear of consequences, and professional isolation operated as constraints. By modelling engagement as co-creation rather than consultation, the Reflexive Dialogue contributed to reimagining higher education community engagement as a reparative, and humanising relation-

ship. The presentation will highlight practical implications for strengthening ethical professional agency and deepening reciprocal university and community partnerships within the South African social work landscape.

**Jonathan Campbell** – Rhodes University

**A21** *Relationship-Centred Lawyering and its Impact on Service-Learning in Clinical Legal Education*

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This paper emphasises the human factor in the relationship between lawyer and client, and the role of legal education in this regard. “Relationship-centred lawyering” (or “relational lawyering”) extends the focus beyond the interests of the client to the relationship between lawyer and client. Four key characteristics define relational lawyering: (i) the background contexts of both client and lawyer; (ii) the importance of non-legal issues (e.g. economic, psychological or social factors); (iii) the partnership between lawyer and client that allows for collaborative problem-solving (with an emphasis on client autonomy in decision-making); and (iv) an array of psychological matters, including interpersonal literacy, emotional intelligence and empathy. A range of skills and values are required to practice relational lawyering, known as “relational competencies” which are not widely practiced or understood by lawyers. It is necessary to intentionally include the teaching of relational skills and values in law school curricula. Experiential learning in the university law clinic provides the most powerful opportunity for the learning of practical skills and relational competencies, most notably in the in-person consultation between student “lawyer” and client. University law clinics are thus extremely effective sites for service learning. The Rhodes University Law Clinic (RULAC), for example, situated in the Makhanda central business district, provides free legal services to indigent clients and communities. Penultimate LLB students are at the front line of legal service provision, consulting with real-life clients, drafting court documents and correspondence, and working to advance their clients’ cases, all under the close supervision of supervising attorneys. Students undertake this work as part of a compulsory practical skills course in the LLB degree. RULAC goes further to provide empowering community education programmes which enable the broader community to better exercise their rights. Clinical legal education is not possible without clients. Law students and their clients are thus mutually dependent for the reciprocal benefits that flow from this relationship, and relational competencies can successfully be learned and exercised in this live-client context.

**Sam Naidu, Lindani Sifanele** – Rhodes University

**A22** *Reading Clubs: Conserving Reading Cultures and Reading Communities*

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This critical reflective paper responds to threats to reading cultures and communities in our current national context of systemic dysfunction, arguably a consequence of historical injustices in South Africa, and in the global context of rapidly developing technology that may have potentially dehumanizing consequences (see Marianne Wolff’s Reader, come home: The reading brain in a digital world, 2018). The premise of this paper is that reading is key to repairing and healing our fractured,

often systemically divided and imbalanced society. Reading, it is argued, empowers and enriches lives, builds community, and offers opportunities for deep, reciprocal relationships among learners, student volunteers, academics, and teachers. To begin, this paper argues for a distinction to be made between basic reading and deep reading, and the value of reading cultures and reading communities, with the aim of defining and explicating these four concepts. Drawing on discipline-specific academic knowledge, practical experience in setting up, running, and facilitating reading clubs across various schools in the city of Makhanda, and the pedagogical practices deployed in the training of student volunteers who run reading clubs, the presenters demonstrate how reading clubs can conserve valuable reading cultures and communities. Experiences at various reading clubs at local institutions such as Ntsika Secondary, DD Siwisa Primary, and the Joza Youth Hub are presented as case studies. Methodologically, the speakers adopt a critical reflective, and dialogic process and presentation style. This methodology is largely influenced by Kathleen Blake Yancey's definition of reflection as "an epistemological practice based in experience" (2016: 318). Concerned with the rhetorical nature of reflection, Yancy emphasizes its cognitive and epistemological value as "a process we use to make meaning and make knowledge [...] unique to reflection given its intersectionality, its insistence that only through bringing the human and the world together to theorize can a reflective knowledge and meaning be made" (303-304). A concluding section offers insights and suggestions for the convening of a reading community.

**Bongekile Yvonne Charlotte Mvuyana** – Mangosuthu University of Technology

*A23 Building Bonds, Shaping Cities: How Grassroots Participation Strengthens Urban Social Cohesion*

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The rapid urbanization of South Africa, exacerbated socio-economic disparities, housing shortages, and exclusionary planning methods have significantly undermined the social cohesion of urban communities, especially in informal settlements. The fundamental tenets of social cohesion – belonging, shared identity, and collective agency are directly undermined by top-down governance structures, which frequently worsen fragmentation, undermine intergroup trust, and silence marginalized voices. To revitalize urban social cohesiveness, this paper reinterprets community participation as a purposeful approach rather than as a procedural tool for development efficiency. Through the development of trust, reciprocal acknowledgment, and cooperative ownership, this paper explores how participatory methods might turn disjointed neighbourhoods into strong, cohesive communities. The study conducts a comprehensive literature evaluation (2015-2025) of peer-reviewed research, policy papers, and development reports, utilizing thematic analysis focused on community participation, participatory planning, collaborative governance, and social cohesion. The paper's findings indicate that enduring, inclusive conversation platforms like ward committees, street forums, and participatory budgeting serve as essential social infrastructure, promoting daily interactions that restore trust, uphold dignity, and reinforce community ties. In contrast, enduring obstacles such as institutional mistrust, communication deficiencies, and the systematic marginalization of informal settlements exacerbate social divisions and sustain spatial and relational

disparities. The study suggests cohesion-centered treatments that integrate civic education to foster inclusive citizenship and shared values, while also bolstering grassroots organizations to foster intergroup solidarity and collective efficacy. The study concludes that equitable urban transformation necessitates not only physical redesign but also deliberate investment in the relational framework of cities. By respecting local knowledge, planning procedures that distribute agency and reinforce belonging do more than just complete projects; they also weave the bonds of mutual respect, trust, and a common goal that are necessary for long-lasting social cohesiveness.

**Noel Pearse, Matolwandile Mtotywa, Heide Kuhlane** – Rhodes University

**A24** *A systematic review of community well-being*

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One way to reshape the social purpose of universities is to conceptualise them as anchor institutions, acknowledging that the future of the institution and the city or town in which they are based are intertwined. Anchor institutions, therefore, intend their community engagement activities to ultimately have a significant economic and social impact on the communities in which they are located. With the intention of developing a baseline measure for the community engagement interventions of a higher education institution, this research paper presents the findings of a systematic review of the concept of “community well-being”. Using the search string “community well-being” AND “higher education” in the Web of Science, Scopus and EBSCOHost databases, 105 documents were extracted. These documents were loaded and screened in Rayyan, excluding duplicates, contextually irrelevant documents, and studies measuring community well-being within university communities (e.g., among staff or students). The remaining documents were then analysed by extracting themes using NotebookLM. The findings revealed that community well-being is a multifaceted concept shaped by the combination of social, economic, cultural, and political conditions that individuals and communities identify as necessary for reaching their full potential. It is also regarded as a collective concept that addresses needs and desires at the community level, thereby reflecting the “collective well-being of a group of individuals representing a given community”. Studies emphasise fulfilment, a state in which people’s physical and psychological needs are met in a specific place. In some contexts, it has been measured quantitatively through indices (e.g. the Community Well-Being Index) that summarise factors such as income, education, employment, and housing. The findings highlight how reciprocal partnerships between higher education and communities are vital to community well-being, with higher education institutions acting as agents of social progress to promote social equity and inclusion. This involves creating “safe, inclusive, and culturally responsive environments” and responding to the needs of marginalised groups. Given that community well-being is both multifaceted and contested, it is recommended that it be defined and measured through community participation, particularly in unequal societies such as South Africa.

**Janice Limson, Ronen Fogel, Lwazikazi Madikiza** – Rhodes University

**A25** *Engaging Communities in Biotechnology in Higher Education: Bridging the Gap between Research and Societal Impact*

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*Objective:* Evolving models for engaged research in higher education in Biotechnology and cognate disciplines.

Within the sciences, the field of Biotechnology links fundamental disciplines of Engineering, Chemistry and the Biological sciences to the application thereof in areas with direct societal impact, including water, energy, health and agriculture. Higher education is viewed as a bridge between research and the development of new processes and tools through the study and application of living organisms in this discipline. Biotechnology is thus tangibly linked with natural resources, traditional knowledge and the scope for direct societal impact and prosperity through its role in unlocking the bioeconomy. Drawing on case studies of engaged biotechnology research, process and product development in water quality, medicinal cannabis, and rapid healthcare diagnostics, this presentation will explore the role of engaged research approaches and pathways to impact for: a) communities – empowering communities to enter scientific discourses and fostering agency and advocacy; b) postgraduate scientific research-shaped and informed by engagement with communities and community knowledge; c) co-creation approaches-leading to impactful scientific solutions and prototypes; d) engaged research-unlocking models for embedding community engagement and e) shaping transformative learning in higher education in Biotechnology and cognate disciplines. Finally, the presentation will explore cross-cutting issues of sustainability in science engagement, and in light of the recent G20 in South Africa, how application of transdisciplinarity and African-based relational frameworks in higher education, research, teaching and innovation can shape critical discussions and action around inclusivity, traditional knowledge, the bioeconomy and benefit sharing.

**Zuko Gqadavama, Sesona Yedwa** – Inkululeko, Makerere University, Rhodes University

**A26** *Universities as Socially Entrepreneurial Anchor Institutions: Belonging, Ubuntu, and Co-Creating*

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This paper seeks to examine the responsibilities of universities as anchor institutions to promote equity, inclusion, and social transformation through deep and reciprocal belonging to place. It draws on collaborative practice-based reflection between a community development practitioner and an academic in organisational psychology at Rhodes University, Makhanda. We reframe anchor institution practice beyond the practical dimensions of hiring, procurement, research, and teaching to interrogate deeper questions of belonging, mutual constitution, and relational accountability. An Ubuntu lens, as proposed by Johnson and Hlatshwayo (2025), is proposed to explore what it means for universities to be anchored institutions. Anchoring through an Ubuntu lens requires universities to understand themselves as constituted by their place and inseparable from the well-being of surrounding institutional ecosystems. The paper seeks to examine four interrelated sites where this

relational anchoring manifests: (i) the municipality as a complex institutional actor facing capacity constraints; (ii) NGOs navigating resource pressures and sustainability challenges; (iii) Rhodes University Community Engagement as a facilitative hub, and (iv) graduates who move between these spaces as emerging professionals and active citizens. The paper seeks to analyse how universities can enact their anchor responsibilities through mechanisms that build systemic capacity while centring relationship and reciprocity. The paper also interrogates whether university interventions risk dependency, create opportunities without reciprocal contribution, or substitute for rather than strengthening democratic institutions. The paper offers a critical reflection on what belonging and Ubuntu require of anchor institutions in contexts of municipal under-resourcing and civil society fragility. We pose guiding questions about whether university engagement builds a place's capacity or merely advances institutional interests. The paper proposes evaluative principles grounded in relational accountability. Social entrepreneurship and social innovation are proposed as a tool that can strengthen institutional capacity while honouring the dignity, agency, and wisdom within communities. Inherent tensions in this work shall be explored as well.

**Jo-Anne Vorster, Nikki Green, Anthea Adams, Masixole Booii** – Rhodes University

*A27 Learning from and with Community Partners: Towards a Decolonial Pedagogy*

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As academic staff developers we work with academics to develop their knowledge and practices to design curricula, including pedagogies and assessment to induct students into the knowledge and practices of the disciplines. Despite ongoing calls for curriculum transformation in South Africa, institutional cultures within universities continue to privilege Eurocentric epistemologies and dominant pedagogical norms. The decolonisation of the curriculum is about centering African and other marginalized knowledges. However, knowledge and learning are intimately connected to ways of knowing and being in the world. Decolonising the curriculum has mainly focused on the knowledge question, however, the question of how African ways of being and knowing can structure pedagogical encounters still needs attention. In response, we initiated a collaborative inquiry with community partners who have worked with academics and students through community-based and service-learning initiatives. In early 2026 the Rhodes University Community Engagement (RUCE) division brokered an initial dialogue between academic developers and community partners to explore possibilities for mutual learning about African pedagogies and their relevance for university teaching. This invitation required us to interrogate our own positionalities as academic developers and to confront hierarchical assumptions embedded within the university's knowledge project. Through this process we established a dialogic partnership that created spaces for shared inquiry between academic developers, academics, students and community partners. These conversations explored how community knowledge systems might contribute to expanding pedagogical practices within the disciplines and bridging the gap between the lived experiences of many students and dominant academic modes of teaching and learning. In this work, community partners were recognised not as sites of application, but as co-architects of pedagogical possibility. This paper reflects on the early stages of this collaborative process, examining how we navigated mutual

vulnerability and what this has revealed about the possibilities of decolonial pedagogies. We consider how engaging with community knowledge challenges entrenched hierarchies of knowledge within the university and invites the academy to reimagine itself as a space of shared human and societal development.

**Rosaline Sebolao** – University of the Free State

**A28** *Cultivating Change: The Humanities Students' Journey into Entrepreneurial Mindset through Community Engagement*

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Cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset among higher education (HE) students requires pedagogical approaches that go beyond classroom-based instruction and actively engage students within the communities in which they are expected to exercise agency. Globally, HE institutions are increasingly emphasising entrepreneurship education not only to promote venture creation but also to equip students with transferable skills such as adaptability, innovation, critical thinking, collaboration, and ethical decision-making that enable meaningful societal contribution. Within this context, community-engaged learning, service learning, and social entrepreneurship initiatives provide authentic environments in which students can integrate theory and practice, develop entrepreneurial competencies, and cultivate a sense of civic responsibility. These approaches align with contemporary understandings of entrepreneurship as a mechanism for social change rather than solely economic gain. This paper argues that entrepreneurship education is most effective when it is socially embedded, experiential, and oriented toward real-world problem solving. Drawing on experiential learning theory (Kolb), communities of practice (Lave & Wenger), and capability and agency theory (Sen), the study conceptualizes entrepreneurial mindset development as a socially situated process through which students learn to recognise opportunities, mobilise resources, and create value in response to community needs. Ethics clearance was obtained from the faculty, interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data from groups of students' associations and individual students in various disciplines in the faculty of the Humanities, after interacting with the communities in the Free State Province either during service learning or work integrated learning programmes. Data were thematically analysed to reflect on the lessons learned through community engagement. The paper culminates in the development of a practical toolbox for cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset, designed for use by academics, curriculum designers, and faculty leaders. The toolbox synthesizes theory and practice into actionable strategies, reflective tools, and community-engagement frameworks that support intentional mindset development. By embedding entrepreneurship education within community contexts, the toolbox aims to strengthen student agency and enhance higher education's contribution to sustainable societal transformation.

**Tshegofatso Bennia Makube** – Rhodes University

**A29** *An Afrocentric Approach to Implementing Musicking as a Community Creative-Arts Wellness Programme in Marginalised Communities in Eastern Cape, South Africa*

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Mental health in marginalised communities in South Africa is frequently impeded by a disjuncture between intent and effective implementation of mental health policies. This results in persistent institutional injustice and barriers to access to wellness and mental healthcare. This study uses Participatory Action Research (PAR) to design a community-led musicking programme developed with a local non-profit organisation (Intlantsi) to promote mental health and wellness within underserved communities in the Eastern Cape. Grounded in an Afrocentric theoretical framework, this qualitative study prioritises ecological perspectives to foster a culturally responsive and community-based approach. The study comprised three phases, each following the cyclical nature of PAR (planning, action, observation, and reflection): (i) One-week framework design, which consists of programme development with Intlantsi as the focus group (co-researchers), (ii) six-month programme implementation within marginalised communities that consists of five-hour workshops per session in Peddie and Makhandla, Eastern Cape, South Africa, and (iii) reflections and adaptations for further sustainability and development. Data were collected through participant journals, interviews, wellness assessments (GP-CORE) as a wellbeing indicator, and community-musicking audios. Preliminary findings from Phase 1 highlight how musicking and creative arts facilitate deeper self-awareness, interpersonal connection, and community dialogue. Participants have initiated discussions on local solutions to mental health challenges and co-developed informational pamphlets for distribution. These insights underscore the transformative potential of community-driven, culturally embedded interventions in addressing mental well-being within marginalised contexts. This study is significant as it contributes to the expanding knowledge of non-clinical strategies for mental health and wellbeing in underserved, marginalised communities. It contributes towards accessible mental health strategies that align with community needs and lived realities, offering a model for sustainable mental health awareness and wellness support in South Africa.

**Aqeelah Hendrickse, Revando van Wyk** – Stellenbosch University

**A30** *Student Volunteering: A Tool of Cultivating a Transformative Student Experience*

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Stellenbosch University (SU) prioritizes Social Impact (SI) through a unique approach to community engagement reciprocity and mutual benefit. This model ensures that both the university and the communities it partners with gain from their collaborations. While the university offers academic expertise and resources, it also gains valuable insight from communities involved. Experiential learning is central to this approach, allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world challenges. The SU Co-curriculum experiential learning approach is underpinned by experiential learning theory (ELT) which defines learning as a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. By engaging with communities, students not only contribute to solving societal issues, but also gain practical skills, such as communication and problem-solving. This

two-way learning process fosters a deeper understanding of social issues and equips students to become active, informed contributors to societal change. Through these partnerships, the university and community members collaboratively work towards sustainable solutions that are both academically rigorous and practically relevant. For our students, engaged citizenship is one of the primary modalities through which social impact is achieved. There are two experimental learning offerings: i) Activating Engaged Citizenship (AEC) and ii) Impacting Communities through Volunteerism (ICT). When identifying which projects students implement, emphasises are placed on working with communities in order to determine needs, instead of assuming. These two offerings will be explored further in the presentation, alongside the competencies that students will meet. Stellenbosch University endeavours the following graduate attributes for every student, which is aligned to its Vision 2040. The volunteer programme gives students the opportunity to enable all of the attributes which is as follows: An Enquiring Mind; An Engaged Citizen; A Dynamic Professional; A Well-rounded individual and A Digital Knower. In conclusion, the presentation will aim to showcase the compilation of the SU values and Vision 2040 that aims to enable a transformative student experience and a well-rounded student. More importantly, cultivating a student that is an active citizen. The presentation will be co-presented with a student who is actively volunteering and will demonstrate how this offering is based on a reciprocal approach.

## DAY 2 PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

**Eureta Rosenberg** – Rhodes University

**A31** *The CO in Co-Creation: Short, But Not Always Sweet*

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Acknowledging that humanity needs solutions informed by the insights of diverse communities, inside and outside of the academy, universities are increasingly encouraging knowledge co-creation. Epistemic narrowness is not only preventing us from adequately seeing and addressing critical social-ecological challenges, but an injustice that universities themselves might perpetuate, whilst we are at the same time striving to produce powerful, transformative knowledge.

In a three-country survey during 2023-2025, we explored what institutional leaders, researchers and students think about transdisciplinary and engaged research, the extent to which they regard it as important, what they are learning from doing it, and what they see as key issues. Two postdoctoral researchers (Ngwenya and Kuse) visited Rhodes and the University of Venda in South Africa; the University of Saskatchewan and Victoria Island University in Canada; and Eberswalde and Leuphana Universities in Germany. They collected data using semi-structured interviews (mostly in-person, but also online) and focus group discussions with students. Twelve institutional leaders, 40 practising academics and researchers, and 60 students contributed. The data was analysed by the lead researcher (Rosenberg), who is also an institutional leader and academic. Our findings showed that common challenges experienced by those supporting or practising engaged research, include: inadequate time; unsuitable financial resources; uncertainty on how best to train transdisciplinary researchers; and lack of guidelines to adjudge transdisciplinary and engaged scholarship. Perhaps the most fundamental finding was that respondents are unsure how to meaningfully combine the diverse knowledges surfaced towards knowledge co-production. What do researchers do when community members disagree with each other? When community knowledge contradicts science? How does one integrate different knowledges, and is it indeed about integration, or perhaps something else altogether? The paper will share these findings, and related suggestions from the scholarly literature, on how to resolve the 'spicy' co-creation conundrum. It will also extend an invitation to the audience to join a community of practice exploring these and other questions regarding transdisciplinary and engaged research, ethics and evaluation.

**Bakhusele Mathupha and Angela James** – University of Kwazulu Natal

**A32** *Educating about Agroecology: Application of Knowledge and Actions with Communities in Eastern Cape*

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Globally, the call to action for the planet, people and prosperity, is documented in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The recent global pandemic was a major factor in the widening of resource inequalities and the provision, and access to food and energy. Communities were faced with food security and nutrition issues, even before the pandemic. This research presents a practical and

community-based approach to enhancing contextually relevant education about agroecology. It is documented that while educational, social, biophysical and political policies and practices are considered, they fail to be contextually relevant and enhancing for the very communities experiencing this issue. The importance of Agroecology is acknowledged and recognised globally and nationally, in the provision of sustainable lifestyles with food security and nutrition. Learning Theory using the Constructivist Community of Practice (CoP) model was adopted in this research. The CoP model is applied to the case study of a rural farmer engaging with the community for enhancement in agro-ecological practices. An interpretive, qualitative case study research was adopted for this research. The interpretivist paradigm is concerned with understanding why, how and what the teacher and community members interacted with for enhancement. The case studies are compiled from in-depth semi-structured interviews, visual methodology and document analysis. The data of the study were analysed using qualitative content analysis. The founders of the Phawu Agripak Cooperative recognised a crucial need for food security and climate-informed greening in their surrounding communities, and the opportunity to improve their livelihoods. The project leaders and their members have been committed to the establishment and success of their project, seeking out sustainable, innovative solutions to the issues of water scarcity, lack of access to water, and dry, compacted soils. The visuals of the crops bear testament to the learning and actions with sustainable practices. This small-scale farmer is putting farming with food security back where it belongs-at the heart of the community. The implications indicate the influences of active engagement with communities to enhance learning and practice towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals 2, 3 and 4 – No poverty, no hunger and quality education.

**Lesley Wood, Beatrix Bouwman – North West University**

**A33** *Relational Resilience: Ubuntu-Informed Community-Engaged Research with NEET Youth*

Young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET) face intersecting challenges that undermine wellbeing, agency, and life opportunities. This presentation draws on a three-year participatory action learning and action research (PALAR) project implemented in three South African townships to examine how relationships grounded in Ubuntu values fostered resilience, confidence, and capability as NEET youth became co-researchers and community educators. The project mobilised unemployed township youth as community assets to design and facilitate complementary educational support for school-going learners, addressing educational inequalities and psychosocial vulnerabilities intensified by poverty. Using drawing, digital storytelling, and SenseMaker® as a distributed narrative-based analytical methodology, participants collaboratively generated knowledge about lived experiences, community challenges, and learning needs. SenseMaker® enabled mapping of relational patterns across youth, researchers, NPO partners, and community structures, illuminating how stakeholders experienced the integrated bottom-up approach and how trust, shared ownership, sustainability, and long-term capacity building emerged within the partnership ecosystem. Through ongoing relational processes, power hierarchies were deliberately flattened, creating dialogical spaces characterised by mutual respect, care, shared decision-making, and col-

lective growth. These principles – aligned with Ubuntu’s ethos of interdependence and human dignity – enabled youth to reconnect with purpose and potential. Findings indicate shifts in self-esteem, self-efficacy, and future orientation. Participants developed employable skills (including tutoring, robotics facilitation, and information literacy), while others initiated micro-enterprises, pursued further education, or secured employment. Relationships across youth, researchers, NPO partners, and community structures were identified as the primary catalyst for these outcomes. Participants emphasised how being seen, heard, and valued enabled constructive agency and sustained engagement. The paper argues that resilience among NEET youth is not an individual trait but an emergent property of relational, cultural, and structural support systems. Ubuntu-grounded community-engaged research demonstrates strong potential to transform deficit narratives and enable sustainable, community-led educational innovation, contributing to frameworks for meaningful youth participation, relational accountability, and community-anchored educational ecosystems in marginalised contexts.

**Heide Kuhlane** – Rhodes University

*A34 Narrative Meaning-Making as Reparative Practice: Structured Introspection and Humanisation in In-Service Teacher Education*

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This paper contributes to debates on higher education community engagement by examining teacher meaning-making in in-service teacher education as a relational, reparative practice situated at the interface of university and community life. Teacher meaning-making is frequently theorised through decontextualised, ahistorical, and implicitly Western frameworks that privilege cognitive or competency-based models, resulting in partial understandings that marginalise teachers’ lived experiences and the communities within which they work. These limitations are particularly pronounced for Foundation Phase teachers in historically disadvantaged and rural South African contexts, such as the Eastern Cape. Drawing on a longitudinal narrative inquiry with in-service teachers enrolled in a part-time Bachelor of Education programme, this study reconceptualises meaning-making as a process negotiated across multiple, intersecting contexts and relationships. These include intergenerational family histories, apartheid and post-apartheid schooling biographies, economic responsibility and care work, and teachers’ simultaneous participation in home, school, and university spaces. In this framing, community is positioned as an ongoing relational context through which teachers’ learning, knowledge, and professional identities are formed and sustained. The paper conceptualises context as an active mediator of meaning-making, shaping what counts as legitimate knowledge and producing tensions between academic theory and lived necessity. By foregrounding teachers’ narratives as central analytic resources, the study positions in-service teachers as co-constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients of university expertise. This approach reframes community engagement as reciprocal and dialogic, where universities bear responsibility for learning with teachers and communities, rather than merely about them. Methodologically, the paper advances structured introspection through narrative inquiry and sustained researcher reflexivity. As an insider researcher working within the same institutional space as the participants, reflexivity is

treated as an ethical and epistemic responsibility, enabling attentiveness to power, relational accountability, and the co-production of meaning. By centring teachers' storied experiences, the study challenges deficit framings of rural teachers and contributes to epistemic justice in teacher education. The paper argues that reparative futures in higher education require reimagining universities as spaces of humanisation, mutual accountability, and socially responsive engagement. Attending to how teachers make meaning across their professional, personal, and community lives offers a pathway for higher education institutions to cultivate more ethical, reciprocal, and contextually grounded forms of community engagement.

**Kanya Padayachee** – University of the Free State

*A35 Reparative Futures for the Cultivation of Humanity: Integral Education for Early Childhood Development Practitioner Pedagogy*

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South Africa's violent history in the successive eras of colonial rule, the racist Union of South Africa and grand apartheid severely damaged the social fabric of South African society. The legacy of subjugation in the forms of racism, discrimination, and social and economic disadvantage remains even after its legislated removal (DeGruy, 2005). Equally, victims of subjugation may suffer significant physical and psychological trauma, also affecting secondary and subsequent generations through transgenerational transmission of knowledge of the past (Jansen, 2010). One of the ways of breaking the cycle is through critical interventions, particularly in early childhood education when sound spiritual, cultural, intellectual, psychological, emotional, social and physical foundations are planted. Consequently, transformation and redress for current and future generations of the historically disadvantaged could be enabled. In this context, the larger doctoral study (Padayachee 2022), from which this presentation derives, used a community based participatory research approach to develop an Integral Education and Ubuntu curriculum framework to foster social responsibility and citizenship in preschool children. The exploratory phase of the study used purposive, stratified and nonprobability sampling of urban, rural, and semi-rural early childhood development staff, parents and community members. The findings on the Integral Education component of the study are presented to support the proposal that an Integral Education paradigm in early childhood development practitioner pedagogy aligns with a reparative futures framework for the cultivation of humanity in Higher Education. To reinforce this, however, the pedagogic model would necessitate change from the mainstream approach which tends to focus on the acquisition of knowledge, development of cognitive skills and individual achievement to an Integral Education, one underpinned by humanism and holism that develops all domains equally. The recently revised policy on the minimum requirements for Higher Education qualifications in Early Childhood Development (RSA, DHET, 2017), recognises the character and disposition specificities of working with preschool children. This presentation, however, argues that the quality of the teacher goes beyond qualification to encompass essential personal qualities and attributes fundamental to an Integral Education approach. Hence, the holistic development of individuals within an interconnected and interdependent collective can be fostered, thus, inching closer to transformative education for reparation in democratic South Africa.

**Phumzile Xulu, Samuel Ntsanwisi** – Durban University of Technology

**A36** *Universities as Anchor Institutions Advancing Equity and Belonging through Early Experiential Exposure to Film and Television*

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This paper explores how universities can act as anchor institutions by embedding themselves within local, resource-constrained schooling systems. As place-based organisations, their resources and long-term presence allow them to promote local development and equity. In higher education, this means moving beyond recruitment to sharing opportunities and building strong community ties. Here, anchoring practice refers to purposeful ways universities use their expertise and resources to create local learning and knowledge exchange opportunities. In South Africa, career guidance typically targets Grade 11 and 12 students and emphasises STEM and health sciences, while early exposure to creative industries is often overlooked (Abe & Chikoko, 2020). To fill this gap at the pivotal Grade 9 stage when subject choices shape future paths, this study therefore explores a Film and Television career-exposure initiative designed as structured, research-driven engagement rather than simple outreach. Run by the Department of Video Technology at Durban University of Technology and the Office of Community Engagement, the programme involved 40 Grade 9 learners from two rural schools in a full-day introduction to Film and Television. As an anchoring practice, it embeds the university in rural education while exposing learners to higher education. The study draws on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory, Wenger's Communities of Practice, and Transformative Learning Theory, employing a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through structured learner questionnaires and semi-structured teacher interviews, and were analysed thematically using ATLAS.ti to examine changes in career imaginaries, self-efficacy, and sense of belonging. Preliminary findings suggest that early experience in creative fields can challenge limited career assumptions, build aspirations, and strengthen school-university ties. The paper argues that anchoring practice goes beyond institutional presence, describing how universities use local engagement and pedagogy to foster equity and transformation.

**Claire McCann, Nwabisa Nkani** – Oxford University, UK and Rhodes University

**A37** *Holding and Making Worlds Together: Reflections on a Digital Storytelling Project on the Experiences of Students between University and Community in Makhanda*

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This paper draws from a collaborative digital storytelling project, conducted between one external facilitator and five local students from Makhanda, that forms part of a PhD study. This storytelling project, taking place in 2025, examines how movement between 'community' and 'university' is experienced, narrated, and remade. Drawing on story circles, the co-creation of short digital narratives, post-production reflexive interviews, and co-authored textual analysis, we centre storytellers' voices to trace three interlocking themes: crossings (physical, social, and epistemic); relational scaffolding (mentors, peers, family, and community programmes); and the limits of institutional inclusion (spatialised histories, silences, and structural exclusion). Rather than treating digital stories as data to be mined, this project treats narrative-making as a relational practice: a space for

unlearning, witnessing, and reciprocal recognition that both reveals and reshapes pathways into higher education. The five portraits- accounts of imposter syndrome, dual belonging, recursive mentoring, intimate loss, and embodied role-modelling-show how belonging is actively made (and remade) rather than simply granted. We argue for reframing community engagement as iterative, embodied path-making: sustained practices that open small but meaningful passages through entrenched institutional geographies. At the same time, these stories make visible persistent limits- such as structural exclusions, performative gratitude, and the uneven distribution of epistemic resources-signalling a need for institutional humility and deeper structural change. The paper concludes with practical implications for engaged researchers and higher education stakeholders working with participatory digital methods. In doing so, it offers both a methodological account of co-production and an argument for the transformative potential of digital storytelling as a relational technology of belonging.

### **Merie Sutherland – STADIO**

#### **A38** *Dialogic Attunement: Empathy as a Tool for Building Reciprocal Community Academic Partnerships*

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The act of community engagement is a humanised act of social and environmental responsibility. To humanise the community-academic partnership, empathy can be used as a tool for building reciprocity. Empathy is part of a human-centred design approach. This approach is associated with problem and project-based assessments in higher education and therefore shows the potential to be adopted in a community engagement project. This paper will therefore explore empathy as a tool to reshape reciprocity and power in community engagement partnerships. The human-centred approach creates an opportunity for effective integration of community engagement into the curriculum. Adopting this approach will also ensure a more sustainable and long-term community engagement project. With empathy as the foundation of the project, a sincere understanding of the communities' needs is captured, ensuring the community-academic partnership is valuable and supports self-sustainability within the intended community. This strategy is adopted within a long-term community engagement project within a higher education institution. The first year of the project is dedicated to adopting the empathy phase. The long-term project aims to upskill on best practices for children with sensory disabilities. This community group will form the test case for adopting the human-centred design approach. For the first year, the project aims to understand the needs of children with sensory disabilities in the Gauteng region of South Africa. Three main stakeholder groups are targeted within this project, including educators, families of children with sensory disabilities and higher education students enrolled at the involved institution. These stakeholders represent the sample for this study. The project will adopt a mixed-method research approach with surveys and focus groups as data collection tools in the empathy phase. The data will be coded, and a thematic analysis will be conducted. The study will follow a five-year design thinking framework applied to the community engagement project. Adopting the design thinking methodology as a human-centred design approach will ensure that the project places the community's needs at the centre. This study aims not

only to address the intended communities' needs but also to test the human-centred design approach as a framework for reciprocal engagement.

**Chantelle August-Mowers, Samantha Hoffman** – Two Oceans Graduate Institute

**A39** *Creating a Culture of Civic Engagement through the Science Module: A Practical Initiative*

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Research on critical service learning proofs to be a complex interplay between higher education institutions, students and community partners. Communities are often faced with social issues as a result of inequality and power imbalances. The call for critical service learning as social justice imperative has heightened in recent years. Institutions of higher learning tend to respond to the call by empowering their students to become change agents. This study explored the application of Change Laboratory Workshops (CLWs) to enhance capabilities of 40 Science students at a Private higher institution. This qualitative study utilized two change laboratory workshops, guided by transformative agency and double stimulation. Data collection tools included questionnaires, focus group interviews and document analysis. Data was analysed using the thematic approach. The findings reveal that community-based activities gives students' experiential opportunities to learn in real world contexts and develop skills of community engagement, while affording community partners opportunities to address significant needs. The findings further indicated that CLWs create a space for students to sensitize faculty, community partners and government stakeholders to real experiences, which can lead to positive changes in educational practices. The CLW is a collaborative problem-solving method that encourages participants to critically examine current practices, identify areas for improvement, and develop innovative solutions. The strength of the CLW approach lies in its emphasis on collective action, fostering a sense of solidarity, ownership and shared responsibility among participants. Implementing CLWs provided students with a collaborative space to critically reflect on their own assumptions, power and privilege and societal structures that create inequality; challenge existing norms, and co-construct innovative strategies that promote both student growth and common good. This study emphasizes the potential of CLWs to enhance the capabilities of students that seek to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding and skills for themselves. It also highlights the importance of ongoing evaluation in implementing this collaborative problem-solving approach. Overall, this study emphasizes the influential role of service learning projects as a catalyst for amplifying dialogue and collective action towards social change and highlights the importance of ongoing evaluation in implementing this collaborative problem-solving approach.

**Fatima Abdulla, Flavia Obakeng Matlou – EDUVOS**

**A40** *The Role of Ubuntu in Cultivating Volunteerism within South African Non-Governmental Organisations.*

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Volunteering is an important expression of civic engagement and community participation. In South Africa, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play a role in delivering community-based services, particularly in urban areas where socio-economic inequality impacts access to social support. Johannesburg is paradoxically marked by significant economic activity and persistent social disparities. NGOs rely on volunteer participation to sustain programmes addressing education, poverty alleviation, and community development. Within this context, volunteerism provides a space to examine how civic participation intersects with culturally grounded values such as Ubuntu, a philosophy that emphasises shared humanity, mutual care, and relational responsibility. This study explores how volunteerism is framed and experienced within selected NGOs in Johannesburg and examines how much these practices cultivate relational citizenship grounded in Ubuntu. The research will draw on qualitative interviews with NGO coordinators and volunteers to investigate how volunteering is conceptualised within organisations, how relationships between volunteers and communities function, and how power dynamics are navigated. The study will examine volunteers' motivations for participation, including the extent to which opportunities for skills development, employability, and social contribution shape engagement within the NGO sector. Attention will be given to how principles associated with Ubuntu influence volunteer practices and interpersonal relationships within organisational contexts. Preliminary findings have indicated the following: Volunteers in South African NGOs prioritise skill-based roles (VOSEA, 2011), despite the resistance of educational resource gaps-Ubuntu fosters relational values (Mugumbate et al., 2023), volunteering roles improve employment opportunities despite lack of training, and poor cultural integration leads to burnout in Gauteng NGOs despite volunteers' display of resilience (Muller et al., 2020). Evidence suggests that findings will highlight how volunteer programmes foster relational values such as solidarity, empathy, and collective responsibility, while also revealing tensions that emerge within volunteer practice in contexts marked by structural inequality. These insights aim to contribute to debates on community engagement and civic participation by extending discussions of Ubuntu beyond philosophical discourse to the realities of volunteer programmes within civil society organisations. By examining volunteerism within Johannesburg NGOs, the study seeks to offer practical reflections for the design of volunteer initiatives that promote dignity, reciprocity, and socially just forms of participation.

**Otilia Chiramba, Callie Grant** – Rhodes University

**A41** *Developing a Whole-School Leadership Culture: A Participatory Case Study in a South African Township School*

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Existing leadership literature tends to focus on school principals as leaders. Consequently, their leadership preparation and development dominate the literature. Teachers, learners and parents are seldom regarded as leaders in many global South school contexts, despite national policy to the contrary. Thus a ‘sleeping giant’ of school leadership remains inactive and untapped. How might this dormant potential be awakened and collectively harnessed in the best interest of the school and the broader community? Research in sub-Saharan Africa has shown that principal leadership preparation and development is more convincingly conceptualised through the lens of socialisation theory and better understood from a whole-school leadership perspective. Against this backdrop, the study on which this presentation draws asks: How can a whole-school leadership culture in a sub-Saharan African context be developed? The ongoing study involves a partnership between Khutliso Daniels secondary school (SA), Rhodes University (SA) and Warwick University (UK). Premised on the idea that strong, dialogic community-university partnerships are key to effective community engagement, engaged research and collaborative knowledge production, the study seeks to create generative spaces for shared inquiry where academic and school knowledge systems meet in mutual respect. Designed as a participatory case study in the critical tradition, the university researchers worked with four key school stakeholder groups over a two-month period: the school management team, a teacher group, a learner group and a parent group. Data generation involved three activities designed to surface, critique, and re-envision leadership practices. Activity 1 involved transect walks, guided by participants and conducted separately with each stakeholder group. A mapping exercise followed. Activity 2 comprised group-specific focus group discussions that use the transect maps as stimuli for collective reflection. Activity 3 brought all groups together in a ‘mirror data’ workshop that enabled participants to encounter and synthesise the perspectives of others. Preliminary findings indicate that participatory processes can strengthen leadership capacity and build collective ownership of school improvement. The paper presents results from the collective visioning process and provides methodological and theoretical insights into university-community partnerships and the cultivation of a whole-school leadership culture.

**Boudina McConnachie, Sambesiwe Mavela** – Rhodes University

**A42** *Anchoring Rhodes University in the Community: A Study of Two Music-Based Community Engagement Teaching and Learning Projects in Makhanda, South Africa*

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In contexts marked by historical inequality and ongoing social fragmentation, universities are called upon to act as anchor institutions contributing to local communities’ social, cultural, and ethical life. This paper explores how higher education can enact this role through participatory, relational practices of engagement, drawing on two music-based initiatives at Rhodes University, Makhanda: the Makana Community Orchestra and the Holy Cross Music Initiative. The study employs a quali-

tative, participatory action research methodology. Data were gathered over three years through reflective journals kept by student participants, semi-structured interviews with community partners and students, and direct observation of rehearsals, performances, and planning meetings. Thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns across participant experiences, with findings triangulated against programme documentation and curriculum materials. Both projects were treated as embedded case studies, allowing for comparative analysis of how each initiative negotiates the relationship between institutional goals and community needs. Both projects are embedded in the local cultural ecosystem, responding to community-identified needs around music education, artistic development, and social cohesion through long-term partnerships with community musicians, non-profit organisations, and schools. They foreground co-creation, shared governance, and reciprocal learning between students, academics, and community partners. Student participation is integrated into formal assessment as credit-bearing service learning or voluntary community-engaged learning, reframing volunteering from acts of charity towards practices of “being with” rather than “doing for”, positioning students as co-learners and collaborators. This approach aligns with Ubuntu-informed values emphasising care, dignity, mutuality, and shared responsibility. The paper argues that sustained institutional support through curriculum integration and resources enables community engagement to move beyond outreach toward a reparative model, fostering artistic development, social cohesion, and shared responsibility for humane futures, positioning universities as locally grounded anchor institutions.

**George Ladaah Openjuru, David Monk** – Gulu University, Uganda

**A43** *Knowledge Democracy for the Cultivation of Humanity: K4C Programme and the African Regional Centre*

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This presentation interrogates the paradigm of knowledge democracy as a catalyst for the cultivation of humanity, centering the theoretical contributions of Professor Catherine Odora Hoppers on cognitive justice. Hoppers (2021) critiques the systemic marginalization of Indigenous and non-Western knowledge systems, arguing that the imposition of Western norms as universal benchmarks results in the “epistemicide” of diverse cosmologies, which are often relegated to the status of the other. This foundational critique necessitates “bridging knowledge cultures” – a framework articulated by Dr. Budd Hall and Dr. Rajesh Tandon, the UNESCO Co-Chairs in Community-Based Research and Social Responsibility in Higher Education. Hall and Tandon (2017) conceptualize knowledge democracy as a mechanism to institutionalize equitable research relationships between universities and communities, thereby challenging dominant Eurocentric paradigms and validating knowledge as a public good. The KnowledgeS for Change (K4C) Global Consortium, co-founded by the UNESCO Chairs, seeks to operationalize these theories through global institutional partnerships. The K4C utilizes a Mentorship Training Programme (MTP) to prepare socially responsible researchers to facilitate community-based participatory research (CBPR). The presentation focuses on the African region of the K4C consortium through the work of the K4C African Regional Training Centre in CBPR hosted by Gulu University in Uganda. The presentation reflects on some goals, successes, challenges,

and great potential of the African region to transform universities and usher in a new paradigm of community university partnerships. By repositioning the university as one actor within a relational “learning ecosystem,” the centre demonstrates how regional networks can sustain a movement for social transformation and epistemic justice across the African continent.

**Olivier Bondéelle** – Université de Paris-Est Créteil, France

*A44 Médiations in People’s History: A Survey on Participation*

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In this presentation, I propose to enrich the typology of participatory projects by considering scientific and educational projects from the perspective of participation. I investigate two mediation projects in people’s history. One is a people’s history festival, co-created by university historians, secondary school teachers, and community organizations. The other is a website on objects used in the democratization of society in Europe, collected during the revolutionary and republican periods since the 18th century. This website is also co-created by university historians and museum curators who own these objects. The Festival of Popular History (FHP: <https://festivalhistoirepopulaire.fr/>) involves the public outside the university during its three annual days in May, thanks to a variety of events: carnival, blind test, spectacular conference, rally. It is renewed each year: this year it will focus on the body, and the theme of speech was in the spotlight for its first edition two years ago. The website *Objets Politiques au siècle des révolutions* (ObjetsPol: <https://objetspol.inha.fr/s/objetspol/page/accueil>) works more with interactive media: photos, videos, comics, podcasts, and educational games. The two projects contrast in terms of mediation modalities (face-to-face versus remote), types of non-academic partners (professionals versus citizens), and also the positions of participants (learners versus discussants). My contrastive analysis aims to examine the boundaries between mediation and participation, as this type of project is rarely considered in analyses of participatory research. My fieldwork is conducted at the University of Paris-Est Créteil (France), where I work as a project manager on citizen science at the university. I adopt the analytical framework of the common proposed by philosopher Pierre Dardot and sociologist Christian Laval, which is well suited to analyzing collective practices. The results clearly indicate that the involvement of non-academics in the steering committee, co-decision making in project development, the two-way flow of knowledge, open access to the knowledge produced, and the long-term involvement of non-academics in the appropriation of knowledge are practices that promote participation. I therefore propose that this be considered participatory mediation.

**Jessica Cockburn** – Rhodes University

**A45** *Centring Shared Humanity and Interdependence in Sustainability Teaching and Research: The Role of Relational Reflexivity*

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For universities to effectively contribute to collective acts of remembering, healing and humanisation, we need to actualise the university's expressed commitments to rejecting extractive research, engaging students as active co-constructors of knowledge and social change, and resisting modes that locate hierarchical power in universities. As educators and researchers, we need to take bold steps not only to repair and renew the relationship between the university and the communities it serves, but also to address the myriad intertwined sustainability issues that characterise our planetary polycrisis. We propose that relational reflexivity is a key competence for this important work. We propose a working definition for relational reflexivity, situating it at the interface of the fields of 'sustainability science' and 'education for sustainable development'. In both these fields, reflexivity has arisen as a prominent concept. Yet conceptualisations are often shallow, and practical considerations and tools are underdeveloped. We therefore offer a robust conceptualisation of reflexivity, arguing that it should be practised through the lens of relationality. Our conceptualisation draws on both existing literature and, importantly, on our own practice as sustainability scientist-educators at Rhodes University, Makhanda, South Africa. We draw on our educational work within a service learning partnership with 'River Rescue' (river clean-up project) and the teaching of a new trans-disciplinary 'Postgraduate Diploma in Sustainability Learning' as real-life grounding. We offer a set of educational practices which can aid in cultivating relational reflexivity among students and educators in higher education. We illustrate these educational practices with examples of tools that can be used in higher education teaching and research activities aimed at addressing the planetary polycrisis. We show how they can re-centre our shared humanity and interdependence. We conclude by considering the practical and institutional implications of adopting relational reflexivity as a core competence in engaged higher education.

**Zinhle Mbili, Philile Sithole** – Mangosuthu University of Technology

**A46** *Cultivating Humanity from Within: Ubuntu and Reparative Volunteering in Higher Education*

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Student Giving, a fund for students by students, represents a different type of community engagement; volunteering that is directed inward towards the university community. The research is based at a historically disadvantaged university in Durban, South Africa. Student Giving uses students' own financial contributions, time, and skills as well as collective decision making to provide support to fellow students experiencing structural disadvantage. Through this initiative of Ubuntu, students are engaging in forms of reparative engagement within higher education, acknowledging both the structural inequalities that have shaped access to universities and the daily vulnerabilities that students experience. Instead of viewing vulnerability as an individual deficit that requires charitable intervention, this research views vulnerability as generated through social relations and structures.

Therefore, when students interact with each other they do so not as helper/beneficiary but as participants in common conditions of uncertainty, responsibility, and care. Thus, vulnerability is viewed as a space from which empathy, ethics and solidarity are generated. Based on qualitative data from students and student partners involved in the initiative, the study shows how Student Giving enables a transition from 'helping' to 'being with'. Students described new feelings of connection and interdependence among themselves as well as greater perceptions of collective responsibility and expanded understandings of what it means to be a citizen within the university community. Students receiving support emphasized the importance of being recognized as co-participants or collaborative members of the community and not simply as passive recipients of assistance. Ultimately, the article advances that Student Giving serves as an example of how volunteering in higher education can be practiced as a relational and reparative practice. The article presents a model of volunteering that has moved beyond charity and toward solidarity and collective flourishing within the university.

**Kavita Behara** – Mangosuthu University of Technology

*A47 Decolonizing STEM Education in South Africa: A CHAT-Based Review of Community Engagement as a Catalyst for Curriculum Reform*

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South African higher education continues to grapple with the enduring effects of colonial epistemologies that marginalize Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and limit the contextual relevance of STEM curricula for diverse student populations. While national curriculum policies promote transformation, university STEM programmes often remain disconnected from community knowledge practices and local problem contexts. This gap contributes to persistent inequities in participation, engagement, and knowledge production within STEM fields. Despite increasing calls for decolonisation, higher education lacks structured frameworks to operationalise community engagement as a mechanism for curriculum reform. This study presents a qualitative narrative review grounded in Third-Generation Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) to examine how interactions among universities, communities, educators, and policymakers shape processes of curriculum transformation. Drawing on peer-reviewed scholarship, policy texts, and decolonial theory, the analysis explores systemic contradictions within overlapping activity systems that influence teaching, learning, and knowledge validation in STEM higher education. The review identifies emerging community-based science practices that demonstrate alternative epistemological orientations aligned with local needs; however, institutional constraints, including rigid disciplinary structures, limited academic preparation for culturally responsive pedagogy, and the continued privileging of Western knowledge systems, restrict their integration into formal curricula. CHAT analysis highlights opportunities for curriculum co-design, participatory knowledge production, and community-engaged pedagogies that reposition students and communities as co-creators of knowledge. The paper argues that decolonizing STEM education in African higher education requires institutionally supported, community-embedded approaches that advance epistemic justice while strengthening curriculum relevance. By positioning CHAT as a practical analytical and design framework, the study

contributes a pathway for integrating IKS into teaching practice, academic development, and policy implementation within transforming African universities.

**Sandile Phakathi, Nwabisa Malimba, Thando Mpolweni, Athenkosi Yalo, Thandolwethu May** – Rhodes University, TEM Mrwetyana & Khutliso Daniels

**A48** *Bridging the Gap in Economics Academic Literacies: Reflections on a Rhodes University-Makhanda High Schools Community Engagement Project*

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Reading and writing practices are central to any educational experience. At university, they are best understood as social practices, or academic literacies, shaped by the disciplinary contexts in which they operate. In South Africa, the transition from high school to university remains marked by a persistent misalignment in academic literacies, particularly for learners from under-resourced township schools. While university reading and writing practices function as socially situated disciplinary meaning-making processes, high school curricula often emphasise procedural responses that do not adequately prepare learners for the epistemic demands of higher education. This disconnect can reproduce structural inequalities and contribute to patterns of exclusion in first-year classrooms. Students' reading and writing practices are influenced by the kinds of knowledge and ways of working valued within a discipline. Developing these literacies, therefore, requires an understanding of disciplinary knowledge and the practices through which it is constructed and communicated. Drawing on Communities of Practice theory, this paper conceptualises the transition from high school to university as a movement between distinct knowledge communities. It reflects on how disciplinary literacy practices in Economics can be made more explicit through collaboration between university academics and school teachers. The paper reflects on an ongoing community engagement partnership between Rhodes University academics and Economics teachers at two township high schools in Makhanda. Since 2022, the initiative has involved weekly 60-minute sessions with Grade 10 and 11 learners, co-facilitated with teachers and tutors, focusing on reading and writing in Economics as disciplinary practices. These sessions emphasise argument construction, engagement with sources, responsible AI use, plagiarism awareness, and referencing as participation in a knowledge community rather than mere procedural compliance. The discussion draws on the authors' reflective engagement with the project and observations from sustained collaboration with teachers. Framed through the concept of the university as an anchor institution, a locally embedded institution that contributes to the social and educational development of its surrounding community, the initiative illustrates how universities can move beyond traditional outreach toward place-based responsibility. Reflecting on this partnership highlights both the possibilities and challenges of aligning school and university literacy practices. Bridging academic literacies in this context is therefore not only a pedagogical concern, but also an institutional commitment to equity and social transformation.

**Gernus Terblanche, Karen Venter** – University of the Free State

**A49** *Bridging Theory and Practice: Co-Curricular Student Engagement for Reparative Futures in Higher Education*

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Despite growing institutional commitments to community engagement as a pathway toward socially just and humane futures, a significant gap persists between the theoretical framing of engagement within higher education policy and curricula, and the practical opportunities available for meaningful student participation. Co-curricular spaces remain under-recognised as critical sites for relational learning, civic agency, and participatory knowledge co-creation, limiting institutions' ability to move beyond aspirational engagement agendas toward reparative practices that meaningfully involve students in addressing complex social challenges alongside communities. This presentation offers a practice-based reflection on the ACCESS UFS (Active Community Citizens through Engaged Scholarship for Sustainability) programme at the University of the Free State as a student-centred approach to community-based engagement that seeks to cultivate socially responsive graduates through participatory action learning and action research (PALAR). ACCESS UFS provides an enabling platform for student involvement in Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) initiatives that are co-developed with university and community stakeholders. Through PALAR, ACCESS UFS Champions participate in identifying locally relevant challenges related to social justice, environmental sustainability, and health and wellness, and engage in the co-creation of contextually grounded interventions. These practice-oriented engagements create opportunities for students to critically reflect on their positionalities, engage with diverse knowledge systems, and contribute toward community-driven change processes. Framed within the broader agenda of cultivating humanity through higher education community engagement, the programme prioritises relational collaborative learning, and collective responsibility as key elements of student development. The presentation will share insights into the implementation of student-led engagement initiatives, including partnership building, participatory project planning, and reflective learning mechanisms that support both personal, professional and collective development. By foregrounding student participation as a driver of engaged scholarship, the ACCESS UFS programme illustrates how structured community engagement practices can contribute toward reparative institutional futures that foster dignity, agency, and sustainable social impact within the Global South. The presentation ultimately reflects on the role of student-led participatory engagement in reimagining the civic purpose of higher education in cultivating more just and humane societies.

**Nosipho Nxumalo** – North West University

**A50** *Community Engagement and Fractured Ubuntu: A Reflexive Account of a Doctoral Research Journey in Community Based Research*

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‘Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu’ is a well-known isiZulu proverb that translates to “I am because you are.” This phrase reflects the philosophy of Ubuntu, a concept deeply rooted in Southern African cultures that emphasises interconnectedness, mutual care, and collective responsibility within communities. Ubuntu suggests that an individual’s well-being is inherently linked to the well-being of others. In South Africa, Ubuntu is frequently invoked as a guiding value in social relations and community engagement. For community-based researchers, this philosophy calls for relational, respectful, and ethically grounded engagement with the communities they work with, encouraging practices that embody empathy, reciprocity, and shared humanity. However, the practice of Ubuntu is not always straightforward in under-resourced contexts such as townships, where structural inequalities and competition for limited opportunities can complicate community relationships. This presentation offers a reflexive analysis of journal entries written during my doctoral study in which I conducted participatory action research (PAR) with 14 young female participants in Khuma Township in the North West Province of South Africa. The project aimed to explore how participatory action research could enable youth who are not in employment, education, or training (NEET) to develop skills, knowledge, and values that may enhance their life opportunities. Drawing on Ubuntu as a relational and ethical framework, the analysis of my reflective journal entries interrogates how dynamics such as greed, jealousy, and deliberate misinterpretation of intentions challenged assumptions of shared values and collective solidarity within the community. These tensions emerged through narratives and experiences shared by participants during the research process. Interpreted through the lens of social learning theory, the findings illustrate how some adults within the community discouraged youth from participating in developmental initiatives, while competition for limited resources contributed to strained relationships and reduced mutual support among participants. Based on these reflections, I argue that Ubuntu should not be understood as an inherent characteristic of community life but rather as an aspirational ethic that requires continuous cultivation, negotiation, and repair. By foregrounding these complexities, this presentation challenges idealised representations of Ubuntu and highlights the relational and ethical tensions that researchers may encounter in community-based research contexts.

**Mabitsela Choene Rose Lelaka, Constance Matshidiso, Muleya Emmison** – University of the Free State and University of Johannesburg

**A51** *Preparing for Ethical and Socially Responsible Community Development Practice through Work-Integrated Learning*

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Work-integrated learning (WIL) is widely valued for linking theory and practice to improve student learning and employability. However, this focus often overlooks the role of community engagement and social responsibility. This study reframes WIL as a tool for fostering ethical and socially respon-

sible community development practice, emphasising the active involvement of community members and the importance of supervision, capacity building, and support. This study adopted a qualitative research approach to explore how WIL serves as an approach to prepare for ethical and socially responsible community development practice. An exploratory descriptive design was employed, and data was collected through semi-structured face-to-face interviews with ten (10) community development workers (CDWs) who supervise community development students enrolled for WIL at the University of the Free State (UFS). The study was conducted in Qwaqwa, in the Free State Province between December 2024 and February 2025. During this period, the corresponding author was working at the UFS, however not directly involved with the CDWs. Participants were recruited through purposive and snowball techniques. The collected data was interpreted through thematic analysis, which revealed three themes: Supervisory support to students, University-hosted capacity building, as well as peer-to-peer support. The findings attest that supervision, capacity building, and support in WIL are essential in ensuring that ethics, community engagement, and social responsibility are not neglected in community development practice. This requires a shift from the traditional conception of WIL, to a comprehensive one that integrates community engagement at its core. In this context, WIL intersects with service learning by integrating experiential learning with meaningful community engagement, therefore strengthening the students' social responsibility alongside professional competence. The study recommends the development of holistic capacity building programmes and supervision policies to enhance WIL in the community development curriculum.

**Claire McCann** – Rhodes University

*A52 Staying with the trouble: Reflections on participation, power, and messiness in community-engaged research*

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Community-engaged research approaches aim to create environments of shared authority among stakeholders, encompassing the entire research process. In doing so, they seek to disrupt conventional notions of research by repositioning those traditionally framed as 'participants' as co-investigators and co-creators of knowledge. At the same time, a growing body of scholarship cautions against the uncritical valorisation of these approaches. Critics highlight the relative under-theorisation of power relations between universities and communities, and the risk of a 'false egalitarianism' that obscures rather than confronts existing inequalities. Further tensions arise from asymmetries in time, resources, and institutional incentives, as well as from the persistence of models that position communities as external to the university, an orientation that may reinforce, rather than challenge, the divide between academic and public knowledge.

This presentation reflects on the messiness, tensions, and possibilities of community-engaged research, drawing on a collaborative doctoral project conducted in Makhanda, South Africa. This research project, now in its final stages, adopted an emergent and participatory approach to inquiry, involving community members as co-researchers in shaping research questions, methods, and interpretations.

Rather than presenting participatory research as inherently equitable or straightforward, I foreground the uneven, iterative, and power-laden nature of collaboration, examining how methodological decisions were continually reworked in response to context, relationships, and participants' preferences, sometimes in ways that contradicted established participatory 'best practices.' Ultimately, I argue for an understanding of community-engaged research as a negotiated and relational process, whose value lies not only in formal outputs but in its affective and relational processes of listening, recognition, and shared meaning-making. By making visible the tensions and partialities of collaboration, I seek to offer a grounded account of what it means to conduct research through situated, power-laden, but undoubtedly generative relationships.

**Vince Ndou** – Mangosuthu University of Technology

*A53 Bridging Theory and Practice: Agricultural Extension Students Advancing Food Security through School Garden Development in uMlazi and uMbumbulu, Durban, South Africa*

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Food insecurity limited agricultural knowledge, and inadequate practical farming skills among youth remain persistent challenges in many South African communities. School gardens present a practical and sustainable approach to improving food security, nutrition awareness, and agricultural education among learners. The aim of the project was to enhance learners' agricultural knowledge and practical crop production skills, while simultaneously providing university students with experiential training in agricultural extension. A participatory action research approach was adopted to guide the implementation of the project. Eight (8) schools located in uMlazi and uMbumbulu were selected, with the aim of strengthening school garden systems through capacity building and skills development and baseline assessments were conducted to evaluate existing garden conditions and learners' agricultural knowledge levels. A total of forty-eight (48) university third-year students participated in the project, working collaboratively with school learners and educators, as part of their project-based learning component. The researcher served as the principal investigator and lecturer responsible for coordinating and supervising the project activities. Sixteen (16) workshops were conducted across the participating schools, with topics tailored to the specific needs identified during the baseline assessment. These workshops combined theoretical instruction with practical demonstrations and focused on key areas such as soil preparation, crop selection, planting techniques, composting, irrigation practices, pest management, and general garden maintenance. Learners actively participated in the establishment and management of vegetable gardens, supported through ongoing mentorship and monitoring. The outcomes of the project indicated improved learner understanding of sustainable agricultural practices and increased participation in school garden activities. The revitalized gardens demonstrated improved crop performance due to better soil management and maintenance practices. Furthermore, the project strengthened university students' competencies in facilitation, communication, leadership, and community-based problem solving. The study highlights the value of experiential, community-engaged learning in bridging theory and practice while contributing to youth empowerment and local food security. The study concludes that structured capacity-building interventions in school gardens can promote sustainable agricultural skills and community develop-

ment. Continued university-school partnerships, sustained mentorship, and integration of agricultural education into school programs are recommended to ensure long-term impact and sustainability.

**Nthatsi Nkoebele** – University of the Free State

*A54 Co-creating Student-Community Collaborations: Community Development Praxis through the Lens of Ubudlelane at a South African University*

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This qualitative case study is conducted at the University of the Free State (Qwa-Qwa Campus) within a fourth-year Community Development praxis module. The study explores how the principles of Ubudlelane influence pedagogical practices that promote reciprocal and contextually relevant forms of community engagement. Data are collected through the analysis of student reflection diaries produced during the community engagement process, alongside relevant module documentation, including module guides, assessment guidelines, and community engagement reports. These sources provide insights into how students perceive their relationships with community partners and how the design of the module shapes engagement practices. Data are analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns related to reciprocity, relational accountability, collective learning, and responsiveness to locally identified community priorities. Attention is given to how students reflect on their positionality, their responsibilities within community partnerships, and the extent to which engagement practices align with the relational principles of Ubudlelane. The study contributes to the conceptual and pedagogical development of praxis-oriented community engagement in South African higher education. By examining how African relational philosophy informs teaching and learning practices, the research strengthens community engagement frameworks that move beyond service delivery toward collaborative knowledge creation and mutual benefit. More broadly, the study contributes to international debates on decolonial community engagement by foregrounding African philosophical perspectives as a basis for ethically grounded and socially responsive university-community partnerships.

**Monique Purcell** – Rhodes University

*A55 Transformation in Critical Service-Learning: The Sakh'impilo Mobile Healthcare Experience*

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Sakh'impilo, a mobile healthcare service, is a community-based service-learning programme embedded within the Bachelor of Pharmacy curriculum at Rhodes University. In partnership with the Eastern Cape Department of Health (ECDOH) of South Africa, students and staff provide healthcare education, screening, and medicines to underserved communities in Makhanda and the surrounding rural areas. Rhodes University students and staff conduct clinical screenings, interpret results, provide acute primary healthcare medicines, and develop ongoing care plans for patients' conditions. The ECDOH provides HIV testing, TB screening, and women's health screening. Together, at each site, healthcare plans are developed to support continuity of care through referrals or follow-ups. The initiative began in response to the urgent public healthcare needs observed in these communities,

particularly in rural areas where access to primary healthcare is often limited. A key component of this service-learning course is the inclusion of semi-structured post-reflection group sessions following each Sakh'impilo visit. These sessions were designed to encourage students to explore how the experience impacted them personally and to engage critically with the realities of healthcare provision in rural communities. This study therefore explores how structured critical reflection within the Sakh'impilo programme may transform pharmacy students' understanding of rural healthcare inequities and their professional responsibility within the public health system. The researcher, a lecturer in pharmacy practice and coordinator of the Sakh'impilo programme, employed a qualitative reflective methodology. Data were generated through student focus groups conducted by an independent facilitator at the end of the service-learning course. A thematic analysis was used to analyse students' perspectives on their experiences of the Sakh'impilo visits and the accompanying reflection sessions. The researcher's positionality as an educator, healthcare professional, and programme facilitator provided an insider-practitioner perspective, enabling a nuanced exploration of the programme's potential to support transformative learning while critically examining students' experiences. Students reported that the post-reflection sessions facilitated shared meaning-making with peers and contributed to the formation of their emerging professional identities. Furthermore, they described how the Sakh'impilo experience fostered a deeper awareness of patients' social contexts and strengthened their sense of social responsibility, highlighting the transformative potential of critical service-learning in addressing healthcare inequities in underserved communities.

**Eugene Machimana** – University of Pretoria

*A56 Transformative University-Community Partnerships and Institutional Change in South African Higher Education*

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Partnerships form a central foundation for community engagement (CE) in higher education by creating spaces where academic and community knowledge intersect through reciprocity, mutual respect and shared learning. This paper explores how the University of Pretoria (UP) integrates such partnerships into its institutional mission, positioning engagement not as outreach or service delivery, but as a collaborative process of shared inquiry and problem-solving. The study draws on a longitudinal qualitative investigation of university-community collaborations conducted in 2026 across rural and urban contexts in South Africa. The research captures the perspectives of 93 participants, including parents and caregivers, teachers, student-clients, service-learning students and university researchers. By foregrounding these voices, the study highlights experiences that are often overlooked in traditional university decision-making. Located within contexts shaped by inequality, limited resources and enduring socio-economic disparities, the research challenges deficit-based approaches that view the university as the sole source of expertise. Instead, CE is framed as a participatory and dialogic practice supported by approaches such as Participatory Reflection and Action and academic service-learning. These methods encourage shared reflection, collective identification of priorities and collaborative development of solutions grounded in local knowledge. The study adopts an interpretive phenomenological approach within a transformative framework that

values reflexivity and social justice. Comparative analysis across participant groups shows that sustained partnerships strengthen trust, build social capital and support shared ownership of initiatives. The findings indicate that embedding CE within teaching, research and learning can contribute to meaningful institutional change. Through reciprocal partnerships and inclusive knowledge production, universities can advance democratic participation, social innovation and sustainable development while working collaboratively with communities to address complex societal challenges.

**Shulamy Vuyolwethu Ntsoeu** – Rhodes University

*A57 Co-producing Estuarine Knowledge: Citizen Science and Engaged Eutrophication Monitoring in the Swartkops Estuary*

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Estuarine ecosystems provide critical ecological services and sustain surrounding communities, yet many are under severe pressure from nutrient pollution and eutrophication. The Swartkops Estuary in South Africa exemplifies this challenge, having become hyper-eutrophic due to sustained anthropogenic nutrient inputs. While conventional water quality monitoring generates rigorous scientific data, it is often resource-intensive, institutionally controlled, and inaccessible to local communities most affected by environmental decline. This project explores how engaged research and citizen science can contribute to more inclusive and context-responsive estuarine monitoring. Specifically, it evaluates the reliability and effectiveness of a participatory eutrophication monitoring approach using the Global Eutrophication Monitoring (GEM-in-a-Box) kit, implemented with Grade 11 learners as citizen scientists, in comparison to conventional laboratory-based water quality analysis. Adopting a transdisciplinary design, the study integrates ecological and social science methodologies. Quantitative data (including nutrient concentrations, temperature, dissolved oxygen, and turbidity) are collected across multiple estuary sites during wet and dry seasons, with parallel analysis conducted using both field-based GEM kits and standard laboratory methods. Statistical comparisons assess the reliability and validity of citizen-generated data. Concurrently, qualitative methods, including interviews and observations, examine participants' experiences of knowledge co-production, environmental learning, and scientific engagement. Beyond methodological comparison, the project interrogates how citizen science reshapes traditional hierarchies of environmental knowledge. By positioning local youth as contributors to data generation and environmental interpretation, the research challenges the separation between "expert" and "community" knowledge. In doing so, it demonstrates how universities can learn alongside communities and build reciprocal research partnerships that strengthen environmental stewardship. This study contributes to engaged research scholarship by illustrating how citizen science can complement conventional monitoring while fostering epistemic inclusion, environmental agency, and shared responsibility for ecological wellbeing.

**Enver Lottering, Nikki Green** – Rhodes University

**A58** *Beyond Language as Access: Mother-Tongue Leadership and Epistemic Belonging through “Projek Bereik”*

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Community engagement in multilingual South Africa often encounters a form of epistemic injustice when the dominant language of the university does not align with that of the partner community. Language in such contexts is not merely a medium of communication but a carrier of identity, belonging, and authority. This presentation reflects on Projek Bereik (Project Reach), a leadership development initiative developed in collaboration with 38 peer leaders and staff members at Mary Waters High School, a predominantly Afrikaans-speaking school in Makhanda. Meaning both “to reach” and “to achieve,” Bereik symbolises a dual commitment: bridging linguistic divides while strengthening learner leadership from within the community itself. While academic mentorship programmes such as the 9/10ths Programme, also offered to the school, support academic performance and access to higher education, a complementary gap remains in structured leadership development and contextually grounded soft-skill formation. Projek Bereik addresses this gap by focusing on strategic communication, conflict resolution, collaborative problem-solving, and idea-to-implementation processes within existing school governance structures. These competencies enable learners not only to succeed academically but to exercise agency, articulate community-informed ideas, and engage institutional systems effectively in the language that shapes their everyday worlds. Grounded in Community Psychology principles of empowerment, ecological systems thinking, and asset-based development, the project adopts a peer-embedded cascading leadership approach rather than a traditional training hierarchy. Workshops are conducted in Afrikaans, including local dialectal expressions, to ensure cultural resonance and deep participation. Rather than positioning university partners as experts, the initiative centres reciprocal knowledge exchange in which learners and staff co-shape the content and extend leadership practices within existing school structures. This case study draws on reflective practitioner inquiry, including facilitator reflections, participant feedback, and observations gathered during the first phase of the initiative. As facilitators working within the partnership, we reflect critically on our positionality as university collaborators engaging with a school community whose linguistic and cultural context shapes the leadership practices explored. By strengthening learner leadership in their mother language, Projek Bereik enhances confidence, institutional literacy, and collaborative competence. The project ultimately demonstrates how language-sensitive community engagement can shift partnerships from outreach toward epistemic collaboration, enabling mutual learning and sustained empowerment.

**Diana Sanchez-Betancourt** – HSRC

**A59** *How are Engaged Research Methodologies Operationalised in Academic and Research Settings in Low and Middle Income Countries?*

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Engaged research (ER) is a useful framework that describes a set of principles and processes for consulting, collaborating, and/or co-creating with users during various or any of the stages of the research cycle. Our paper aims to establish some practical examples of what ER projects might entail from a methodological perspective. This is based on previous work by the HSRC which created a comprehensive evidence synthesis through an evidence map of literature using different approaches to Engaged Research. A detailed account of this phase of work can be found in Fluks et al. (2024). According to this review, Engaged Research is mostly conducted through 16 methodological approaches, with most studies employing a Participatory Action Research (PAR) framework. We conducted secondary data analyses on these papers, focusing on how these Engaged Research approaches were operationalised. Given that the PAR framework is an established approach in the literature, we focus our analysis on papers that employ emerging or less established Engaged Research methodologies. For the analysis we followed a descriptive approach using thematic content analysis (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017) and the data capturing and processing has been supported by Atlas ti software. Our preliminary interpretation of the findings is led by these key questions: (i) What are the practical steps involved in conducting Engaged Research from a methodological perspective? For example, when ‘stakeholder engagement’ was employed, what did this look like on the ground and what activities were implemented to operationalise this? (ii) When are ER principles enacted within the studies? (at the start, in the middle, at the end of the study?) (iii) What are the challenges associated with employing ER methodologies? Our preliminary findings and reflections will provide valuable information to researchers and students who aim to conduct and advance engaged research across various disciplines and organisations.

**Dizline Mfanozelwe Shozi, Busisiwe Nkonki-Mandleni, Dudu Thobile Mbhele** – Mangosuthu University of Technology

**A60** *Community Engagement for Nation-Building: Applying Communities of Practice and Ubuntu in MUT’s Mandela Month and Schools & Community Cup Programmes*

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In South Africa, the Education White Paper 3 (Department of Education, 1997) calls on higher education institutions to extend their role beyond teaching and research to actively promote democratic values, shared citizenship, and commitment to the common good. Responding to this mandate, this study examines how Mangosuthu University of Technology’s (MUT) Mandela Month and Schools and Community Cup community engagement projects function as platforms that promote nation-building, and collaborative learning. Initiated in 2023, these projects bring together MUT, the eThekweni Metropolitan Municipality, industry partners, and civil society organisations to encourage inclusive participation in sport and community-based activities in schools and communities of Umlazi. The study is theoretically framed around Communities of Practice (CoP) social learning theory

(Letseka, 2012) and Ubuntu philosophy (Metz, 2011). Communities of Practice provide a lens for understanding how participation among students, staff, school learners, and community partners facilitates knowledge co-creation, experiential learning, and graduate development through shared practice. Ubuntu complements this perspective by emphasising collective responsibility, social cohesion, and reciprocal partnerships that advance democratic citizenship and social transformation. A qualitative document analysis methodology was employed to examine project reports, institutional records, partnership agreements, policy documents, and relevant literature. Documents were purposively selected based on their relevance to programme planning, implementation, and evaluation. Data were analysed using thematic analysis which explored patterns of participation, partnership formation, collaborative learning, and community impact within the university-community engagement context. Findings reveal meaningful impact across MUT students, communities, and the university. The initiatives strengthen multi-sector partnerships and contribute to nation building while articulating MUT's strategic posture of its dual commitment to academic excellence and socio-economic transformation. The study concludes that such community engagement initiative demonstrate how MUT acts as anchor institution in contributing meaningfully to social transformation while enriching graduate attributes.

**Tugce Ataci, Laura Lema Silva** – Université Paris-Est Créteil (UPEC), France

*A61 Scientific Transmediation for Community Engagement and Societal Impact: The Case of the “Constellations for Plural Peace” Project*

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Scientific mediation aims to transfer the knowledge produced within academic spaces into accessible and communicable forms that can be understood, used and valued by those outside these spaces. Despite emphasizing dialogue and collaboration, this process often follows a linear logic model in which researchers serve as producers and communicators and external audiences are positioned as recipients or potential beneficiaries. This one-directional and one-dimensional approach overlooks opportunities for communities to participate not only in knowledge production but also in dissemination. In this paper, we conceptualize an alternative process in which knowledge is both co-produced and co-mediated through transmedia storytelling, a process we call scientific transmediation. Transmedia storytelling is a concept that initially emerged for marketing purposes and within fictional narrative worlds, where fans contribute to story-making through fan fiction and other creative productions. The concept later evolved into an educational practice that encourages learners to develop skills through diverse transmedia practices such as multimodal creation and dissemination. In this paper, we use transmedia storytelling as a framework through which researchers and communities collaboratively develop and circulate knowledge via different media. To demonstrate this, we present the “Constellations for Plural Peace” (CpPaix) project as a case study. The project brings together six researchers from Parisian universities, the National University of Colombia and the partner Institut pour la Paix (Institute for Peace), with both insider and outsider positionalities in the team. It builds on previous participatory research conducted with Indigenous communities in Colombia and migrant communities in France. The objective is to build a transmedia

platform and investigate diverse understandings of peace across different communities and contexts in order to contribute to peacebuilding initiatives. Through joint work between researchers and community members (including students, non-academic personnel and migrants in the region), the project involves both digital (a platform) and physical (a peace festival) spaces to facilitate encounters in which participating groups use creative arts to express what peace means to them and disseminate these insights collectively. Scientific transmediation thus establishes an interdependent process of cocreation and co-mediation so that knowledge is not only shaped through community engagement but also expanded through collaborative mediation.

**Keabetswe Charmyne Modise** – Central University of Technology

*A62 Examining how Dialogic Partnerships between Higher Education Institutions, Communities and Students Create Shared Inquiry Spaces for Inclusive Higher-Education Planning*

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South Africa's post-school education and training sector is facing persistent institutional impediments including limited university capacity to provide accessible higher education and training opportunities. Despite meeting university entry requirements, many students struggle to find university placements. Furthermore, student funding delays, limited institutional support and infrastructural challenges aggravate inequalities, leaving many students without fair access to higher education learning and training. Prospective students are encouraged to explore different post-school pathways including TVET institutions, CET programs, and other post-school options. However, students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are disproportionately affected by their limiting capacity to make informed decisions about pursuing higher education. This study aims to explore how dialogic partnerships between higher education institutions, communities and students can create well-structured spaces to support well-informed and inclusive higher-education planning. The study adopts a qualitative desktop approach; conducted in 2026 to review institutional policy documents and public communications from higher education institutions and the Department of Higher Education and Training. Content analysis systematically examine how do higher education institutions plan and support learner planning and placement. The researcher adopts a reflexive position as a higher-education scholar examining institutional practices from an analytical and policy-review perspective. Dialogic partnerships could provide structured spaces for co-constructing knowledge to enable learners to better understand different post-school pathways. These spaces support inclusive post-school planning, improve learner agency and help students prepare for academic progress and work placements. Predominately, dialogic engagement can help alleviate socio-economic barriers and foster informed decisions to connect learners with institutional and community support.

**Melusi Dlamini** – Rhodes University

**A63** *Learning in/through the Landfill: Service Learning and Reparative Pedagogies in South African Anthropology*

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Anthropology is routinely invoked as a discipline of critical thinking, ethical engagement, and social responsiveness, a framing that is especially urgent in relation to the enduring and reconfigured inequalities of post-apartheid South Africa. Within this context, South African universities and national policy frameworks increasingly foreground graduate attributes such as critical citizenship, ethical judgement, reflexivity, and socially engaged responsibility. Yet scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) that theorises how anthropological ways of knowing, particularly ethnographic sensibilities, are taught, practised, and assessed in higher education remains comparatively thin. I suggest that these graduate attributes are not best understood as transferable skills that students simply acquire and carry across contexts. Rather, they are relational capacities formed through situated encounters with power, difference, and inequality, precisely the terrain anthropology is equipped to illuminate and contest. This paper draws on an applied service-learning anthropology module organised around rapid ethnographic assessment approaches, through which students practise situated observation, mapping, and collaborative inquiry with waste pickers in Makhanda, South Africa. In engaging waste infrastructures as a local problem, students bring anthropological perspectives to bear on how waste pickers navigate precarious livelihoods while performing essential socio-ecological labour that sustains informal recycling economies and urban life. I argue that service learning can contribute to reparative pedagogies when it shifts from studying marginalised communities to learning with them, and when community engagement is approached as a site of epistemic justice rather than an add-on to disciplinary training. Three interrelated themes emerged. First, waste pickers' everyday practices operate as vernacular theories of repair, care, and survival, unsettling deficit framings that locate "waste" only in discarded material or, implicitly, in poor communities. Second, the pedagogical architecture through which students encountered these theories, including structured fieldwork activities and guided reflection, foregrounded positionality, reciprocity, and accountability as core elements of ethnographic practice rather than optional ethical considerations. Third, the module surfaced the limits of reparative engagement: uneven institutional power, compressed academic timeframes, the risk of extractive learning, and the difficulty of sustaining partnerships beyond the semester. In making these arguments, the paper contributes to a South African SoTL of anthropology that treats community-engaged ethnographic pedagogy as a central site for remaking disciplinary knowledge and for forming graduates capable of socially responsive, ethically accountable practice.

**Lorraine Makena** – University of Pretoria

**A64** *Bridging the Digital Divide Through Collaborative Ecosystems in Mamelodi*

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The rapid acceleration of the global digital economy has highlighted a profound digital divide within South African townships, where a lack of technical skills often translates directly into socio-economic

exclusion and the stagnation of local growth. This paper explores a transformative collaborative empowerment model at the University of Pretoria's Mamelodi campus in South Africa, which seeks to transform the community into a digitally literate hub through a strategic, multi-stakeholder framework. By integrating the efforts of university students engaged through both curricular community engagement and extracurricular volunteerism, academic staff, local community volunteers, and corporate partners, the initiative moves beyond traditional, one-dimensional interventions toward a sustainable “shared value” ecosystem. In this model, the University cohort provides the pedagogical structure and technical mentorship necessary for foundational learning, while corporate companies contribute the infrastructure and industry-aligned insights required to ensure that the skills being taught remain relevant to the high-demand requirements of the modern labour market. Furthermore, the inclusion of community volunteers ensures that the program is culturally grounded and that knowledge remains resident within Mamelodi, creating a peer-to-peer support network that survives long after formal training sessions conclude. The research utilised a reflexive practitioner model, where findings were generated through the systematic analysis of the engagement process. This approach enabled the researcher to develop the “shared value” framework by documenting visible shifts among community participants – from initial technical hesitation to autonomous peer-to-peer support. This reflexive methodology asserts that the programme’s strength lies in the sustained resident knowledge created through these collaborative interactions. The study argues that digital literacy is most effective and enduring when treated as a collective social practice rather than a mere technical requirement or a hardware-focused checklist. The paper demonstrates how this multi-layered collective action successfully reduces the psychological “intimidation barrier” to technology, fosters grassroots innovation at the local level, and empowers marginalised individuals to participate meaningfully in the digital economy. This research provides a proven, scalable roadmap for bridging the digital divide in other South African townships, asserting that digital equity lies in the strength of collaborative partnerships and the democratisation of technical knowledge across all sectors of society.

**Arorisoe Sibanda, Noncaba Khumalo, Heila Lotz** – Sisitka-Rhodes University

*A65 Advancing Education for Sustainable Development through Co-Engaged Research and Social Learning in a Professional Learning Community*

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Despite growing demand for sustainability education and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), significant gaps remain in innovative and transformative pedagogical approaches, especially in resource-constrained contexts. This study addresses these gaps through a co-engaged formative intervention to integrate ESD into the social sciences curriculum in Makhanda, South Africa. Drawing from a social learning theoretical lens, we frame teacher professional development as a dialogical co-construction of meaning, practice, and agency rather than expert knowledge transfer. We supported thirteen teachers through the Fundisa for Change professional learning programme. Four of these teachers have successfully completed the Introduction to ESD and Fundisa for Change course and significantly contributed as co-producers of knowledge and design research partners in curricu-

lum innovations within a community of practice that emphasizes collaborative reflexivity and negotiated meaning-making. Qualitative data was generated from reflection sessions during the three workshops conducted over a period of three months, tracing social learning across iterative cycles of dialogue, classroom practices, and shared reflection. Two researchers are the Fundisa for Change course designers and facilitators, which positions them as insiders with potential bias toward programme efficacy, mitigated via collaborative reflexivity, while the third researcher was a masters student participant-observer. The preliminary findings revealed that teachers faced challenges such as curriculum overload, limited professional development, and resource scarcity. However, our co-engaged formative intervention, informed by the expansive learning cycle, through the Fundisa for Change online course and ESD change projects, helped teachers navigate the challenges that limit the integration of ESD into teaching and learning. Thus, the findings show that co-engaged research in professional development bridges structural constraints and capacitates teachers to integrate ESD in their teaching. We conclude that co-engaged research and social learning in professional development empower teachers with educative, catalytic pedagogies that resonate with learners; lived experiences and contribute to climate action and sustainability practices. The research continues with teachers as design research partners in small-scale teacher-led curriculum-activated ESD change projects.

**Sisonke Mawonga** – Rhodes University

*A66 Speaking Proximity: Multilingual Practice and the University as Anchor Institution*

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Universities are increasingly described as anchor institutions, locally embedded entities with a responsibility to promote equity, inclusion, and collective well-being in the communities where they are situated. Yet, in linguistically diverse contexts, institutional engagement often remains mediated through English, reproducing communicative asymmetries between universities and the communities they aim to serve. As a multilingualism researcher and facilitator embedded within the university and local isiXhosa-speaking communities, I approach this work from a standpoint that recognises both the privileges and responsibilities of institutional engagement. My reflections are informed by my direct involvement in teaching, course design, and ongoing dialogue with participants and community partners. This paper reflects on the design and implementation of an ongoing 12-session conversational isiXhosa course offered to university staff who engage with isiXhosa-speaking community partners in and around Makhanda. The course prioritises oral communication, relational confidence, and critical reflection on language, power, and multilingualism in community engagement contexts. Rather than positioning language acquisition as an individual professional skill, the intervention frames multilingual practice as an ethical responsibility of the institution, grounded in an Ubuntu-informed commitment to relational care and human flourishing. Drawing on participant reflections, scenario-based learning, and structured micro-practices between sessions, the course disrupts linguistic hierarchies and fosters more reciprocal modes of engagement. Language learning is approached as a form of institutional proximity, a deliberate movement toward communities through linguistic recognition, ethical engagement, and relational accountability. By

examining the pedagogical design, reflective practices, and emerging impacts of the course, this paper argues that small-scale multilingual interventions can contribute to the re-imagination of the university as an anchor institution that advances equity, inclusion, and collective wellbeing. It invites discussion on how universities in multilingual contexts might move beyond symbolic commitments to inclusion toward embodied, communicative transformation, where language, care, and social responsibility intersect to strengthen community-university partnerships.

**Siphamandla Mncwango** – University of the Free State

**A67** *Drivers and Constraints of Engaged Scholarship in Higher Education*

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Engaged scholarship is a movement that has been growing steadily since 1995. It offers a new way of bridging gaps between university and civil society. Numerous papers and reports have been published since Boyer's foundational discourse in 1996. However, this paper places engaged scholarship within the context of recent literature and policy actions that suggest the traditional role of universities as society's primary generators and transmitters of knowledge is evolving. The study explores the concept of engaged scholarship in higher education, highlighting both its drivers and constraints. The theoretical basis guiding the study is social capital theory, which fosters collaboration and trust among scholars and community members. A qualitative research approach was employed, with data collected from secondary sources. The findings show that drives for engaged scholarship include developing critical awareness and creating conditions for social change that emphasized Ubuntu or humanity, as well as improving research and learning. They also indicate constraints such as insufficient funding, a lack of inclusive collaboration, and community barriers. The study recommends raising critical consciousness, establishing conditions for social change, increase funding for community engaged research and enhancing research and learning. It also recommends strategies to reduce community barriers, foster sustainable partnerships with community, and explore financing options. The study concludes that engaged scholarship has the potential to cultivate deeper relationships between scholars and communities, enrich teaching and learning experiences, and drive meaningful social change but it also encounters significant challenges.

**Ashley Westaway, Kelly Long** – GADRA Education

**A68** *Innovating to Understand and Address the Fundamental Challenge of Literacy in Makhanda*

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This research paper describes and analyses longitudinal (2023-2026) data produced by an innovative service-learning study into the literacy competence of all Grade 4 learners in the city of Makhanda. The service-learning project is undertaken through a partnership between GADRA Education, Rhodes University, local schools and the Department of Basic Education. The research concerns a collaborative intervention that designed a creative response to one of the most fundamental challenges facing South Africa, namely illiteracy. The severity of the country's problems are reflected in

the recent results of the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). In the last two studies, only 22% (2016) and 19% (2021) of Grade 4 learners were found to be able to read for meaning in the language in which they were taught in their Foundation Phase years. Ironically, despite the literacy crisis highlighted by the PIRLS results, there is a shortage of reliable quantitative and qualitative information on learner performance. As a consequence, it is difficult for government to take informed decisions regarding literacy-related policies. Similarly, there are very few detailed case studies that delve into specifics and dynamics of localities. The annual service-learning study assesses every Grade 4 learner in the city; about 4334 learners in the four years and approximately 1080 learners per year on average. The research utilises a quantitative theoretical framework to analyse the data produced by the annual studies to understand the relationship between variables such as literacy competence, language of teaching and learning, socio-economic status. Quantitative research methods including statistical analysis of data are used to identify patterns and test hypotheses. The Makhanda service-learning study has revealed that 45% of the city's Grade 4 learners are able to read for meaning. The paper examines why Makhanda's literacy rate is more than double the national average. Analysis points to a combination of structural and contextual factors, including language-of-instruction effects, socio-economic stratification, instructional quality, and the density of locally embedded literacy interventions. By offering a detailed locality-based case study, this contribution advances engaged knowledge creation for literacy justice and provides reparative insights into what conditions enable children to read for meaning in South Africa.

**Nikki Green** – Rhodes University

**A69** *It Takes a Network: Literacy as Dialogic Community Engagement in Makhanda*

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Literacy is often framed as a schooling problem, measured through assessment scores and addressed through classroom-based interventions. Yet in practice, literacy is a community capacity, built through relationships, languages, stories, identities, and shared spaces of learning. Within community engagement, this raises a critical question: how can universities move beyond isolated projects toward sustained relational partnership? This paper presents the Makhanda Literacy Pathways Programme (MLP) as an example of dialogic community engagement grounded in community development theory, demonstrating how relational infrastructure can sustain educational transformation. The MLP emerged in response to fragmentation across early literacy initiatives in Makhanda, where multiple volunteer and NGO programmes operated in parallel rather than partnership. Such fragmentation reflects a broader challenge within community engagement practice, where well-intentioned initiatives often function alongside rather than in dialogue with one another. Rather than introducing a new intervention, the MLP intentionally cultivated a networked literacy ecosystem connecting Foundation Phase educators, Department of Basic Education subject advisors, literacy NGOs, linguistics researchers, university pedagogy specialists, and student volunteers. This ecosystem is coordinated through the Makhanda Literacy Collective (MLC) and supported by the Rhodes University Community Engagement Unit (RUCE) as a backbone convenor. Drawing on theories of relational infrastructure (Gilchrist, 2019), knowledge pluralism (Ledwith,

2011), communities of practice (Wenger, 1999), and dialogical praxis (Freire, 1970), this paper argues that effective community engagement depends not on single projects but on sustained dialogic partnerships. Within the MLP Advisory Group, academic, practitioner, and community knowledge meet in shared spaces of listening, co-analysis, and iterative design. Here, authority is decentralised and expertise distributed, positioning dialogue not as consultation but as co-construction. Teachers contribute classroom wisdom; researchers provide linguistic data; NGOs offer pedagogical tools; volunteers bring human capacity; and DBE advisors align systemic requirements. No single actor holds authority; rather, distributed expertise shapes collective action. The paper positions dialogic partnerships as the ethical core of impactful community engagement. When universities act as anchor institutions that convene, connect, and learn alongside communities, fragmented efforts become aligned pathways and isolated interventions become collective movement. By framing literacy as a co-held social process rather than a technical outcome, the MLP illustrates how community engagement grounded in community development principles can advance equity, agency, and shared ownership. In doing so, it invites a rethinking of engagement not as activity, but as relational infrastructure for human flourishing.

### **Siyamdumisa Vena – Nelson Mandela University**

#### *A70 Educating for Ethical Democratic Leadership: Digital Ubuntu and the University's Reparative Role in Civic Formation*

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Amid intensifying public concern about ethical decline in democratic leadership, this paper reframes the question of political accountability as a problem of civic formation rather than individual moral failure. Situated within the South African context, the study argues that sustainable democratic renewal requires early political education grounded in relational ethics, constitutional literacy, and critical digital participation. Drawing on decolonial theory, Ubuntu philosophy, and critical pedagogy, the paper proposes a reparative model of community engagement in which universities collaborate with primary schools and local communities to co-develop digitally mediated civic education infrastructures. Central to this model is the concept of Digital Ubuntu—the extension of relational accountability, interdependence, and shared humanity into technologically mediated learning environments. The paper conceptualizes a tablet-supported civic education platform co-designed by university researchers, educators, and community stakeholders. Rather than reproducing technocratic or Western-centric civics curricula, the proposed application integrates African intellectual traditions, participatory democratic values, constitutional education, and critical media literacy. In doing so, it seeks to cultivate ethical agency from an early age and reposition children not as passive recipients of governance but as emerging democratic actors. Methodologically, the study employs a conceptual and design-based research approach informed by participatory engagement with educators and community partners. It situates digital innovation within broader debates on engaged research, social innovation, and universities as anchor institutions. The paper argues that higher education institutions carry a reparative responsibility to contribute intellectual, technological, and human resources toward democratic deepening. By embedding civic formation within community-university

partnerships, engagement shifts from episodic outreach to sustained co-creation of knowledge infrastructures. The study contributes to scholarship on higher education community engagement by demonstrating how digital civic education, grounded in Ubuntu and decolonial praxis, can function as a humanizing intervention in democratic life. It advances a framework for understanding political education as both social innovation and reparative engagement aimed at cultivating ethical leadership and collective responsibility.

**Mncedi Eddie Magade** – iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu

*A71 Co-Creating Community Knowledge through Media, Literacy and Creative Publishing: A Community-Based Participatory Research Study of Student Learning and Community Partnerships in East London*

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Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) foregrounds equitable partnerships, shared decision-making, and the co-creation of knowledge between academic institutions and communities to address locally identified challenges. This study examines how the Eastern Cape for Africa Foundation (ECFAF) enables community-engaged student learning through partnerships with a community-based media organisation and local schools in East London communities, culminating in the co-creation and publication of two creative, community-authored books. Guided by CBPR principles, the study employs a participatory qualitative design in which students, community members, educators, media practitioners, and ECFAF facilitators act as co-researchers throughout the research process. Together, participants identify priority issues related to local storytelling, media representation, and reading and literacy development. Students collaborate with a community media organisation to co-produce locally relevant media content while simultaneously providing reading and literacy support to learners in nearby schools. These engagements move beyond service delivery to include dialogue, collective reflection, and shared ownership of knowledge production. A key outcome of the project is the publication of two creative books co-developed with community members and learners. These texts function as tangible knowledge artefacts that foreground community voices, lived experiences, and local epistemologies, while also serving as culturally relevant literacy resources for schools and the broader community. Data are generated through participatory workshops, focus groups, reflective student journals, interviews with partners, and analysis of co-created media and published texts. By foregrounding creative knowledge production and community authorship, the study challenges university-centric models of learning and research, repositioning communities as equal knowledge producers. It contributes to CBPR, service-learning, community media, and literacy education by offering a transferable, ethical, and participatory model for integrating student learning with community-defined priorities.

**Rev Chis Nkomo** – Mamelodi Historical Society and the University of Pretoria

*A 72 Reflections on Digitally Preserving the History of Mamelodi: A Dialogic Partnership between the Mamelodi Historical Society and the University of Pretoria – A Community Partner Reflection*

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This paper describes an ongoing initiative of the past four years to digitally preserve the history of Mamelodi through a dialogic partnership that promotes respectful engagement between academic institutions and community knowledge holders. Traditionally, historical documentation has been an extractive process; however, this project reframes the community as the primary stewards of their own legacy. By creating shared spaces for dialogue, the project merges scholarly research with lived experiences. This collaborative effort involves three academics working alongside students enrolled in the BSocSci Honours Heritage and Cultural Tourism (HCT) programme, three members of the Historical Society of Mamelodi, and interested community members. Together, these stakeholders ensure that narratives are authentically represented and that residents retain agency over how their stories are archived. Central to this initiative is the “parity of esteem” methodology, which values local wisdom alongside academic theory. Through participatory workshops, semi-structured interviews, and digital storytelling sessions, the initiative empowers community members to actively contribute to documenting their heritage. This process allowed participants to identify landmarks, individuals, and oral traditions deemed most significant by the residents, rather than adhering to a pre-determined academic agenda. The use of digital tools provided a modern platform for elders to pass down historical truths to the youth, effectively bridging the generational gap. As a community partner presenting this work, I highlight that our findings indicate such partnerships do far more than just archive the past; they actively shape the future of our township. These collaborations significantly strengthen community cohesion and develop a renewed sense of pride and shared identity. This initiative serves as a vital model for future collaborations, highlighting the importance of mutual respect in advancing social justice and historical integrity. I argue that authentic historical preservation is only possible when the community is recognised as an equal partner, ensuring that the digital record of Mamelodi accurately reflects our resilience and spirit.

**Flip Schutte** – STADIO

*A73 Learning to Listen Before Acting: A Story of Listening Circles, Community Engagement, and Gender-Based Violence*

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This storytelling contribution traces the early stages of an institution learning to listen before intervening. Situated within STADIO Higher Education’s emerging commitment to community engagement and its institutional focus on gender-based violence (GBV), the story examines how listening circles emerged as a necessary ethical and pedagogical practice for working with communities affected by violence, silence, and mistrust. As a young private higher education institution, STADIO has begun grappling with how to engage communities around GBV in ways that do not reproduce extraction, saviourism, or premature solutions. Early conversations within the in-

stitution-particularly in the Schools of Policing and Law-revealed a shared unease: before awareness campaigns, reporting initiatives, or curriculum interventions could be designed, the institution needed to understand how communities themselves make sense of GBV, why it manifests differently across contexts, and what prevents victims from reporting or seeking support. This realisation marked a turning point from action-oriented engagement towards listening as an intentional first step.

The story centres on the conceptual emergence of listening circles as a dialogic, participatory space for collective reflection. Drawing on insights from participatory research, learning circles, and facilitated group listening, listening circles are understood not merely as data-gathering tools but as relational practices that create safe, non-hierarchical spaces for communities to speak, reflect, and make meaning together. In the context of GBV, where fear, shame, power, and trauma are deeply embedded, listening circles offer a way for institutions to enter communities with humility, patience, and ethical restraint. Set within the ethos of critical service learning, this story reflects on listening as a form of learning for students, academics, and institutions alike. It positions listening circles as nurturing shared agency, reflexivity, and social responsibility, while resisting the urge to “fix” complex social problems too quickly. The contribution concludes by situating listening circles as the first phase of a longer longitudinal journey at STADIO, which will later include focused GBV research, curriculum integration, community-based partnerships, and the establishment of a GBV research lab. In telling this early story of hesitation, listening, and intentional slowness, the paper argues that cultivating humanity in community engagement begins not with intervention, but with the courage to listen.

**Ntethelelo Sibiyi** – Rhodes University

*A74 Reflection on Diabetology Elective Course: Driving Diabetes Care and Awareness in Makhanda Community whilst Fostering Student Learning and Development*

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Diabetes mellitus is amongst the most prevalent diseases and leading causes of mortality and morbidity. We developed a Diabetology elective course, which in part is delivered through community based-service learning. This course provides an opportunity and privilege to introduce new concepts and further expand concepts relating to biological/biochemical physiological and pharmacological basis of glucose regulation and diabetes related pathophysiology and management strategies. Most importantly, whilst the student gains deep scientific and clinical insights, there is however a pressing necessity to understand and respond to challenges faced with the community, with a goal to enforce holistic development through serving the communities. The service-learning component of this course blends the academic learning with community interactions, enriching understanding, skills, and engagement with diabetes-related issues. Students are more deeply engaged with the specific needs of patients living with the condition and envisaged to acquire practical skills, including problem analysis, problem-solving, empathy, critical thinking, and cognitive development, to navigate the unique challenges presented by each patient. Furthermore, the students engage with high school learners with a goal to empower them with diabetes prevention strategies and caring for family members. We reflect on the service-learning curriculum and teaching and learning strategies

for Diabetology. The presentation focuses on the service-learning component learning activity highlighting its benefits in teaching and learning for Diabetology, and improving student's educational experience. We discuss the challenges and opportunities presented by this community based-service learning project.

**Belinda Pakati** – University of Pretoria

*A75 Cultivating Humanity Through Youth-Led Community Engagement: Reflections from the Just Leaders Programme at the CSA&G*

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This practice-based reflection explores how youth-led community engagement can function as a reparative and humanising practice within higher education. Drawing on the Community Engagement Project of the Centre for Sexualities, AIDS, and Gender (CSA&G) at the University of Pretoria, this presentation reflects on participatory approaches to Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE), social justice, and wellbeing implemented in collaboration with four township schools in Pretoria. The project works with 40 high school learners and 13 teachers, supported by approximately 20 university student volunteers per semester, to establish Social Justice Clubs within participating schools. These clubs create learner-led spaces that promote equitable access to Comprehensive Sexuality Education and encourage critical dialogue on issues such as sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), gender diversity, bullying, stigma, and mental health. Central to the initiative is the Just Leaders Programme, a nine-week training programme that equips university students with foundational knowledge in social justice, structural violence, restorative justice, activism, and leadership. Graduates of the programme collaborate with learners and teachers to support youth-led engagement activities within schools. The project adopts a participatory approach that positions learners and teachers as co-creators of knowledge rather than passive recipients of interventions. Participatory methods include focus groups with learners and teachers, asset-mapping exercises, and collaborative program design processes, which allow participants to reflect on their experiences of Life Orientation education, identify gaps in existing learning materials, and shape context-responsive activities within their schools. Learners and teachers co-develop initiatives such as CSE-oriented assemblies, wellness days, and Social Justice Club programmes that promote peer learning and inclusive dialogue. While supporting CSE engagement, the project recognises the Scripted Lesson Plans developed by the Department of Basic Education as the core curricular framework for Life Orientation teaching. Grounded in Ubuntu and principles of reparative engagement, the initiative moves beyond traditional service-delivery models toward relational practices of listening, dialogue, and shared action. The work demonstrates that youth-led engagement fosters belonging and collective responsibility, sustained school partnerships enable context-responsive approaches to CSE, and centring young people's voices challenges hierarchical knowledge models while strengthening community-university relationships. These insights contribute to broader debates on how higher education institutions can cultivate humanity through community engagement by supporting youth leadership, knowledge cocreation, and relational accountability in partnerships with schools.

**Moorosi Leshoele** – University of the Free State**A76** *Endogenous Development in Africa: Lessons from Burkina Faso and Rwanda's Community Development Girinka Programme*

Since the independence wave of the 1960s in Africa, a number of countries have experimented with different development models, more so the neoliberal development approach of the Bretton Woods institutions underpinned by liberal Western democracy. It is now widely acknowledged in many quarters that these approaches have for the most part, failed to deliver basic public goods for the general disenfranchised African masses. This paper therefore seeks to explore alternative approaches to the elusive development efforts in Africa in the form of endogenous and indigenous development approaches, making it a qualitative explorative study. The 2006 Rwandan Girinka programme is explored as a classical instance of how poverty and malnutrition can be drastically reduced through the reinvention and readaptation of indigenous socio-economic strategies such as the 'one cow one poor family' programme in Rwanda. This example of a community development strategy that is explored and implemented in Rwanda is an example of such strategies found in other African countries such as 'Letsema' in Lesotho. These programmatic strategies are anchored on endogenous development theory as advanced by Joseph Ki-Zerbo and as empirically seen through the Sankarian development and governance model. In addition, lessons are also drawn from Thomas Sankara's radical government of the mid 1980s in Burkina Faso. Sankara explored and rolled out numerous endogenous policies as part of his governance architecture. For instance, in the agricultural sector, many homegrown strategies were used to ensure that enough crops were grown, in ways that could store water for long because Burkina Faso is an arid country, and these efforts yielded remarkable results. Others were agroecological strategies such as the 'Zai and half-moon planting pits'. Lastly, the leadership and governance strategies of Sankara and the current military leader of Burkina Faso, Ibrahim Traore are also explored, compared and contrasted, and critiqued through a decolonial gaze and Sankarist lens, speaking to the theoretical and philosophical grounding of this study.

**Simphiwe Lynette Mahlangu** – University of Pretoria**A77** *Engaging for Change: Showing Up is Showing Love*

What does it mean for university students to "show up" in community engagement beyond charity or service, but as participants in the co-creation of humane and reparative futures? This paper reflects on a community engagement internship experience at Black Labone (BL), a grassroots creative collective in Pretoria, where we served as intern community development and operations managers. Each Thursday evening, the backstage became a site of dialogic partnership, where artists, volunteer interns, academics, and audiences met in shared vulnerability and creative expression. Drawing on development studies, participatory research, and decolonial perspectives, the paper argues that BL operates more than just an entertainment hub but as a living site for community knowledge, care, and agency designed to sustain young artists navigating unemployment and systemic exclusion. In these spaces, development was not abstract policy but embodied agency. Music became living

research. Performance became knowledge production. The audience transformed into co-participants in meaning making. Grounded in Ubuntu and relational ethics, this experience disrupted charity-based models of volunteering. Engagement shifted from “helping” to “being with.” Artists were not beneficiaries but knowledge holders and agents of transformation. We learned that reparative engagement begins in reciprocity: in listening, accountability, and recognising community cultural spaces as sites of epistemic authority. Through reflexive storytelling and practice-based analysis, this paper shows how our roles nurtured dialogic partnerships where academic frameworks of social inclusion, participatory development, and cultural capital encountered lived community wisdom. This community engagement partnership shows how communities hold vital epistemologies for rethinking development, research, and higher education’s social purpose. The paper further shows the ethics of critical service learning by reflecting on burnout, blurred boundaries, and reciprocal responsibility. These reflections position community engagement as inward transformation as much as outward contribution further challenging universities toward structural introspection and relational humility. Finally, we propose that partnership between universities and creative collectives such as BL offer fertile ground for engaged research, youth empowerment, and reparative futures grounded in Ubuntu.

By centring backstage narratives rather than stage performances, this paper invites us to reimagine higher education as anchored in community creativity, cultural capital, and shared humanity. It asks: How might universities cultivate humanity not through extraction, but through presence, partnership, and repair? Perhaps reparative futures begin in small acts of showing up with love, structure, and accountability.

### **Abraham de Villiers, Kerri-Lee Schneider** – STADIO Higher Education

#### ***A78 A Community-Engaged (CE) and Social Impact (SI) Approach to Improved Literacy Outcomes for All: Strengthening Early Childhood Education Through an HEI and School Partnerships***

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This study examines a collaboration between a Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI) and partner schools in South Africa to address literacy challenges in Early Childhood Development (ECD) and Foundation Phase (FP) education. The 2021 PIRLS study found that 81% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa cannot read for meaning (DBE, 2022), underscoring the urgency of early literacy intervention. Struggling readers face lifelong educational and societal disadvantages, necessitating sustainable literacy reform through community partnerships and intersectoral support (Spaull & Pretorius, 2019). Utilising a qualitative, action-based research approach, this study engaged 398 first-year Higher Certificate in Pre-School Education students in a participatory needs analysis activity during their three-week teaching practice. In collaboration with mentor teachers, students assessed literacy instruction challenges and opportunities. Key findings highlight issues such as limited print resources, language diversity, the need for pragmatic professional development, and parental involvement. Insights gained will inform future literacy scholarship, curriculum design, and teaching, learning and assessment transformation, enhancing equitable access to early literacy practices.

Grounded in a socio-cultural framework, this research strengthens partnerships between PHEIs, schools, and communities to cultivate literacy-rich cultures and promote democratic citizenship. By prioritising socially responsive initiatives, the study fosters critical thinking, civic responsibility, and adaptability-essential attributes for future educators. This community-based model demonstrates how a PHEI can drive literacy reform by balancing global education standards with local needs. Through CE and SI, the study underscores the transformative role of education in shaping an equitable and effective learning landscape, advancing sustainable literacy development in South Africa.

**Damaris Kiewiets, Keith Cloete** – University of the Western Cape and Department of Health and Wellness, Western Cape Government

*A79 A Living Model of Dialogic Partnership: Co-Governance, Co-Inquiry, and Legacy-Making in Community Engagement*

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This paper presents a living model of dialogic partnership that positions community engagement as a form of co-governance grounded in shared inquiry, epistemic respect, and institutional collaboration. The model emerges from a two-year partnership between the Community Engagement Unit at the University of the Western Cape and the Department of Health and Wellness of the Western Cape Government, working through a Whole of Government (WoG) Civil Society Action Group comprising 24 partners from government departments, the university, and civil society organisations. Informed by dialogical and critical pedagogical traditions, particularly the work of Paulo Freire, the paper conceptualises dialogic partnerships as relational spaces where academic, community, and state knowledge systems meet under conditions of mutual respect. Within this framing, community engagement becomes a process of co-inquiry in which knowledge is collaboratively produced and directly linked to collective action. This approach challenges extractive and instrumental engagement models by foregrounding reciprocity, shared decision-making, and accountability to community-defined priorities. Methodologically, the model is enacted through structured multi-stakeholder forums that convene partners around shared social challenges. These forums prioritise trust-building and deep listening, followed by joint problem framing, co-design of responses, and alignment of institutional mandates, resources, and implementation responsibilities. The community liaison function plays a central mediating role in sustaining dialogue across sectors and ensuring that community priorities meaningfully shape both policy responses and university engagement agendas. Empirically, the paper draws on reflective practitioner insights and observations from the implementation of the WoG Civil Society Action Group over the past two years. The co-delivery of this paper by a university-based practitioner and a senior government official models the dialogic principles under discussion. The paper argues that embedding dialogue within governance structures offers a sustainable and scalable pathway

**Leah Shibambo – STADIO**

**A80** *Reimagining Community Engagement in Distance Learning: A Case Study from the STADIO School of Policing and Law Enforcement*

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The model presented aims to: (i) offer a practical and adaptable framework for other distance learning institutions seeking to strengthen their civic impact while enriching student learning; (ii) share the experiences of a distance learning school that successfully implemented community engagement; (iii) inspire and encourage a reimagining of community engagement within distance education contexts. The School of Policing and Law Enforcement (SOPALE) offers a range of qualifications through a distance learning mode. Most students are employed professionals (police and security officers) drawn from different parts of the country, and the region. Without regular face-to-face interaction and with a geographically dispersed student body, meaningful community engagement initially appeared difficult to achieve. SOPALE, as a distance learning school, managed to successfully implement community engagement activities that reached diverse communities with a shared purpose. The Crime Prevention Management modules (CPM162 and CPM152) were used for the community engagement project. The students were tasked with designing and delivering crime awareness sessions within their own communities on locally relevant issues such as substance abuse, bullying, theft, etc. They were required to plan, implement, and critically reflect on their interventions, linking practical experience to policing theory and social crime prevention. A total of 960 students (924 from CPM162 and 36 from CPM152) were registered for these two modules in semester 1/2025. About 600 submitted their video presentations as proof of having participated in the community engagement project in various schools. The presentations were done between March 2025 and April 2025. The students' survey was conducted in semester 2/2025. This presentation highlights how structured community engagement can enhance applied learning while benefiting both communities and law enforcement institutions. It also discusses challenges encountered, lessons learned, and feedback from participating students.

**Ntandazo Dlatu, Zanexololo Klaas, Ntombekhaya Tisani – Iyunivesithi Walter Sisulu, Rhodes University**

**A81** *Reframing Research Practice: A Comparative Analysis of Conventional and Engaged Approaches to Purpose, Process, and Community Relationships*

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This presentation contributes to ongoing conversations on community engagement, social justice, and knowledge co-creation in higher education by reimagining the relationship between conventional academic research and engaged research through the metaphor of “the plantation and the grasslands.” This metaphor highlights a crucial shift from hierarchical, extractive knowledge systems to relational, context-responsive, and community-rooted approaches to knowledge creation. Drawing on decolonial, participatory, and African philosophical traditions, particularly ubuNtu and liberation praxis, it places research within larger struggles for epistemic justice and institutional transformation. By review of the literature and rooted in diverse perspectives across higher edu-

cation, basic education, and social enterprise; it critically examines how research aims, processes, and community relationships are built, negotiated, and challenged in practice. The presentation explores key debates in community-engaged scholarship, including knowledge hierarchies, power, voice, and relational accountability, and emphasizes how conventional research often marginalizes lived experiences and reinforces institutional authority. Conversely, engaged research is presented as a collaborative, inclusive, and transformative practice that centres community voices, fosters reciprocal partnerships, and promotes socially responsive knowledge. By linking theory and practice, this presentation advocates for higher education institutions to move beyond symbolic engagement toward ethically grounded, participatory, and transformative approaches. It aligns with the conference theme by positioning community engagement not as an addition but as a vital scholarly practice essential for advancing equity, justice, and sustainable social change.

**Noxolo Manyati** – Rhodes University

**A82** *Closing The Gap Between Community Radio and its Audience: Exploring the value of Audio Diaries*

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This study examines the potential of participatory storytelling methods, particularly audio diaries, to promote community engagement and inclusivity in community radio. Focusing on Rhodes Music Radio (RMR) in Makhanda, South Africa, the research explores how audio diaries can serve as a practical and theoretical bridge, enabling community members to create and share their own narratives, thereby amplifying the voices of those who are underrepresented. Guided by the principles of Communication for Social Change and participatory communication, the study employs a praxis-based action research methodology, collaborating with young people in Makhanda to create audio diaries. The research critically examines the potential of this method to transform traditional radio production, highlighting the challenges and opportunities of integrating raw, subjective narratives into a broadcast schedule. The findings suggest that audio diaries can be a valuable tool for community radio stations seeking to diversify content and co-create with marginalised communities. The study contributes to broader discussions on media participation, youth empowerment, and social belonging, underscoring the importance of listening and co-creation in community radio.

**Sakhile Fakude, Sambesiwe Mavela, Rudi Olivier, Sinesipho Geelbooi** – Rhodes University

**A83** *Echoes of Hope: Rethinking the Sound of Giving*

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This storytelling presentation reflects on a mini-documentary that traces my journey from a young girl in a disadvantaged community accessing music education, to becoming a university student and volunteer engaged in community-based music programmes. Through personal narrative, visual storytelling, and critical reflection, I explore how volunteering in higher education can move beyond charity and toward relational, reparative engagement. Having received access to music education

through scholarship support and later studying music at Rhodes University, I occupy a dual position: both beneficiary and participant in university-led community engagement initiatives. This positionality enables a critical interrogation of volunteering practices that risk reproducing paternalistic and hierarchical dynamics. Rather than framing engagement as “giving back,” this presentation asks what it means to be in relationship-to move from helping to being with. Grounded in Ubuntu and informed by lived experience, the mini-documentary reflects on music education as a site of humanisation, reciprocity, and co-creation. It considers how universities may serve not as saviours but as partners, shaped and taught by the communities they engage. Through storytelling, I aim to illuminate how volunteering, when rooted in dignity and mutuality, contributes to the cultivation of humanity and to reparative futures in higher education.

**Ayanda Khoza** – Rhodes University

*A84 Universities as Anchor Institutions: Reparative Community Engagement and the Cultivation of Humanity in South African Higher Education*

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This paper examines the role of universities as anchor institutions within their local ecologies, arguing that higher education institutions must function as accountable, place-based actors committed to social repair and participatory development. Situated within the context of South Africa, the paper draws from my experience as a Change Ambassador in the Msunduzi Innovative Development Institute (MIDI), a youth-led community engagement programme working with primary and high school learners across wards in the Msunduzi Municipality. The study adopts a reflective qualitative approach grounded in participatory practice. Throughout the programme, local youth engaged in structured workshops, facilitated group discussions, and participated in policy engagement sessions focused on issues such as child-friendly cities, food security, and access to basic services. Each ambassador identified a specific problem within their community ward and developed project-based responses. Discussions were formally documented, and outcomes were translated into written reports, policy proposals and presentations delivered at municipal and provincial levels. These processes generated community narratives rooted in lived experience, which were analysed thematically to examine patterns of institutional responsiveness, youth agency, and collaborative problem-solving. The paper advances three arguments. First, universities as anchor institutions must engage in structural introspection by examining how their research, curricula and engagement practices align with locally articulated needs. Second, sustained partnerships with youth-led community initiatives enable universities to support policy engagement and democratic participation beyond campus boundaries. Third, anchor institutions contribute to social repair when they treat community knowledge not as supplementary but as central to knowledge production and development planning. I write from the standpoint of a youth representative who identified the absence of a clinic in my ward and participated in policy drafting and municipal presentations advocating for service delivery. This positionality shapes the analysis, foregrounding youth voice, relational accountability and the ethical responsibilities of institutions embedded within unequal

social contexts. The paper contributes a grounded framework for understanding universities as anchor institutions committed to enduring, reparative and participatory engagement.

**Eugene Machimana** – University of Pretoria

*Moja Gabedi: Transforming a neglected site to an innovative hub for community engagement and transdisciplinary research*

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Moja Gabedi Community Engagement (CE) Hub, an initiative of the University of Pretoria's Unit for Community Engagement, demonstrates how universities can promote socially responsive innovation by working with communities as partners in knowledge creation. The hub emerged from the rehabilitation of a neglected urban site where approximately 3,000 tons of waste were removed through a joint effort between the university and local residents. Today, the site serves as a vibrant centre for curricular community engagement (CCE), transdisciplinary learning and participatory research. The work at Moja Gabedi reflects key principles of social innovation, collaboration, shared decision-making and context-based problem solving. Instead of introducing externally designed solutions, the hub prioritises ongoing engagement with community members, early childhood development practitioners and civic partners. Through these conversations, participants identify local priorities such as environmental degradation, food insecurity, limited skills development and the shortage of safe community spaces. Responses are then developed collectively, combining ecological restoration with opportunities for learning and livelihood development. The hub now hosts a range of activities. It includes a well-maintained therapeutic garden, a venue for community training and workshops, and a site for educational visits and student-led projects. These initiatives allow academic knowledge to be applied in practical ways while responding to community needs. Moja Gabedi also strengthens teaching and learning. Students from different faculties participate in experiential and service-learning projects that address real-world challenges. Programmes such as garden training, biodiversity education and the Garden and Bees initiative integrate sustainability, entrepreneurship and environmental awareness into academic work. Through ongoing collaboration and reflection, the hub continues to evolve. By transforming a neglected site into a shared learning space, Moja Gabedi highlights how universities can support community-centred innovation, environmental renewal and inclusive knowledge creation.

## DAY 3 PRESENTATION ABSTRACTS

**Heila Lotz-Sisitka, Monde Duma – Rhodes University**

**A85** *Learning in and from Transdisciplinary, Co-Engaged Research Methodologies: A Focus on Cultural Historical Activity Theory Research*

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This presentation shares insight into what can be learned in and from transdisciplinary co-engaged research methodologies. The field of community engagement has long been influenced by forms of research broadly termed ‘Participatory Action Research’. In recent years there have been interesting advances on the field of PAR, particularly following the critique of participation in community development settings by Cooke and Kothari (2001) who articulated a ‘tyranny of participation’ as a methodological problem where participatory methods paradoxically become forms of manipulative engagement in community settings, acting as a new form of tyranny by reinforcing existing power dynamics, marginalizing participants, and facilitating top-down agendas under the guise of empowerment. In this presentation we consider how cultural historical activity theory research can help to address such challenges. The presentation will outline the principles of cultural historical activity theory research (e.g. historicity, multi-voicedness, activity focus), and its associated theories of expansive learning and transformative agency. The presentation will also, through sharing practical cases of such in-depth co-engaged research conducted over multi-year periods in the Eastern Cape, South Africa (cf Duma, 2025; Lotz-Sisitka et al., 2021) show how this approach to research can deepen participatory action research in interesting ways, in the process firmly establishing cultural historical activity theory research as a form of decolonial, transdisciplinary, co-engaged research with transformative, transgressive impact in community settings.

**Muleka Phumudzo Nengwani – EDUVOS**

**A86** *Ubuntu, Knowledge Democracy, and the Cultivation of Humanity in Community-University Partnerships*

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Contemporary higher education faces increasing pressure to reimagine its social purpose beyond economic productivity towards the cultivation of humane and socially just societies. In South Africa, higher education is mandated to advance social responsibility, transformation, and community engagement as core institutional functions (Department of Education, 1997; Council on Higher Education, 2016). Yet dominant engagement models often remain instrumental, transactional, and hierarchically structured, reflecting enduring colonial and apartheid-era epistemic inequalities. Against this backdrop, the paper asks: how can community engagement in higher education be reconfigured as a reparative and dialogic practice grounded in Ubuntu and knowledge democracy? Situated within post-apartheid South Africa and the expanding private higher education sector’s search for institutional legitimacy and social accountability, this paper develops a conceptual framework for understanding community engagement as a reparative practice grounded in Ubuntu

and knowledge democracy. Drawing on African humanist philosophy, decolonial theory, and participatory knowledge frameworks, the paper critically examines dominant models of community engagement that position communities as sites of intervention rather than co-creators of knowledge. The objectives of the study are threefold: to critically examine dominant institutional models of community engagement, to explore how Ubuntu philosophy and knowledge democracy can inform more dialogic partnerships between universities and communities and to develop a conceptual framework for Ubuntu-informed dialogic partnerships within private higher education institutions. The paper proposes a model of Ubuntu-informed dialogic partnerships centred on relational accountability, mutual learning, and epistemic plurality. The model is intended for implementation within private higher education institutions in South Africa through institutional engagement structures such as service-learning programmes, engaged research initiatives, and community partnership offices. It outlines mechanisms for co-creation of knowledge, participatory research practices, and reciprocal partnership governance. Methodologically, the study is conceptual but forms part of a broader research agenda that will examine institutional community engagement practices through policy analysis, institutional documents, and qualitative case studies of community-university partnerships. These data sources will enable examination of how relational ethics and knowledge democracy may be operationalised within institutional contexts. By advancing an integrated model of Ubuntu-informed knowledge democracy, the paper contributes to scholarship on the reparative university and offers theoretical and practical insights for designing community engagement practices that promote epistemic justice, institutional transformation, and the cultivation of humanity in higher education.

**Lian May, Monica Canca, Claire McCann** – Rhodes University, Oxford University

*A 87 From Bridges to Pathways: Narrative Portraits of Community Engagement in Makhanda*

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Literature on higher education community engagement (CE) is growing in South Africa. However, much of it remains situated at the level of national and institutional policy, strategy, and academic theorisation. While some studies centre students' experiences, few attend to community partners, and even fewer explore the lives of those who inhabit the in-between spaces of university and community, i.e., the individuals whose biographies traverse, complicate, and unsettle the 'university' and 'community' divide.

This paper seeks to address this silence through relational ethnography conducted in Makhanda, South Africa. The project asks: What do the lived experiences of those involved in community–university partnerships (CUPs) reveal about how community engagement is imagined and enacted? We were especially attentive to three dynamics: power relations, spatial experience, and the circulation, or stagnation, of knowledge in CUPs. Drawing on dialogues conducted in 2025 with residents, community partners, educators, academics, activists, artists, and individuals who move between community and university, we—an engaged research team comprising members of Rhodes University and Makhanda community—present a series of narrative portraits. These portraits do not treat CE as a discrete programme or institutional bridge linking two stable entities. Instead, they reveal CE as a

set of pathways, which can be uneven, fragile, and relational, along which people and knowledges may move. Across the portraits, pathways widen where care scaffolds transitions: mentorship that sustains first-generation students, collaborative pedagogies that relocate knowledge production, informal hospitality that softens institutional boundaries. Yet these stories also expose stagnation: extractive research practices, epistemic hierarchies and power imbalances, and spatial inequalities. Personal commitment and relational care, while generative, are insufficient substitutes for deeper institutional commitment. We argue that understanding CE through narrative portraits foregrounds its lived complexity. Community engagement emerges less as connection across fixed boundaries and more as the slow, uncertain work of reshaping the terrain on which university and community meet.

**Vuyelwa Moyo, Boudina McConnachie** – Rhodes University

*A88 Dialogic Partnerships Through Sound: An Ecomusicological Approach to Community-Engaged Knowledge Production*

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This paper explores dialogic partnerships and engaged research through the IMIsEE (Indigenous Marine Innovations for Sustainable Environments and Economies), Audio Postcards project, a collaborative initiative that brings together researchers and community partners to co-produce knowledge about the interconnectedness of people, culture, and the environment. Situated within an ecomusicological framework, the study conceptualises sacred and everyday spaces as living archive sites where intangible heritage, memory, ritual practice, and ecological knowledge intersect and are continually renewed through sound and performance. The Audio Postcards emerged as a participatory methodological tool for documenting and reflecting on community experiences of place, environmental change, and cultural continuity. Through co-creation processes involving music, soundscapes, storytelling, ritual practices and other Traditional Cultural Expressions (TCEs), the project sought to disrupt conventional disciplinary boundaries between the arts and sciences. Central to the research was the development of dialogic engagement strategies that foreground community agency, ensuring that knowledge production was reciprocal rather than extractive. To evaluate the impact of these engagements, community partners and academic researchers were invited to respond to “before” and “after” reflective questions that captured shifts in perceptions, knowledge, and relationships resulting from participation. These reflections form the primary analytical foundation of the paper. Findings highlight how collaborative sonic practices fostered renewed community connections to place, strengthened intergenerational knowledge transmission, and created accessible pathways for communicating environmental and scientific knowledge. Equally, the research illuminates what academic researchers gained from these partnerships, including deeper contextual understanding, methodological innovation, and ethical reflexivity. The paper argues that arts-based participatory methods, such as sound postcards, can serve as powerful mediating tools between academic and community knowledge systems, enabling more inclusive approaches to science communication and archival practice. By positioning sound, ritual, and performance as legitimate forms of knowledge and documentation, the project contributes to emerging conversations on decolonial research methodologies and community-centred heritage preservation. Ultimately, this

study demonstrates that engaged research grounded in respect, reciprocity, and creativity can produce transformative outcomes for both communities and researchers, while offering new conceptual pathways for understanding the dynamic relationship between culture, memory, and ecological sustainability.

**Nyx McLean, Sakhe Ntlabezo, Jodey-Lee Malgas – EDUVOS**

**A89** *Research for Real-World Impact: Institutionalising Community-Based Participatory Research in a Private Higher Education Context*

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As calls intensify for universities to embrace reparative and humanising futures, private higher education institutions (HEI) are often absent from conversations on community engagement. This paper reflects on how Eduvos, a South African private HEI, is embedding community-based participatory research (CBPR) within its institutional strategy under the banner of “Research for Real-World Impact.” Drawing on institutional reform processes led through the Department of Research and Postgraduate Studies, the paper argues that engaged research must move beyond discrete projects toward structural integration. In line with Freire’s (1970) dialogical pedagogy and Smith’s (2012) decolonising methodologies, the approach recognises communities not as objects of study but as co-theorisers and co-producers of knowledge. Tandon and Hall’s (2017) argument that higher education must move from knowledge monopolies to knowledge partnerships is central to the institutional reforms described here. At Eduvos, this has involved aligning institutional and faculty research agendas with regional development priorities, embedding ethical governance at faculty level, and foregrounding co-creation in research design and postgraduate supervision. The framework is further informed by Harding’s (1991) standpoint epistemology and Haraway’s (1988) concept of situated knowledges, foregrounding epistemic accountability and the partiality of all knowledge claims. In the African context, this aligns with Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s (2018) call for epistemic freedom and Mbembe’s (2016) vision of the university as a site of repair and humanisation. At the same time, the paper remains attentive to critiques that warn against the symbolic appropriation of decolonisation without structural change (Tuck and Yang, 2012). Institutionalising CBPR therefore requires governance reform, revised authorship norms, mentorship structures, and impact metrics that reflect community-defined outcomes rather than purely academic outputs. By embedding CBPR principles within governance, supervision, and research culture, Eduvos offers a case study of how a private university can function as an anchor institution committed to equity, co-creation, and social repair. The paper argues that reparative futures in higher education depend on systemic shifts in how knowledge is authorised, valued, and shared.

**Taryn Pereira-Kaplan, Kira Erwin** – Rhodes University and Ground Work

**A90** *Scholar-Activist Dialogic Partnerships for Environmental Justice*

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This presentation draws on scholar-activist engagement within environmental justice (EJ) movements in South Africa to explore how transdisciplinary (TD) research can be re-oriented through solidarity-based partnerships. The presentation is grounded in co-engaged research within a transdisciplinary ocean governance project conducted between 2020-2024, working with a network of approximately 100 small-scale fishers and other coastal community participants. It also draws on ongoing work alongside and from within social movements working toward a community-led Just Transition through an 18-month participatory research project (2025-2026) with five EJ campaigns affiliated to groundWork, involving dozens of community-based organisations and at least 100 activists. The co-presenters have both worked extensively with EJ organisations and movements across South Africa, with longstanding roles in building relationships between civil society and academia. The research draws on transdisciplinary, arts-based and reflexive methods, including political theatre processes, participatory workshops, learning network coordination and ongoing dialogic engagement between researchers and community-based activists. We reflect on the role of EJ activists as specialist knowledge holders and agents of socio-ecological transformation, who hold situated and strategic knowledges emerging from frontline struggles-knowledges essential to the just transitions called for in response to climate change. Sustainability researchers committed to ethical and transformative knowledge co-production therefore need to develop reciprocal partnerships with community-based activists and movements. However, many movements are distrustful of academic research due to longstanding experiences of extractive knowledge practices that fail to return value to movements or that are mobilised to advance industry or academic agendas. In this context, we explore forms of research that are meaningful and useful to movements-approaches that co-develop research agendas, centre community knowledge, and generate evidence that can be mobilised within ongoing struggles for justice. The presentation surfaces key dimensions of scholar-activist praxis emerging across this work, including the role of scholar-activists within TD networks as relational bridge-builders; cultivating reflexive, political and care-centred competencies for navigating power and positionality; practising solidarity through responsive research, advocacy, knowledge mediation and resource mobilisation; and sustaining critical reflexivity across the multiple institutional and political obligations scholar-activists inhabit.

**Diana Hornby** – Rhodes University

**A91** *From Universities as Anchor Institutions to Reparative Anchor Institutions: Implications for Conceptualizing Universities as Anchor Institutions in South Africa*

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Anchor institutions – such as hospitals, local government and universities – are place-based institutions that are simultaneously dynamic and deeply rooted in locality. As the role of place is increasingly recast as a key driver of development and change in the 21st century, this presentation has two parts. The first part is intentional and reports on findings from my qualitative, partly

participatory doctoral study, with Rhodes University as the case study. The study aims to (i) conceptualise universities as anchor institutions in South Africa, and (ii) assess the extent to which community engagement contributes to anchoring universities, given that community engagement – alongside teaching and research – is mandated to advance the developmental and transformative roles of higher education institutions. The second part is an unintentional consequence of the study's findings. It argues for incorporating reparation as an integral component of anchoring universities in South Africa through community engagement – an area that remains largely disconnected from reparative imperatives. Through a review of the literature, and drawing on my findings, ecosystems theory and Ubuntu, I advance the notion of a reparative anchor university: an institution that accepts responsibility for historical injustices and actively works to repair harm by promoting community engagement and development through relational healing, and social and epistemic justice. I conclude by proposing an integrated conceptual framework that links anchor institution strategies with reparative justice, offering a practical foundation for reimagining universities as institutions of repair rather than reproduction, in service of the public good.

**Jeffrey Sipiwe Mkhize, Nereshnee Govender, Gift Mheta, Andrea Alcock, Nonhlanhla Khumalo** – Durban University of Technology and University of Zululand

*A92 Universities as Anchor Institutions for Social Repair: Academic Writing Development and Transformative Learning in a KwaZulu-Natal Correctional Facility*

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South African universities are increasingly called upon to act as anchor institutions, locally embedded, socially accountable entities, that mobilise knowledge, partnerships and resources to advance equity, inclusion, and human flourishing. This paper presents a work-in-progress community engagement initiative led by the Durban University of Technology (DUT) Writing Centre, in partnership with the Department of Correctional Services (DCS), to be situated within a correctional facility in KwaZulu-Natal. The initiative focuses on academic writing development for incarcerated higher education students and correctional services staff of the education unit. This intervention is conceptualised as a form of intellectual and social infrastructure development that will support access to learning and through this social repair with the belief that academic attainment leads to a better chance at rehabilitation and post-release reintegration. Through structured academic writing workshops, mentoring and dialogic learning encounters, the university plans to leverage its academic expertise and civic mandate to strengthen cultures of learning within the correctional environment. In doing so, the project will demonstrate how anchor institutions can extend their impact beyond university boundaries by developing teaching, learning and engagement within and with a community system where highly marginalised students are often excluded from higher education pathways. This study uses action research (Lewin 1948) to plan, implement, evaluate and refine academic writing support interventions in the correctional education unit. Action research has a practical, community-based orientation where collaboration, empowerment and reflective praxis are valued. The project links institutional inputs (long-term partnership agreements, academic expertise and resource commitment) to engagement activities and measurable social outcomes and this paper

reports and reflects on the planning thereof. The value of this engagement includes enhanced academic literacy, increased learner agency and strengthened institutional relationships between higher education and correctional services. Theoretically, the study draws on Vygotsky's Social Learning Theory and Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory to illuminate how academic writing functions as a mediating tool for cognitive development, critical reflection, and identity transformation in contexts of constraint. By foregrounding sustained partnership, reciprocity and institutional accountability, the paper explores how universities, acting as anchor institutions, can contribute meaningfully to reparative futures.

**Jason Oberholster** – University of Pretoria

*A93 Equipping Architectural Graduates for Complex Urban Integration of Migrants and Refugees: Dialogic Partnerships, Participatory Development, and Collaborative Urban Citizenship*

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This paper reports on doctoral research examining how architectural education prepares graduates to engage the complex urban integration of migrants and refugees, with dialogic partnerships treated as a necessary condition for meaningful community engagement. The study asks how such partnerships create spaces for shared inquiry, in which academic and community knowledge systems meet with mutual respect, and how these conditions shape graduates' ethical judgment and capacities for collaborative urban citizenship in contexts characterised by inequality, mobility, and contested claims to place. Adopting a qualitative, interpretive design, the research investigates two programmes: the Unit for Urban Citizenship at the University of Pretoria (South Africa) and the Architecture and Planning Beyond Sustainability programme at Chalmers University of Technology (Sweden). Conducted between 2023 and 2026, the study draws on semi-structured interviews with graduates and lecturers. Interviews were completed in mid-2024, with interviewees drawn from participants of modules between 2018 and 2022. Analysis draws on Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic approach to trace how engagement practices are described and experienced across curriculum design, studio pedagogy, and field-based collaboration. The findings suggest that graduates' readiness for inclusive practice is enhanced when engagement is organised as a dialogic partnership, rather than as episodic consultation. Particular conditions include relationships sustained beyond single projects, shared framing of problems and priorities at the outset, iterative feedback open to revision, and explicit recognition of community expertise in evaluating feasibility and consequences. Graduates describe changes in professional stance, moving away from expert-led solution-making towards facilitation, negotiation, and accountability, alongside a strengthened capacity to work with uncertainty and difference. The analysis also identifies tensions that can restrict dialogue, including time constraints, mismatches between universities and communities, assessment pressures, emotional and ethical strain, and institutional norms that narrow what can be recognised as valid knowledge. The study offers implications for architectural educators and programme leaders developing community-based, research-led design curricula. It outlines partnership and pedagogical practices that support shared inquiry, including clear agreements on roles and expectations, struc-

tured reflection on positionality and power, supervision arrangements that distribute responsibility for communication and care, and assessment approaches that recognise reciprocity and learning with community partners.

**Jonathan Davy, Kai Manie, Gosia Lipinska, Laura C. Roden, Karine Scheuermaier, F. Xavier, Gómez-Olivé, Raphaella Lewis, Swantje Wells, Yvonne M. Milton, Teagan L.Y. Niemand, Noel Reddy, Dale E. Rae, Lived Experience Experts of the SleepCHAMPzzz – Rhodes University**

*A94 From Advisors to Advocates – Reflections on Embedding Lived Experience in the Study of Teen Sleep and Mental Health*

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Traditional research models often side-line lived experience, despite its importance for context-sensitive, impactful research, particularly with adolescents facing mental health challenges. The biological and psychological changes of adolescence increase vulnerability to anxiety and depression, with poor sleep identified as a key contributor. While the sleep-mental health link is well established, less is known about mediating factors or when these challenges emerge in young adolescents, especially in Low- and Middle-Income Countries. The SleepCHAMPzzz study, launched in 2024, explores these questions across Makhanda, Cape Town, and Coventry (United Kingdom). Through the adoption of a Community-based Participatory Research framework, Phase 1, the 'looking back' phase, centred around involving people with lived experience of sleep or mental health issues, either personally or as mentors, teachers, or parents to adolescents within the communities where the study is being conducted. Across the three sites, 20 LEEs became research collaborators before data collection began (UK: Sept 2024; SA: April 2025). LEEs were introduced to the research questions, the proposed measures, and the implementation strategies for phase 2, the 'looking forward' phase. This offered the opportunity for the co-design of phase 2, which focuses on following 450 adolescents (between 12 and 14 years old) for three years through a longitudinal, observational mixed methods design, to explore when and how specific sleep, circadian and biopsychosocial factors result in or protect from symptoms of depression and anxiety. Our positionality as a research collective is central to this inquiry. The authoring team, university researchers and LEEs, co-designed this study, countering the tendency to privilege academic over experiential knowledge. By embedding LEEs as co-researchers before data collection, we flattened this hierarchy, ensuring our design and implementation was shaped by perspectives of both researchers and LEEs. This presentation captures an overview of the SleepCHAMPzzz project, year 1 findings, and LEEs' reflections on the research process. LEEs felt valued and influential, with many gaining confidence to speak authoritatively about sleep and mental health in their communities, helping them evolve from advisors to advocates. Both groups agreed that the collaboration improved research quality, participant support, and data collection during the implementation phase.

**Sakhe Ntlabezo, Andile Mtotywa** – EDUVOS, Rhodes University

**A95** *Toward Participatory Advancement: Repositioning Resource Mobilisation through Dialogic Partnership*

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Community-based organisations (CBOs) work closest to social need, yet many remain on the margins of formal resource mobilisation systems. Predominant approaches to institutional advancement often assume levels of organisational capacity, access to influential networks, and forms of institutional legitimacy that are unevenly distributed within South Africa’s historically unequal landscape. This misalignment limits who gets to meaningfully participate in advancement processes and whose knowledge informs the development of social solutions. In response to this misalignment, this study proposes a Participatory Advancement Model (PADM) that draws on the principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR). This framework integrates institutional advancement practice with participatory research methodologies to reposition resource mobilisation as a collaborative infrastructure for collective development. It posits that this is possible through embedding CBPR principles into the operational language of advancement strategy, partnerships, and evaluation. Participatory advancement is conceptualised as a relational approach that embeds co-creation, dialogic partnership, and shared governance into institutional resource mobilisation practices. The PADM operationalises this through three interrelated principles. First, participatory co-management promotes shared governance arrangements that align institutional strategy with community-defined priorities. Second, co-created sustainability strategies link institutional longevity with socially responsive impact by integrating participatory research processes into advancement practices. Third, reflexivity and learning function as systemic feedback mechanisms that strengthen institutional capacity, reinforce legitimacy–resource relationships, and enable continuous adaptation through critical reflection and knowledge integration. Using a conceptual research design, the study synthesises literature from institutional advancement and participatory research methodologies to develop an integrative framework for participatory resource mobilisation. By reframing advancement as a relational and dialogic practice rather than a purely technical fundraising function, the study proposes a pathway for redistributing power within advancement processes and strengthening reciprocal partnerships between institutions and communities. Future research is required to empirically test and refine the PADM as a mechanism for participatory resource mobilisation and socially grounded institutional advancement.

**Monica Canca, Bahle Maqina** – Rhodes University

**A96** *From a Reparative Perspective: Building Transformative Leadership in Students through Community Engagement*

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This paper advances a reparative perspective on higher education by exploring how transformative leadership can be cultivated in students through the praxis of engaged citizenry as a form of community engagement. We describe the Nine-Tenths Programme as part of Rhodes University’s Vice-Chancellor’s Education Initiative aimed at transforming the education trajectory of Makhanda,

where the cultivation of student leadership is a central focus. Our conceptual and praxis-based presentation argues that developing transformative leadership is one of the purposes of higher education. We propose that universities, as civic institutions, have a responsibility to foster leadership that is relational, reflexive, and oriented toward the common good rather than individual advancement. Community engagement provides an ideal platform for this, giving effect to the imperative of inculcating civic and social responsibility in students. Sashkin and Sashkin (2003) describe transformational leadership through the ‘ABC’ model: Affect (emotion and feeling), Behaviour (confidence to act), and Cognition (the basis for vision). From our respective positions as Coordinator of Engaged Citizenry at the Rhodes University Community Engagement Division and Community Engagement Representative on the Student Representative Council, we examine how students are prepared for and emerge through this transformative process. Drawing on principles of community engagement, we conceptualise engaged citizenry as a pedagogical and developmental process through which students co-create knowledge with communities, engage real-world challenges, and develop ethical responsibility. Through a narrative approach, we illustrate how values such as solidarity, accountability, and care shape leadership identities responsive to complex societal needs. We conclude by situating engaged citizenry within a reparative framework, arguing that it offers a powerful pathway for reimagining higher education’s role in cultivating graduates who are not only skilled professionals, but socially conscious leaders committed to more just and inclusive societies, thereby advancing the cultivation of humanity.

**Noel Pearse** – Rhodes University

*A97 Community Engagement and Leadership Development*

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Community engagement is identified as a space suitable for developing leaders. The research question I posed in this systematised review of the literature is “How are leaders being developed for and through community engagement, and what outcomes are achieved?” My interest in this topic stems from extensive work and research in leadership development, which has largely focused on values-based leadership theories and leadership competencies. I used the search string: “Community engagement” AND “leadership development” in Scopus and Web of Science, generating 62 and 29 records, respectively. Removing duplicate records and excluding others because they (i) were conceptual papers; or (ii) focused on the wrong population; or (iii) were not journal articles; or (iv) the metadata provided insufficient detail, left 50 records. Of these, the full text of six articles was unavailable, leaving 44 records for analysis. I applied content analysis to the dataset, examining the countries and settings in which the studies were conducted, the leadership theory that informed leadership development, the leadership activities employed, and the leadership outcomes achieved. The studies’ settings were mainly in Health, Education, and Community development. Results indicate that the vast majority of studies were conducted in the USA, though some were also conducted in Africa. US studies emphasised the development of individual human capital, while African studies tended to focus more on collectivist philosophies and social capital. Leadership development was typically viewed as a process, not an event, and explicit theories informed some of

the studies, while others drew on broader theories of mentoring, leading change, and social and experiential learning. Some of the leadership theories identified included self-leadership, adaptive, transformative, transformational, and servant leadership. Leadership development activities included training programmes and events, mentoring, creating partnerships, and various forms of experiential learning, including service-learning. Outcomes of these initiatives were categorised into individual transformation (e.g., self-awareness, confidence, and self-efficacy); the development of bridging social capital (e.g., networks, mentorship, and peer support); and institutional and community impact (e.g., grant funding, policy changes, and community-driven programmes). The implications for community engagement and my leadership research and practice are discussed.

**Bruce Damons, Oyama Soga, Nomthandazo Pukwana, Pushetji Leshilo, Neo Maruma, Amy De Raedt** – Nelson Mandela University

**A98** *Designing Relational Food Governance: Student Agency and Reparative Institutional Architecture*

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Student food insecurity represents a structural institutional risk impacting dignity, cognitive functioning, and academic progression. In contexts shaped by historical inequality, responses to food insecurity require systemic redesign rather than episodic relief. This paper presents a case study of Nelson Mandela University's repositioning of student food sovereignty as a transversal institutional priority embedded within Vision2030. The initiative involved moving from fragmented, welfare-oriented interventions toward a layered institutional architecture linking student development, engagement governance, thematic coordination platforms, and structured student participation. Rather than positioning students as recipients of aid, the redesign centred student agency within food governance processes. Cross-portfolio alignment between the Engagement and Transformation Portfolio and the Office of the Dean of Students has the potential to enable relational coordination across academic units, student structures, and local food system partners. Drawing on knowledge democracy and critical participatory pathways of exploration, the paper examines how food governance can become a site of structural introspection, institutional accountability, and participatory design. The case illustrates how institutional responses to student precarity can be reconfigured through convergent governance approaches that integrate welfare, sustainability, learning, and civic responsibility within a shared institutional architecture. The repositioning offers a transferable model for universities seeking to move from charity-based food provision toward relational, justice-oriented institutional design grounded in dignity and co-creation.

**Nolly Shelle, Vatiswa Joni, Nikki Green** – Rhodes University

**A99** *Sustaining Youth Employment and Community Wellbeing: The Role of a University-Based Centre as an Anchor Institution in Early Childhood Development*

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Universities are increasingly recognized as anchor institutions with the capacity to promote equity, inclusion, and wellbeing within their local contexts. This paper presents a four-year engagement between the Centre for Social Development (CSD) and the Social Employment Fund (SEF), a component of South Africa's Presidential Employment Stimulus supported by the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC). The SEF aims to create work for the common good by partnering with civil society organizations to provide stipend, community-based employment opportunities. Since its inception, the CSD has hosted SEF participants across four phases of implementation within the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector. SEF participants have served in diverse roles, including classroom assistants in ECD centres, facilitators in Toy Libraries, developers of literacy and educational resources, and coordinators of gardening, nutrition, and literacy programmes. Through these roles, participants have contributed directly to strengthening ECD practice and expanding access to early learning support in under-resourced communities. This paper explores two interrelated dimensions of impact. First, it examines how sustained participation, particularly among youth who have engaged in three or more phases, has influenced their personal development, employability, skills acquisition, confidence, and sense of purpose. Second, it considers the perspectives of ECD partners regarding the contribution of SEF participants to their centres, including continuity of support, improved programme delivery, and enhanced capacity. Methodologically, the study draws on reflective practitioner inquiry conducted by the CSD team, alongside qualitative data generated through semi-structured conversations with long-term SEF participants and ECD partner organizations. Participant narratives and partner reflections are analyzed thematically to understand how sustained social employment participation shapes youth development trajectories and community benefit over time. Within this process, the CSD functions as an intermediary anchor institution by translating national policy and funding mechanisms into locally embedded community development practice. Acting as a bridge between government stimulus programmes, community-based organizations, and the ECD sector, the centre facilitates coordination, capacity building, and relational continuity across programme phases. By foregrounding both youth and community voices, this paper contributes to broader conversations about the role of universities in advancing human flourishing through long-term, equity-oriented community engagement.

**Adams, A (RU), Williams, S (CPUT), Muhuro, P (UFH), Kanise, F (CHE)**

*Awakening critical consciousness through dialogical engagements*

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The guiding principles underpinning community engagement in national and institutional policies and frameworks underscore its transformative, sustainable, and collaborative, mutually beneficial nature. A plethora of studies confirmed the value of these principles when community engagement

is a planned initiative between equitable stakeholders and community partners. Increasingly, scholars critique the dichotomous view of community partners as strictly external to the university. Drawing on critical pedagogy, social justice, and communities of practice (CoPs) as complementary theoretical lenses, we problematise the transformative nature of professional development that results from a planned intervention. This ongoing intervention involved dialogical, collaborative engagements between three senior academic developers based at different institutions within different provinces and a senior manager whose remit spans sector-wide governance and management. We provide an auto-ethnographic analysis of community engagement as a relational, co-constructed process rather than a unidirectional act of outreach.

In addition to foregrounding voice, power, reflexivity, difference, informal mentoring, collaborative inquiry, and resource sharing, our community engagement initiative, as a vibrant, dialogical space, shaped our personal and professional development and contributed to eco-social epistemic and personal transformation, features that are paramount for the cultivation of humanity.

We argue that dialogical engagement conscientizes stakeholders to the influence of power dynamics, the need to disrupt hierarchies, foster reciprocal partnerships, and cultivate socially just academic communities. Dialogical engagements are empowering, as they can introduce stakeholders to disciplinary discourses and pedagogical practices in higher education teaching and learning. Moreover, critical consciousness, an indispensable disposition in institutional and meta-level support roles, academic and regulatory work, emerges through sustained and authentic dialogical engagements. Disrupting the notion of community partners bound by geographic proximity, cultivated our critical consciousness and helped us recognise the interdependent nature of each other's contributions within an ecosystem in which the collective support, evaluation, and regulation of academic work is essential.

**Keywords:** dialogical engagements, professional development, critical consciousness

**TL Manje, R Demana, TH Mathe, P Tshiambara** – University of Pretoria

*A 100 Final-Year Community Nutrition Students' Critical Service-Learning Engagement on Overweight and Obesity in the Melusi Community: Healthy Living Hub in Tshwane, South Africa*

The escalating challenges of overweight and obesity represent significant public health issues in South Africa, particularly impacting the Melusi community, where health screenings indicated a notably high prevalence, especially among women. This situation highlighted the urgent need for a tailored, community-engaged intervention to address nutritional risks and combat misconceptions regarding the affordability of healthy foods. The project aimed to enhance awareness, prevention, and management of obesity through a service-learning framework that focused on promoting culturally acceptable, affordable dietary practices and increasing knowledge of physical activity. Key components of the intervention included anthropometric assessments, which revealed alarming statistics on individuals' body mass index and waist circumference, indicating a substantial risk for non-communicable diseases. Conducted by Dietetics students from the University of Pretoria under the guidance of Dr. Tshiambara, this initiative commenced on October 7, 2025, at the Melusi Youth

Development Organization (MYDO). Some of the activities implemented during the intervention were: nutrition educational sessions on overweight and obesity based on the South African healthy eating guidelines; sessions on home gardening, food preservation, and self-sufficiency were presented in partnership with the Tshwane District Hospital gardening unit. Demonstrations of a culturally relevant, budget-friendly recipe showcased how healthy eating can utilize locally sourced ingredients. The participatory critical service-learning approach was instrumental in engaging community members to identify their needs concerning obesity while initiating discussions on affordable healthy living. Partnerships with health stakeholders and local organizations cultivated shared ownership within the community, enriching the educational experience for both students and participants. This method not only promoted socially responsive education at the university but also strengthened students' clinical and critical thinking skills. The program demonstrated strong community engagement and increased motivation for healthier lifestyles. Ultimately, the intervention showcased that culturally relevant nutrition education, practical demonstrations, and active community involvement can lead to healthier lifestyle choices. Utilizing familiar, locally sourced foods increased the project's acceptance and sustainability, with collaboration from health professionals and community organizations being key to its success. The initiative aims to enhance community capacity for healthy living, proposing future actions such as regular health screenings, expanding community gardening efforts, and providing ongoing nutrition education through digital platforms like a WhatsApp channel.

### **Pesadean Hendricks** – North West University

#### *A101 Community Engagement Interventions in the Intermediate Phase: Student Reflections through a Storyboard*

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This poster presents a community-engaged service-learning literacy project that explores how collaboration between pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, and university lecturers can strengthen reading for comprehension in South African Intermediate Phase classrooms. The project responds to persistent literacy challenges, mainly those linked to linguistic diversity and the transition to English as the Language of Learning and Teaching. The study is framed within a participatory approach and adopts Participatory Action Learning and Action Research (PALAR) to foster dialogic, reciprocal engagement. Fourth-year pre-service teachers, practising teachers, and lecturers worked together in Action Learning Groups (ALGs) to identify classroom-based literacy challenges, design contextually relevant interventions, and reflect critically on their implementation. As part of their service-learning, pre-service teachers were expected to reflect after each meeting and report on these reflections in the form of digital story telling during Cycle 3 of the project. They presented their digital stories for formative assessment (as part of their ENIP/ENFI 412 module). The project unfolded in three interconnected phases: (i) identifying key literacy and language barriers in classrooms; (ii) implementing responsive reading comprehension strategies during teaching practice; and (iii) co-constructing practical guidelines to support future literacy instruction. This process

foregrounded the value of teacher voice, local knowledge, and lived classroom realities, positioning participants as co-creators of knowledge rather than passive recipients.

**Dineo Mokoena** – University of the Free State

**A102** *Exploring the Role Social Entrepreneurship in Youth Development in Rural Contexts: A Case Study of Maluti-A-Phofung Municipality.*

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This study examines how youth led social entrepreneurship (SE) foster youth development and community development in the Maluti-A-Phofung (MAP) municipality in South Africa. In circumstances where there is a high rate of youth unemployment and limited of economic opportunities, especially in rural areas, social entrepreneurship has been identified as an alternative in which young people address socio-economic challenges while contributing to the wellbeing of the community. Despite economic participation, youth led social entrepreneurship can be taken as corrective measure, where young people actively respond to structural inequalities through socially innovative initiatives. This study is framed by the Social Innovation Theory, as it explored how young social entrepreneurs form innovative solutions to social needs while regaining agency and promoting humanisation and empowerment initiatives in their communities. By doing so, this research shows that young people are the active agents rebuilding futures through socially responsible enterprises and community driven solutions, not just the recipients of the initiatives. The MAP Municipality young social entrepreneurs were the subject of a qualitative case study design. The study investigates their goals, driving forces as well as difficulties they face in starting and maintaining the social enterprises. The results show that youth-led social entrepreneurship gives young people a platform for agency, leadership, and group problem-solving, allowing them to make significant contributions to social change and local development. Through their projects, these business owners create social value, fortify community ties, and advance development models based on humanisation, dignity, and inclusivity. However, the study also concludes that structural obstacles, such as restricted access to resources, poor institutional recognition, and inadequate support from local governing institutions, limit the transformative potential of young social entrepreneurship. These limitations show that in order to establish supportive conditions for youth-led social innovation, municipalities, development actors, and community stakeholders must work together more closely. By showing how youth social entrepreneurship can serve as a workable strategy for resolving socioeconomic disparities while fostering youth empowerment and community-centred development in rural areas, the study adds to the conversation on reparative futures.

**Tabisa Booï, Wellington M. Hokonya** – Rhodes University

**A103** *Engaging the Community in Family Maths Workshops: Siyakhana: Enhancing Quality Teaching of Literacy and Numeracy in Early Childhood Development*

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*Background:* The Rhodes University Community Engagement office and the Centre for Social Development, coordinate a critical service-learning initiative designed to address educational disparities. The first author is a lecturer at the Center for Social Development and the second is a lecturer at the Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. The programme mobilizes university student volunteers to support early numeracy and literacy development in under-resourced educational settings in Makhanda District. Aim: This paper reflects on how structured student participation in a targeted intervention contributes to community learning while fostering the development of socially responsive university graduates.

*Setting:* The initiative is situated in rural town of Makhanda, in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, specifically targeting 15 under-resourced Early Childhood Development (ECD) sites. Participants include 70 university student volunteers from fourteen university residence halls and learners aged 4 to 5 years.

*Methods:* Student volunteers facilitate ten sessions using research-informed, bilingual Family Maths storybooks. The curriculum focuses on foundational numeracy concepts such as number vocabulary, comparison, skip counting, and bonds of five. The intervention is grounded in Mother Tongue-Based Bilingual Education (MTB-BE) principles, utilizing children's existing knowledge of English number names as a linguistic resource to bolster home-language development.

*Results:* Ongoing monitoring suggests that the programme enhances learners' early mathematical understanding. Simultaneously, it fosters pedagogical growth, social awareness, and a deepened commitment to community engagement among university students.

*Conclusion:* The collaborative structure strengthens the nexus between the university, students, and ECD sites. It demonstrates that community-responsive service learning can successfully affirm multilingual identities and promote more equitable educational opportunities.

*Contribution:* This paper contributes to the discourse on service learning and multilingual pedagogy by illustrating a scalable model for university-community partnerships.

**Mbekezeli Nxumalo, Dr Poka, Sivuyile Madikizela** – Rhodes University, Mrwetyana High School

**A104** *From Outreach to Reparative Partnership: Reframing Mathematics Service-Learning through Ubuntu*

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This is a presentation of a collaboratively developed Mathematics Service-Learning partnership between Rhodes University and Mrwetyana High School in Makhanda. The initiative originated in outreach support for National Mathematics Olympiad preparation, where significant foundational gaps in Grade 11 content became visible. Rather than interpreting these gaps as learner deficits, university academics and the school-based teacher reimaged the intervention as a sustained,

dialogic partnership grounded in responsiveness and shared responsibility. The programme involved 13 Grade 11 learners from Mrwetyana High School and 14 first-year Mathematics students from Rhodes University who participated as tutors. In 2025, the project expanded through structured Saturday sessions hosted on the university campus. Learner feedback played a central role in redesigning the programme: students requested respectful engagement from tutors, a change in learning environment, and support for material conditions that affect participation, such as food and transport. In response, sessions incorporated shared meals, transport arrangements, and structured tutor preparation focused on ethical engagement, language sensitivity, and reflective observation. The authors present from their respective positions as Rhodes University academics coordinating the Service-Learning initiative and the participating Grade 11 Mathematics teacher at Mrwetyana High School. This collaborative positionality informs both the design of the programme and the reflective analysis presented in this study. The study asks: How does a relational Service-Learning model influence learner confidence and topic-specific performance in Mathematics? How does it shape tutors' disciplinary identity and pedagogical confidence? Drawing on comparative learner performance trends, tutor observation logs, and collective reflection among university and school partners, findings indicate improvement in targeted content areas alongside increased learner participation and confidence. Tutors reported enhanced conceptual clarity, stronger mathematical communication, and deeper awareness of their social and ethical responsibilities. Situated within the framework of Ubuntu and the concept of the reparative university, the paper argues that Critical Service Learning in Mathematics can function as a practice of relational repair. By decentring institutional authority, redistributing educational space, and positioning school learners and teachers as co-creators of knowledge, the partnership illustrates how community engagement may contribute to the cultivation of humanity through sustained, reciprocal practice.

**Zandile Mnisi LaMvuleni** – Rhodes University

*A105 Dialogic Partnerships in Motion: Rhodes University and Book Dash Advancing Literacy Through Community Engagement*

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This case study investigates how dialogic partnerships between Rhodes University's Community Engagement Division and literacy-focused non-profit organizations such as Book Dash advance educational equity, social cohesion and sustainable community empowerment.

*Methodology:* A qualitative case study approach was adopted to explore the dynamisms of collaboration. This study drew on student participant observation during weekly literacy initiatives, formal and informal interviews with schoolteachers in local township schools, focus group discussions and document analysis.

*Sample:* The research engaged 44 participants, including 10 Rhodes University Community Engagement volunteers, 10 primary school teachers, 10 Book Dash Volunteers, 2 Community Engagement stakeholders such as Lebone Educational Centre and 8 Grade One and Grade Two students and 4 parents from the local community.

*Data Collection:* Data was collected through interviews and observations, then coded and analyzed thematically. Arnstein's ladder of participation and Freire's pedagogy of dialogue provided theoretical frameworks for interpreting levels of engagement dialogic practices.

*Findings:* Results indicate that dialogic partnerships foster mutual reciprocity, strengthen social cohesion, and enhance literacy outcomes. Participants reported increased access to educational resources, improved community participation, and a sense of shared ownership in advancing literacy. The collaboration also promoted social innovation by integrating academic knowledge with grassroots initiatives, creating a replicable model for other institutions of higher learning.

*Conclusion:* This poster presentation demonstrates that community engagement, when grounded in dialogic partnership, is a sustainable approach to advancing literacy and social justice. The Rhodes University Community Engagement Division-Book Dash collaboration demonstrates how higher education institutions can act as catalysts for equitable educational and community development.

**Estella. Z. Jingxi, Nomfundo. L. N. Ndlovu, S'thembile Mzimela** – Mangosuthu University of Technology

**A106** *Dialogic Partnerships in Higher Education: Strengthening University–Community Collaboration*

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Initiating platforms of community conversations regarding research engagements is met with numerous challenges. Inconsistent and low attendance of community stakeholders such as school headmasters, community leaders and community members to arranged meetings is a hinderance to such initiatives. Various reasons to such poor participation include conflicting stakeholder commitments, poor transport availability and inclement weather leading to delays in some instances. Limited availability of time to run these dialogues over a longer period makes it difficult to overcome the attendance challenge and poor participation of community members. Limited time to community conversations also hinders community member transformation and awareness to social change. Social injustices endured by previous disadvantaged communities has been observed to lead to mistrust and fear of exploitation towards researchers. An obstacle to a two-way dialogue between researchers and communities, includes difficulty in understanding research terminology which may necessitate relaying the discussions in lay language. While engaging previously marginalized communities with mistrust challenges would require an extra effort to share research outcomes and findings in methods that consider sensitivity and stigmatization. This paper aims to identify barriers that hinder effective university–community collaboration and meaningful community participation, explores opportunities and enabling factors that promote successful, reciprocal partnerships, and reviews the frameworks underpinning dialogic partnership and therefore recommend a way forward. Furthermore, this paper explores Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 and 16, emphasizing quality education, inclusive and peaceful societies, access to justice, institutional accountability, and pathways for continuous improvement and lifelong learning, through the five theoretical frameworks of dialogic partnerships such as the Bakhtinian Dialogism (Dialogic Theory), Dialogic Public Relations Theory, Dialogic Pedagogy, Collaborative-Dialogic Practice, and Interpersonal and

Relational Communication Theory. These frameworks share common elements, including the recognition of multiple voices, the valuing of difference as a productive, an emphasis on reciprocity and mutual respect, and the conceptualisation of knowledge as socially constructed through interaction. Collectively, these theories position dialogic partnerships as dynamic spaces of interaction in which power is redistributed, multiple perspectives are valued, and collective inquiry serves as the foundation for sustainable and meaningful collaborations.

**Darren Lortan, Darian Smith** – Durban University of Technology, HSRC

**A107** *Mitigating STEM Attrition through a Community University Partnership*

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We explore the efficacy of promoting the Higher Certificate in Applied Sciences through a partnership between the Wentworth Community Fathers EmpowerU project and an academic department at a University of Technology in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN). The Higher Certificate is explicitly designed to mitigate attrition in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) within the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system, offering a structured second-chance learning pathway for students who have not accessed conventional higher education routes. This initiative forms part of the broader Unfurling Post-School Education and Training (UPSET) project, funded through the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) University-led Collaborative Sub-Framework of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) since 1 April 2021. The UPSET project seeks to strengthen articulation and flexible learning pathways across nine provincial/regional Articulation Hubs through the joint development and delivery of qualifications, including Higher Certificates. The Community Fathers EmpowerU project enters this landscape as a valued community partner, working across several high schools in KZN to demystify the processes required to access higher education institutions. Theoretically, the EmpowerU model draws on Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems framework, positioning fathers and male community figures as critical proximal agents who mediate young people's educational aspirations. This is further underpinned by Bourdieu's conceptualisation of social and cultural capital, whereby community fathers function as brokers who expand the habitus of learners from historically marginalised backgrounds. The partnership enacts a form of Freirean critical community pedagogy, mobilising conscientisation to counter deficit narratives and foster transformative agency toward higher education participation. Though the partnership is in its early stages, it is already enabling access to second-chance learning as envisaged by the Higher Certificate framework. We will report on the progress of learners who have entered the programme since the commencement of the partnership, reflecting on the conditions under which community academic collaboration can serve as an effective mechanism for equity driven articulation within the South African PSET landscape.

**Samantha van Heerden** – Rhodes University

**A108** *Uncovering Work and Learning Pathways for Climate Adaptive Labour: Lessons and Reflections on Work the World Needs*

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Climate change poses significant challenges in South Africa, increasing the severity and frequency of extreme weather events. The country already faces diverse climatic conditions, high levels of poverty and unemployment, and limited pathways out of poverty into employment. Severe environmental degradation further undermines lives and livelihoods by threatening environmental, food, economic, and social security. The Presidential Climate Commission (PCC) notes that a Just Transition requires enhancing adaptive capacity and climate resilience, particularly in regions and among marginalised groups most vulnerable to climate impacts. As a means of 'leaving no-one behind', national policy frameworks have emphasised socially inclusive and sustainable economic development and diversification, along with improved skills planning and anticipation, workforce reskilling and upskilling, sectoral coordination, and responsiveness of the skills system to emerging labour market demand. However, these efforts still lack sufficient strategy for including the most marginalised, namely the unemployed, people living in poverty, low-skilled individuals, youth, and women, despite significant opportunities to create viable green 'learn-to-earn' pathways. This presentation shares findings and lessons from PCC-supported research conducted by the Centre for Researching Education and Labour (REAL) at the University of the Witwatersrand and the Environmental Learning Research Centre (ELRC) at Rhodes University. The project aimed to uncover and develop work and learning pathways that strengthen climate adaptation and resilience for vulnerable groups, support their integration into the national skills and labour market system, and stimulate green 'learn-to-earn' pathways to address unemployment. The research focused on four sectors: Rangeland and Catchment Rehabilitation, Water Security and Conservation, Small-Scale Regenerative Urban Agriculture, and Climate and Community-Based Disaster Response. It investigated the demand (and need) for this work, its economic viability, the knowledge and skills involved, and the extent to which the skills system recognises and enables climate-adaptive labour. The research builds foundations for supporting climate-adaptive occupations and related skills development, providing guidance on where further research and programme accreditation are required. It also highlights systemic challenges facing community engagement and the decency of climate adaptation work, particularly the precarious nature of funding for work oriented toward the common good.

**Lwazikazi Madikiza** – Rhodes University

**A109** *A Community-Engaged Water Testing Facility: A Multi-Stakeholder Initiative for Enhancing Agency Around Water Quality and Use.*

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Access to clean water is a human right and a United Nations' sustainable development goal. In small towns in South Africa, failing municipal water reticulation systems, and access to consistent supply of clean water continues to disenfranchise those without the means to purchase water. Knowing the quality of available water was highlighted as a key concern amongst communities during community

engaged research by the Rhodes University Biotechnology Innovation Centre. The European Union's Responsible Research and Innovation framework advocates for the engagement between broader society and science, such that research is informed by community voices. While this serves as a promising approach for sustained engagements, successful implementation of theoretical models such as these in South Africa must consider local contexts and values. Through consultation with community members and wider stakeholders, the RUBIC Community Water Testing Facility sought to co-create a sustainable water testing and reporting facility. Over the past three years, water samples have been collected from household taps, public water taps and rain water tanks through a participatory approach involving community members as collaborators. Laboratory analyses were routinely conducted to evaluate key parameters including microbial indicators such as total coliforms and *Escherichia coli*. In this presentation we share our experiences in enabling agency and advocacy through this initiative, through communication of water testing results. We reflect on our engaged research model using a community water testing facility and report on the progress of water testing activities conducted at the centre and our community engagements surrounding the results of this testing. The changing nature of relational aspects of engagement between the university researchers and community collaborators, evolving towards an interdependent partnership is reflected upon, as well as that between these partners and water providers. From these, we explore efforts to establish pathways to ensuring sustained community engagement research and innovation efforts but also to work towards reparative justice through access to water quality data by citizen scientists and community activists. Finally we share approaches that acknowledge multiple ways of knowing water quality, foregrounding community knowledge.

**Lindiwe Modest Faye** – Walter Sisulu University

*A110 Structural Introspection through Community-Engaged Clinical Governance: Reparative Tuberculosis Care in Rural Eastern Cape South Africa*

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In post-apartheid South Africa, rural health inequities reveal how universities and health systems remain shaped by colonial hierarchies of knowledge, authority, and service delivery. This paper examines Community-Engaged Clinical Governance (CE-CG) as a structurally introspective and reparative framework for tuberculosis (TB) management in rural Eastern Cape. Moving beyond engagement as outreach, CE-CG embeds community participation within clinical governance structures integrating community health worker tracing, digital adherence monitoring, participatory advisory platforms, and TB–HIV co-management into formal accountability systems. Grounded in Ethics of Care, Asset-Based Community Development, Critical Theory, and Systems Theory, the framework repositions communities from passive recipients to co-producers of health governance. Using retrospective cohort data (2018–2020) from six rural facilities, explanatory modeling demonstrated strong structural alignment between governance implementation and treatment success. Treatment success improved from 41.6% to 68.3%, and scenario projections indicate that sustained participatory governance could achieve the WHO 95% target by 2030. While the deterministic association reflects retrospective operationalization rather than causal inference, findings illustrate how embedding

engagement within governance can reshape programmatic outcomes. Critically, CE-CG also turns inward: missed clinic visits are reframed not as patient failure but as systemic governance gaps requiring relational repair. By integrating community knowledge into monitoring, audit, and decision-making processes consistent with the HEQC understanding of community engagement the university becomes an accountable anchor institution. CE-CG demonstrates how structural transformation within higher education and health systems can cultivate humane, just, and responsive futures in high-burden rural settings.

**Marlé van Eyk, Annarie Paterson, Sophumelela Katelo** – Nelson Mandela University, In-scape Education Group, Sophumelela Youth Development Programme

**A111** *Reimagining Research Through Community Engagement: Advancing Equity and Knowledge Co-creation via Community-Based Participatory Research*

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Research plays a central role in addressing complex social and health challenges. However, conventional research methods have often been expert-driven, institution-centred, and insufficiently responsive to community realities. These methods tend to prioritise academic knowledge, portray communities as passive subjects, and reinforce hierarchical power relations, leading to findings that may lack contextual relevance and practical impact. This paper critically examines the shift from traditional research paradigms to engaged approaches, with particular focus on Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR). Using a conceptual analysis of epistemological, ontological, and power-related dimensions of research, the paper investigates how CBPR reframes knowledge as co-created, situated, and grounded in lived experience. CBPR challenges dominant assumptions about expertise, objectivity, and neutrality by encouraging participation, partnership, and shared decision-making throughout the research process. It emphasises reflexivity, co-learning, and the redistribution of power between researchers and communities, while aligning research with action, social change, and addressing structural inequalities. Furthermore, CBPR plays a crucial role in rebuilding trust in contexts where traditional research practices have contributed to marginalisation or harm. The analysis underscores a broader shift within higher education towards engaged and socially responsive scholarship that emphasises relevance, inclusivity, and impact. While CBPR requires time, ethical sensitivity, and sustained commitment, its ability to produce contextually meaningful, democratic, and transformative knowledge makes it a vital approach for promoting equity and social justice.

**Wandile P Mvulane** – Rhodes University

**A112** *Green Learn to Earn in a Just Transitioning South Africa: A Focus on Skills and Livelihood*

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The Environmental Learning Research Centre in partnership with the Centre for Researching Education and Labour and partners such as the Duzi uMgeni Conservation Trust, Ground Truth and other partners are focusing on mapping meaningful work and designing short courses (micro learning) for young people who are engaged in work that responds to environmental change and contributes to the just transition. Key to this research project is how can this youth work be recognised in the

national system of skills. The Green Learn2Earn courses are designed for young people in South Africa who want to make a positive impact on the environment and their community while gaining skills to earn an income. This project primarily leverages on digital tools to provide learning-to-earning pathways in the circular economy, water quality monitoring, ecological restoration, food security/agriculture, enviro-preneurship and more. They are freely available on atlas.org platform (an open-source youth micro-learning platform that is like the Youth Market Agency (YOMA) platform). This work has been enabled by ongoing multi-stakeholder and co-engaged research teams with a focus on just transition in South Africa, with an emphasis on how the Just Transition conditions can create opportunities for unemployed youth to participate in work for the common good. Finally, this research will support youth to participate in the above workstreams and develop their work readiness skills, as well as their environmental occupation knowledge and experience amongst others. We also hope to develop a recognised and accredited qualification. The research involves and is supported by several different projects such as the UNICEF YOMA (youth marketplace) project and the Presidential Climate Change Commission's UNDP funded Workstream Mapping Project. These two projects are complementary and are working in synergy with other projects to strengthen national impact and recognition of the importance of recognising work for the common good as a form of valid work, with available learning pathways in the country.

**Lindiwe Modest Faye, Urgent Tsuru, Ntandazo Dlatu, Mojisola Clara Hosu, Teke Apalata** – Walter Sisulu University

**A113** *Ubuntu and the Reparative University: Community-Engaged Knowledge Production for Latent Tuberculosis Infection Awareness in Rural Eastern Cape*

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Grounded in the Ubuntu ethic of relational interdependence *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* (“a person is a person through others”) this study examined how universities can function as community-embedded partners in health education rather than distant knowledge producers. Within the framework of the Reparative University, which calls for historically responsive and socially accountable scholarship, the study explored how community-engaged research can strengthen tuberculosis (TB) prevention through locally grounded knowledge co-production. A community-based cross-sectional study was conducted over four weeks at a rural primary healthcare facility in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. Using convenience sampling, 245 adults ( $\geq 18$  years) participated in face-to-face interviews using a structured 19-item questionnaire administered in isiXhosa or English. The survey assessed sociodemographic characteristics, knowledge of latent tuberculosis infection (LTBI), and stigma-related beliefs. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's chi-square tests in R (version 4.5.1), with statistical significance set at  $p < 0.05$ . Prior exposure to structured LTBI education was significantly associated with improved knowledge across all domains ( $p < 0.001$ ). Participants who had received education were more likely to understand LTBI (77.1% vs 45.5%), distinguish LTBI from active TB (74.3% vs 40.6%), recognize the risk of progression to active disease (70.8% vs 42.6%), and identify preventive measures (56.9% vs 37.6%). Fear of stigma (42%) and lack of knowledge (33%) were the most frequently reported barriers to TB testing. Educational exposure

differed significantly by age ( $p < 0.001$ ), with younger participants more likely to have received education while older men were underrepresented, indicating that knowledge disparities reflect uneven institutional delivery of health education rather than inherent community deficits. Implemented through a university–community partnership led by the Walter Sisulu University TB Research Group, the study demonstrates how universities can support health systems by generating locally relevant evidence and facilitating community dialogue. Embedding LTBI education within clinical governance and community engagement structures can strengthen institutional responsiveness and advance equitable TB prevention in rural communities.

**Ngaka Martin Mosia** – University of the Free State

**A114** *A Systematic Review on Universities' Community Engagement as Reparative Approach: A Framework for the Cultivation of Humanity in the Higher Education Sector*

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This poster presents findings from a systematic literature review analysing reparative approach within community engagement by South Africa's universities. The review addresses the question about how universities can be humane future universities rooted in grassroots care and mutual aid through community engagement to nurture humanity in the higher education sector? Through a reparative lens for cognitive justice, the review explores the systemic shift from transactional outreach to transformative philosophy that seeks to cultivate humanity within the higher education sector by fostering co-production of knowledge that restores the dignity of indigenous worldviews and institutionalising social accountability. This review was conducted using a structured search strategy across Web of Science, Scopus and Google Scholar databases. The studies published between 2017-2025 in English were screened following PRISMA guidelines. After removing duplications and conducting title, abstract and full-text screening, 19 studies met eligibility criteria. A thematic analysis was used to analyse patterns across studies. Intellectual reparation through cognitive justice, community engagement as marginalised mission, and human-centered pedagogy for social accountability emerged as primary themes. Evidence shows that community engagement in South Africa's universities is limited making it a marginalised mission indicating that there is a policy-practice gap despite third mission commitments to cognitive justice and human-centered pedagogy. This review contributes to the knowledge by positioning community engagement not as a peripheral service, but as a fundamental epistemic intervention essential for repairing colonial knowledge hierarchies and institutionalising cultivation of humanity within the higher education landscape. It further proposes a framework for cultivation of humanity in the higher education sector to further position universities in being humane universities. I have practiced reflexivity by acknowledging that my dual role within an institution of higher education may bias my perspective towards academic frameworks, therefore I am committed to a reparative approach that critically explores institutional power dynamics to ensure that community voices are authentically elevated.

**Joseph Radebe** – Vaal University of Technology

**A115** *Community Engagement as a Practical Tool for Community Development and Social Justice: A Case from the Vaal University of Technology (South Africa)*

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Community engagement is widely recognised as an important mechanism through which universities can address persistent social inequalities. However, questions remain regarding whether university–community partnerships consistently translate into meaningful improvements in the lives of the communities they aim to support. This paper examines the role of community-engaged research in advancing social justice and community development, using the Vaal Region of South Africa as a contextual reference point. The study explores how universities can collaborate with communities to generate socially responsive knowledge and achieve tangible developmental outcomes. The paper also interrogates the gap between the intentions of academic engagement initiatives and the actual developmental impact experienced by historically marginalised communities. In addition, it reflects on whether practices associated with corporate social responsibility (CSR) and corporate social investment (CSI) demonstrate forms of accountability, responsiveness, and impact assessment that could strengthen university-led engagement initiatives. A qualitative literature review methodology was adopted, drawing on peer-reviewed publications from major academic databases including Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The review focused on scholarship addressing community engagement, engaged scholarship, corporate social responsibility, and social justice within higher education, particularly in Global South contexts. Guided by a social justice and engaged scholarship framework emphasising reciprocity, relational knowledge production, and community empowerment, the analysis identifies a significant gap in the rigor and measurable impact of university engagement activities. The findings suggest that although community-engaged research has transformative potential, its impact is often constrained by institutional priorities, limited accountability mechanisms, and insufficient community participation. The paper recommends stronger collaboration between universities, communities, and local businesses, improved impact evaluation, and the development of trust-based partnerships to enhance socially responsive scholarship.

**Ntandazo Dlatu** – Walter Sisulu University

**A116** *Decolonizing TB Education: Reparative Engagement and Knowledge Democracy in Rural South Africa*

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Tuberculosis (TB) continues to disproportionately affect rural communities in South Africa, where stigma, misinformation, and structural barriers often delay diagnosis and worsen treatment outcomes. In Ntabankulu, Eastern Cape, these issues reflect deeper social and relational dynamics that extend beyond biomedical care. Guided by the philosophy of Ubuntu and the concept of the reparative university, this pilot study examines how community-engaged research can foster humane, dialogic approaches to TB education that emphasise dignity, reciprocity, and shared responsibility. A cross-sectional Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices (KAP) survey was conducted with 131 community

members to assess TB knowledge and perceived obstacles to testing. Knowledge levels were classified as low, moderate, or high. Most participants had moderate knowledge (64.9%), with 11.5% displaying low knowledge and 23.7% high knowledge. Education level was strongly associated with knowledge ( $p < 0.001$ ), with those with tertiary education significantly more likely to demonstrate a high level of understanding. Notably, personal ( $p = 0.047$ ) and family ( $p < 0.001$ ) experiences with TB were also significantly associated with greater understanding, highlighting the influence of lived experience on health literacy. The main barriers to testing cited were fear of stigma (42%) and lack of knowledge (33%). Participants with lower levels of knowledge were more likely to mention structural barriers, such as distance to clinics and financial constraints. Instead of viewing these as deficits, the study considers them opportunities for reparative engagement. Community members suggested survivor storytelling, peer education, and culturally responsive messaging as preferred strategies to improve TB literacy and reduce stigma. This project demonstrates how universities, as vital institutions, can shift from extractive research toward co-creating knowledge with communities. By valuing lived experience and promoting reciprocal dialogue, TB education becomes relational rather than transactional. Such approaches not only enhance public health outcomes but also help build dignity, trust, and shared humanity in historically marginalised rural areas.

**Erin Anthonie** – Ateneo de Manila University

*A117 Ty Moms Living The Live: How Nanay Live Sellers Of The Samahan Ng Nagkakaisang Pamilya Ng Pantawid (SNPP) Experience And Understand Tik Tok Live Selling*

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TikTok live selling has emerged as a low-barrier form of digital livelihood for individuals seeking supplemental income, yet existing scholarship largely focuses on influencers, platform strategies, and consumer behavior. This study addresses the gap by examining how Nanay (mother) live sellers from the Samahan ng Nagkakaisang Pamilya ng Pantawid (SNPP) experience and understand Tik Tok live selling within their everyday lives. Grounded in qualitative inquiry, the research conceptualizes live selling not only as an economic activity but also as a socially embedded practice shaped by motherhood, domestic labour, and community participation. Data will be gathered through focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with selected SNPP Nanay live sellers to capture their lived experiences, negotiations of digital labour, and meaning-making processes. The study is expected to explore how TikTok live selling is incorporated into daily routines and caregiving responsibilities, as well as how Nanays (mothers) balance household roles with the demands of real-time digital engagement. It also seeks to examine how live selling may be understood as both an opportunity for flexibility, income supplementation, and skill development. Furthermore, the research aims to analyze how shared language, symbols, and home-based live selling practices contribute to trust-building with viewers and to the formation of a collective identity among Nanay live sellers. By centering the perspectives of non-influencer, economically marginalized women, this study contributes to communication scholarship on digital livelihoods and offers insights relevant to inclusive platform design, community-based support initiatives, and policy discussions on informal digital labour in the Philippine context.

**Maso Nduna** – Assumption Development Centre (ADC)

**A118** *ADC Model for Socio-Economic Development: A Community Partner Perspective*

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Community and university partnerships can play a significant role in advancing **reparative justice**. However, university reparations can happen only when community-university partnerships move beyond superficial engagement and become deeply rooted in local realities. To entrench their role and be effective community-university partnerships need to shift how they build relationships, collaborate, produce knowledge, and respond to community defined priorities. Traditionally, universities have positioned themselves as knowledge creators and communities as their subjects from whom knowledge is extracted. This thinking has to change for community and university to create mutually beneficial partnerships. From my position as manager of the Assumption Development Centre, an NGO based in Makhanda and working collaboratively with a number of departments at Rhodes University, including Psychology, Education, Linguistics, and the Business School, I present ADC's Socio-Economic Developmental model. I share ADC's experiences on how it has been able to build mutually beneficial partnership with Rhodes University. And I also share the challenges experienced along the path of building collaborative and meaningful community-university partnership relationships that are meant to benefit both community and university.

**Sibusiso Trevor Tshabalala** – Mangosuthu University of Technology

**A119** *Transforming an Invasive Pest into a Regenerative Resource: A Social Innovation Approach to Enhancing Soil Fertility and Smallholder Livelihoods in eJozini Municipality, South Africa*

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Social innovation in higher education places communities at the centre of knowledge production and promotes collaborative, context-sensitive solutions to complex social challenges. This study adopts a social innovation lens to examine the STT Snail Growth Stimulant, a locally developed bio-based agricultural input that repurposes *Achatina fulica* (giant African land snail) – an invasive agricultural pest – into a regenerative soil fertility enhancer for smallholder farmers in the eJozini Municipality Irrigation Scheme, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The innovation represents a creative and socially embedded response to interconnected challenges of soil degradation, rising input costs, and food insecurity. By converting a harmful pest into a productive resource, the intervention aligns with principles of circular economy, regenerative agriculture, and community-based innovation. The study positions higher education as a catalyst for social innovation by facilitating participatory research, scientific validation, and knowledge co-production between researchers and farming communities. A mixed-methods research design is employed, integrating field-based quasi-experiments, laboratory soil analysis, and socio-economic surveys. Crop yield data (sweet potato, spinach, and maize) are compared between adopters and non-adopters of the stimulant, while changes in soil quality indicators and farmer perceptions are assessed. Qualitative data further capture farmers' experiences, attitudes, and willingness to adopt the innovation, highlighting the role of social learning and collective problem-solving. Preliminary findings suggest that the STT Snail Growth Stimulant has the

potential to improve soil biological activity, enhance crop productivity, and contribute to livelihood diversification among smallholder farmers. Beyond agronomic benefits, the innovation fosters community empowerment by valuing local ecological knowledge and strengthening collaboration between higher education institutions and rural communities. The study demonstrates how socially embedded agricultural technologies can enhance wellbeing, promote social cohesion, and support sustainable rural development. It contributes to the broader discourse on social innovation by illustrating how higher education can function as a platform for co-creating scalable, inclusive, and environmentally sustainable solutions to persistent development challenges.

**Nkejane Gloria** – Durban University of Technology

*A120 Community-Driven Indigenous Knowledge Documentation: Strengthening Local Participation through the National Recordal System in the Free State*

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The Free State Indigenous Knowledge Systems Documentation Centre (IKSDC), housed at the University of the Free State within the Centre for Gender and Africa Studies, has been operational since 2013 as a provincial pillar of South Africa's National Recordal System (NRS). As one of ten provincial centres supporting the Department of Science and Innovation's Indigenous Knowledge Systems programme, the IKSDC plays a critical role in documenting, preserving, and safeguarding Indigenous Knowledge (IK) for socio-economic development and community benefit. In the 2024/25 cycle, the IKSDC's documentation work is focused in the Thabo Mofutsanyane District Municipality, particularly in Bethlehem and currently in Clarens. This expansion followed consultations with the Dihlabeng Local Municipality, which confirmed the richness and viability of Indigenous Knowledge in the area. Through participatory engagement with Indigenous Knowledge Holders, the Centre documents knowledge related to African Traditional Medicine, indigenous foods, technologies, games, and other cultural practices. Grounded in the Indigenous Knowledge Act, the work aligns with national efforts to institutionalise ethical documentation, protection, and management of IK through the National Indigenous Knowledge Management System (NIKMAS). The IKSDC functions as a bridge between communities and digital infrastructure, ensuring that knowledge is recorded in both manual and electronic formats while respecting community protocols and benefit-sharing principles. This paper reflects on the Clarens documentation process as a model of engaged scholarship, highlighting collaborative methodologies, ethical considerations, and community ownership. It argues that university-based Indigenous Knowledge Documentation Centres can serve as transformative platforms for decolonial knowledge production, social innovation, and sustainable local development through meaningful community engagement.

**Claire McCann** – Oxford University

**A121** *From Enclosure to Path-Making: A Conceptual Framework for Higher Education Community Engagement*

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This paper develops a conceptual framework for understanding higher education community engagement through the lenses of institutional logics, spatial imaginaries, mobility, and epistemic justice. Rather than treating community engagement as a discrete programme or ‘third mission,’ I argue that it is a deeply situated practice shaped by broader imaginaries of what universities are and who they are designed for. The paper maps four overlapping institutional logics that organise contemporary universities – neoliberal, engaged, reparative, and abolitionist – and demonstrates how each carries distinctive assumptions about knowledge, justice, and the relationship between university and community. Under neoliberalism, engagement risks becoming instrumental, managerial, and reputational, reinforcing institutional enclosures. The engaged university reframes communities as partners and promotes bridge-building, yet often leaves structural boundaries intact. Reparative approaches foreground historical harm, recognition, and epistemic reparation, shifting community engagement from service to accountability. Abolitionist imaginaries push further, questioning whether inherited institutional enclosures can be meaningfully transformed at all. To move beyond bridging metaphors for community engagement, I draw on relational spatial theory (Massey; Ingold) to reconceptualise community engagement not as boundary-spanning between fixed entities, but as path-making and commoning. Path-making foregrounds the creation of durable routes through which people and knowledges circulate, gradually reconfiguring institutional landscapes. Commoning names the relational labour required to sustain these routes and redistribute epistemic authority. Together, these concepts position community engagement as an incremental practice of spatial and epistemic entanglement rather than a neutral exchange. Situated within the South African context marked by colonial cartographies, apartheid spatial segregation, and enduring epistemic hierarchies, the paper argues that community engagement must be understood as a contested terrain where enclosure, repair, and reconfiguration coexist. Community engagement, viewed through this lens, is not merely outreach or partnership; it is a struggle over mobility, recognition, and the making of shared worlds.

**Lauren Rembach and Michelle Smal** – STADIO

**A122** *Reparative Interdisciplinary Community Engagement: An Ubuntu-Informed Model for Socially Responsible Higher Education in South Africa*

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South African higher education institutions are mandated to ensure that Community Engagement (CE) plays a central role in fostering partnerships with communities that are socially responsive (Council on Higher Education, 2004). Despite this policy emphasis, CE often remains instrumental in practice, with limited transformative impact. This conceptual paper introduces a service-learning project aligned to the principles of Ubuntu-informed practice and a dialogic engagement, with the School of Education and School of Law at a higher education institution. We situate this project using

Fraser's (2003) theory of social justice, redistribution, recognition and representation through dialogue, and draw on Fricker's (2007) concept of epistemic injustice, which highlights the importance of listening with others as a tool to unpack diverse voices, acknowledge marginalised voices and forms of knowledge opening up spaces for co-production of knowledge. Furthermore, the work of (Ramose, 2002; Chilisa, 2012) Ubuntu relational epistemology aligns with social justice in that it promotes interdependence and importance of ethical responsibility to create meaningful dialogue. Community engagement is thus, an act of meaningful dialogue creating opportunities to address structural inequalities and accountability. We argue that this service-learning project is a viable model to promote community engagement within our institution whereby students participation encourages them to critically examine their legal, ethical and professional responsibilities when engaging with issues related to gender based violence. Guided by the research question, how can Ubuntu-informed interdisciplinary service-learning foster socially responsive engagement and critical awareness of gender-based violence among law and education students?, we assert that a conceptual model for reparative community engagement with the students will foreground justice, dignity and collaborative knowledge production and equip the students to advocate for GBV initiatives and understandings their responsibilities in their respective law and education contexts.

### **Thandukwazi Ncube** – Durban University of Technology

#### **A123** *From 'Cultural Safari' to 'Being With': A Systematic Review of Critical Service Learning as a Reparative Practice in Higher Education*

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*Background:* Traditional service learning in Higher Education often inadvertently functions as a “cultural safari,” reinforcing paternalistic narratives where the university acts as a benevolent savior to “needy” communities. The concept of the “Reparative University” challenges institutions to move beyond transaction toward Ubuntu-centered reciprocity.

*Objectives:* This study utilizes the PRISMA framework to systematically review empirical literature regarding the efficacy of Critical Service Learning (CSL) in shifting student worldviews from a “savior complex” (doing for) to a mindset of solidarity (being with).

*Methods:* A systematic search was conducted across Scopus, ERIC, and Web of Science for articles published between 2015 and 2025. Search terms included “Critical Service Learning,” “Paternalism,” “Reciprocity,” “Ubuntu,” and “Higher Education.”

*Results:* Of 452 initial records, 24 empirical studies met the inclusion criteria. The synthesis identifies that unmediated volunteering frequently increases student prejudice. However, curricula integrating structural introspection and structured storytelling significantly correlate with a shift toward reciprocity and the cultivation of humanity.

*Conclusion:* True reparative engagement requires a pedagogical dismantling of the “benevolent university” narrative. The findings advocate for a curriculum of being with – grounded in the recognition of shared humanity, as a prerequisite for ethical community engagement.

**Matolwandile M Mtotywa** – Rhodes University

**A124** *Consulting as Community-Based Service Learning for Business Analysis Education: An Integrated Conceptual Framework with Technology Integration and Maturity Index*

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Service learning advances the integration of community service with reflection, providing higher education students with a community-based learning context. This creates connections between academic coursework and students' roles as critical, engaged citizens, enhancing practical skills while addressing real-world issues. The study aimed to develop a comprehensive conceptual framework for integrating consulting as service learning within business analysis education. The framework was developed through a review of relevant literature and theories. Key concepts were identified, analysed, and linked within the research context, then refined to align with the study objectives and guide future model validation. The framework shows that effective consulting is produced through integrated curriculum design and a learning architecture grounded in ethics-based partnership, reciprocity, competency-based learning, and continuous improvement. The framework suggests that student development progresses through three linked phases: preparation and fundamentals, active engagement, and reflection/meaning-making. Faculty and mentor support is expected to strengthen learning across these stages, while stakeholder engagement fosters continuity and deeper impact. Quality assurance, project management, and technology integration function as cross-cutting enablers. Consulting effectiveness is reflected in both performance outcomes and increasing maturity levels. The study has implications for business education by informing policy reform, curriculum design, and ethical community engagement. The framework strengthens reciprocal partnerships with small businesses while improving student employability through competency-based experiential learning. A limitation of the conceptual framework is that it may be context-specific and has not yet been empirically validated. The researcher adopts a practice-informed positionality shaped by involvement in curriculum design, partnership development, and consulting education. This position provides contextual insight into how ethics-based partnership, stakeholder engagement, and reflective learning operate within the framework. However, this proximity may influence interpretation by privileging implementation strengths over constraints. The study extends community engagement theory by introducing consulting-based service learning complemented by technological platforms and offers a systematic, replicable framework development approach for business education.

**Jerit Dube** – University of the Free State

**A125** *Co-production of Knowledge through Engaged Research Practices in QwaQwa*

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The imperative to decolonise knowledge production and reconfigure university–community relations in South Africa have intensified in the context of persistent socio-economic inequality and persistent colonial epistemic legacies. This paper critically analyses the co-production of knowledge through engaged research practices as a reparative and humanising approach to higher education community engagement in QwaQwa. Moving beyond traditional research paradigms, co-production foregrounds

mutual accountability, epistemic justice and dialogic partnerships and collaborations, recognising local communities as legitimate producers of knowledge rather than passive research subjects. Drawing on Ubuntu as a relational ethical framework, the paper conceptualises engaged research as a process of shared inquiry in which universities and communities collaboratively define research agendas, generate and interpret data, and mobilise knowledge for social transformation. Using illustrative South African case examples in areas such as youth development, local governance and food security, youth development, this paper reveals how co-produced research can disrupt hierarchical knowledge systems and promote reciprocal learning. When embedded in sustained, trust-based collaborations, such practices contribute not only to contextually relevant interventions but also to the cultivation of humanity through shared responsibility, solidarity and care. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative participatory approach, drawing on Community-Engaged Research (CEnR) framework. The analysis identifies enabling conditions for meaningful co-production, including institutional support structures, recognition of community epistemologies, ethical reflexivity, and equitable resource allocation. It further interrogates tensions related to bureaucratic constraints, the risk of tokenistic participation and power asymmetries. The paper argues that co-production, understood as reparative engagement, requires structural introspection within universities to address entrenched hierarchies of knowledge and reward systems that marginalise engaged scholarship. Through repositioning universities as anchor institutions constituted by and accountable to their local contexts, co-produced research advances socially responsive scholarship and transformative development. In this way, this paper reframes engaged research as a pathway towards humane, just, and contextually grounded futures in South Africa.

**Gcina Mtengwane** – University of the Free State

*A126 Community-Based Organizations as former Homeland Youth Agency through the Lens of the African Philosophy of Ubuntu*

South Africa's former homeland youth face numerous challenges, including unemployment, limited economic prospects, and a lack of relevant skills and training. These challenges hinder their ability to attain the social and economic independence that marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. Despite various government policies, programs, and institutions, the problem has worsened in the post-apartheid dispensation. Using the African philosophy of Ubuntu as a theoretical framework, this study examined the role of community-based organizations in youth development in Qwaqwa. Data was gathered through four focus group discussions (FGDs) with representatives from six community-based organizations. The FGDs triangulated with 19 open-ended interviews. The findings reveal that former homelands lack confidence in government-led initiatives and programmes; they thus feel disengaged and neglected and are frustrated by the lack of visibility and accessibility of government-led youth development support. Consequently, community-based organizations become the primary means for youth to achieve their developmental goals. This study contributes to understanding how community development can enhance collaborations between government and non-

governmental organizations in rural youth development. This study was part of a doctoral project on youth transitions in the former homeland of Qwaqwa.

**Timothy Stanton**, Diana Sánchez Betancourt, Darian Smith – HSRC, Stanford University

*A127 Strengthening Impact of Community-Engaged Research: Experience and Insights of Scholars at the Human Sciences Research Council*

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Increasingly scholars and institutions are urged to commit to collaborative, equity-focused community development and civic action through active, often multi-lateral community partnerships (Hurd and Stanton, 2022). In response, many have sought to do so by embracing the Community Development Society’s “Principles of Good Practice” and striving for “generativity-oriented reciprocity” that emphasizes how working collaboratively across differences has potential not only to benefit individuals, but also to produce new value and/or systemic change through transformation in ways of knowing and being through intersubjective relationships (Dostilio et al, 2012). Our presentation will offer an overview of HSRC’s efforts to join this movement by developing dialogic partnership-based community engaged research (CER) designed to strengthen community impact. HSRC produces academic research for understanding, explaining and informing social change and public policies in South Africa. Its “Impact Research” initiative supports efforts to reform institutional processes to support community-engaged work and learn from and demonstrate it through two pilot projects (in Langa, Cape Town, and Wentworth, Durban) and a newly developing collaborative project joining researchers in both Colombia and South Africa, which aims to advance empirical knowledge on relational wellbeing in the Global South through ‘popular research’ implemented by a Bogotá NGO. Using these projects as case studies and data from numerous interviews with HSRC researchers and community stakeholders across South Africa, our inquiry sought to identify and analyze challenges in undertaking and sustaining CER – both in communities and institutionally – with focus on community partnership development and practice. We offer evidence-based recommendations for establishing and sustaining such partnerships between research institutions and community-based organizations and citizen groups. Our hybrid analysis of HSRC’s CER efforts provides detail about its practice and impacts – real and potential – as well about the challenges faced by engaged researchers seeking to organize, carry it out and sustain it. Our presentation will combine an overview of our studies and findings.

**Nina Frölich** – Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) Germany

*A128 Cross-Pollinating Knowledge Gardens: Criteria for Transformative Partnerships in Higher Education*

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This paper develops the metaphor of interconnected “knowledge gardens” to conceptualize partnerships between universities and external actors as processes of cross-pollination across distinct epistemic spaces. Rather than assuming a unified knowledge landscape, the manuscript starts from the premise that disciplines, institutions, and community contexts form gardens – each shaped by its

own norms, values, and cultivation practices. Transformative engagement, therefore, depends not on integration into a single system, but on the quality of exchange between gardens. Empirically, we reflect on an emerging partnership between the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) in Germany and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) in Mexico. The partnership unfolds between two institutes, the Institute for Technology Assessment and Systems Analysis (ITAS) and the National Laboratory of Sustainability Science (LANCIS). Both institutes focus on sustainability and transdisciplinary approaches. Using the garden metaphor as analytical lens, we examine how collaboration unfolds across unequal geopolitical and institutional contexts. The metaphor highlights both generative potential and structural constraints of cross-border academic exchange. From this case, we derive six preliminary elements for evaluating and designing cross-pollination efforts in higher education partnerships: (i) Documentation practices: Shared frameworks, templates, reporting standards, and metadata conventions to integrate diverse epistemologies into a common language; (ii) Digital tools: Interoperable data structures and collaborative platforms enable co-design of boundary objects that communicate shared understanding across stakeholders; (iii) Decision-Visualization Environments: Physical spaces with advanced visualization tools enhance human-computer-content interactions and support participatory planning, experimentation, and decision-making; (iv) Human capacities: Integration experts, exchange programs, joint teaching and research modules, and international training programs foster knowledge transfer, cultivate shared practices, and strengthen institutional ties; (v) Institutionalized anchors: Administrative mechanisms sustain documentation, digital tools, visualization environments, and human capacities, providing operational stability for long-term collaborations while preserving contextual diversity; (vi) Governance structures: Long-term agreements, legal frameworks, and policy processes enable partnerships to move beyond project-level horizons, supporting sustained transformative effects. Together, these criteria shift the focus of partnerships from output-oriented collaboration toward relational and structural conditions of exchange. The metaphor highlights that cross-pollination is generative but not automatically equitable; without reflexive design, it can reproduce dominance or instrumentalization.

**Nathaniel John A. Nuñez** – Ateneo De Manila University, Philippines

**A129** *H.U.N.T.A: Holistic Understanding of Local Narratives Towards Advocating the Malaquing Tubig River: A Basis for a Localized Supplemental Learning Material*

HUNTA, derived from the Tagalog term *huntahan* meaning “sharing of stories,” examines how community narratives and local ecological knowledge can be transformed into pedagogical resources for environmental education. Centered on the Malaquing Tubig River in San Jose, Batangas, Philippines, the study responds to critiques of transmission-oriented education by repositioning communities as co-interpreters of knowledge. The researcher’s positionality informs the orientation of the study. The researcher advocates for integrating history and heritage into formal education and regards them as key components of holistic and sustainable development. This perspective guided the study’s emphasis on community participation and the recognition of local knowledge as a legitimate basis for educational content. The research was conducted over one academic year in

elementary education, equivalent to ten months. Data collection used Photo-Voice Assisted Focus Group Discussions. Twelve participants were involved and divided into two groups. The first group consisted of three local historians and cultural bearers and three elementary school principals. The second group included two church representatives, two representatives from the local government unit, and two youth leaders. In addition, seventy (70) Grade 4 students participated through analysing and determining their least mastered competencies that informed the development and pilot testing of the supplemental learning material. Participants recalled how the Malaquing Tubig River historically functioned as an ecological, domestic, and religious corridor that supported agricultural livelihood and expressions of faith. In contrast, its present condition was widely described as environmentally degraded and socially neglected. Despite this decline, participants across sectors recognized the river's continuing educational potential as a concrete springboard through its cultural significance. A challenge involved facilitating dialogue among local historians and cultural bearers who hold differing interpretations of the river's heritage. The findings show that integrating community narratives into co-designed instructional materials supports a reparative approach to environmental education by restoring epistemic value to the river and framing environmental learning as a shared civic responsibility.

**Melanie Mans, Sasha Wessels** – EDUVOS, University of Witwatersrand

*A130 Dialogical Partnerships in Non-Placement Work-Integrated Learning: A Bridge for Strengthening Community-Oriented Design Projects in Graphic Design Education at a Multi-Campus Private Higher Education Institution*

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Barriers exist within Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) in design education, such as limited social capital and financial resources and restricted student placement at a creative studio (Grant-Smith et al., 2017; Macqueen et al., 2025). For this reason, a non-placement WIL design project, implemented over eight weeks from mid-July to September 2025 was constructed to address professional development through community engagement, presenting students with real-world challenges within an academic framework that fosters collaboration, professional competencies, and problem-solving skills. Grounded in community-based participatory and engaged research principles (Horowitz et al., 2009; Hergenrather et al., 2010; Tandon et al., 2016; Lortan and Maistry, 2019) this research evaluated the sustainability of academic-community partnership in advancing social impact and enriching experiential learning by moving beyond hypothetical design projects to collaborate with an organisation in shaping industry-standard briefs. This study employed a mixed-method approach to analyse both qualitative and quantitative data. This includes (i) a semi-structured interview with the one community partner, reflecting on the planning, collaboration, integration, and overall outcome of the project, and (ii) a survey conducted with two graphic design lecturers and 15 third year students to provide insight into experiences and feedback on community-oriented WIL design projects. Four major themes drawn from the findings are discussed extensively throughout this paper with close reference to the ongoing literature surrounding the integration of community engagement into design education. The major themes identified were (i) the apprehension towards a community-

oriented design brief as a pathway of industry readiness and employability; (ii) authenticity as a challenge in a simulated approach learning context; (iii) well-intentioned but administratively burdensome and lastly (iv) importance of honest and candid conversations. The findings suggested that despite rigorous planning, structured reflection and intentional engagement with the community partner, lecturers and facilitating students in a community-oriented WIL design project brought unique challenges that were inevitable. Rather than positioning these tensions as obstacles and shortcomings, we frame them as inherent to relational collaboration, trust-building, and the negotiation of power. Sustainable and meaningful partnerships require intentional relation work, structured reflection, and ongoing dialogical engagement across all partners within a Private Higher Education context.

**Ncomeka Sineke, Ntandazo Dlatu, Wezile Wilson Chitham, Teke Apalata and Lindiwe Modest Faye** – Walter Sisulu University

*A131 From Hotspot Households to Structural Introspection: Data-Driven TB Risk Stratification as Reparative Community Engagement in Rural Eastern Cape*

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Universities in South Africa are increasingly called to practice community engagement as structural introspection that confronts historically produced inequalities. This study proposes reparative engagement as a model of university-community collaboration that shifts from gathering knowledge to accountable action addressing patterned structural disparities. A reparative lens is an analytical framework that sees epidemic risk as a socially and historically built vulnerability, with predictive modelling used to promote institutional accountability and system transformation. Drawing on a rural Eastern Cape study of 437 household contacts of smear-positive Tuberculosis (TB) patients, we examine how household risk stratification can function as reparative engagement in practice. Using  $\chi^2$  tests, Z-tests, multivariable logistic regression, and machine learning models, we analyzed predictors of high-risk classification. Of 437 contacts, 290 (66.4%) were classified as high risk. Age was significantly associated with risk ( $\chi^2 = 16.61$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ), with children aged 0–4 disproportionately represented ( $Z = 2.706$ ), while gender showed no association ( $p = 0.523$ ). Younger age (aOR = 2.41, 95% CI: 1.48–3.94) and larger household size (aOR = 1.12 per additional member, 95% CI: 1.01–1.25) independently predicted high-risk status. Gradient boosting demonstrated the strongest predictive performance (AUROC = 0.65; AUPRC = 0.76; Brier score = 0.21) and net clinical benefit within probability thresholds of 0.2–0.6. Network and heatmap visualisations revealed concentrated “hotspot families,” indicating that vulnerability is socially classified rather than randomly distributed. Through a reparative lens, these findings expose how overcrowding, poverty, and fragmented preventive systems reproduce household-level TB risk. By translating stratification outputs into proactive, family-centered follow-up and targeted prevention, the study operationalizes reparative engagement as both diagnostic and corrective. Predictive modelling thus becomes a mechanism of institutional self-reflection, prompting reconsideration of outreach, resource allocation, and preventive governance. Embedded within clinical governance and community-engaged education,

household risk stratification represents transformative engagement that aligns data science with relational accountability and Ubuntu-informed partnership.

**Anil Lonappan, Bibin Mohan George** – Mangosuthu University of Technology

**A132** *Work Integrated learning as a Pedagogical Strategy in Engineering Education: Curriculum, Assessment and Industry Engagement*

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Higher education institutions, particularly those offering engineering and applied science programmes, are under growing pressure to ensure that graduates can move confidently between classroom learning and real-world professional practice. However, traditional curriculum models often treat theory and practice as separate domains, leaving graduates underprepared for the realities and expectations of the workplace. In response to this challenge, this paper explores Work Integrated Learning (WIL) as a pedagogical approach that intentionally connects academic learning with professional experience through coherent curriculum design, aligned teaching practices, authentic assessment, and meaningful industry engagement. Using a qualitative conceptual review approach, the study draws on recent peer reviewed literature to examine key theoretical foundations, curriculum models, pedagogical strategies, assessment practices, and implementation challenges associated with WIL in higher education, with a particular focus on engineering education. The analysis highlights the importance of embedding WIL systematically within academic programmes, rather than positioning it as a supplementary or stand-alone workplace activity. The findings suggest that effective WIL is grounded in experiential and reflective learning, supported by constructive curriculum alignment and assessment methods that capture cognitive, practical, and professional learning outcomes. While WIL is shown to enhance graduate employability, professional identity development, and workplace readiness, its successful implementation is often limited by uneven learning opportunities across workplaces, resource constraints, and the need for greater capacity building among both academic staff and industry partners. The paper concludes that WIL offers a strong and theoretically informed pathway for improving the relevance and quality of engineering education when adopted as an integrated curriculum strategy. It is therefore recommended that higher education institutions strengthen institutional support mechanisms, invest in staff development, and formalise industry partnerships to ensure the quality, consistency, and long-term sustainability of WIL initiatives.

**Sambesiwe Mavela** – Rhodes University

**A133** *Empowering Communities Through Music Education: An Exploration of Two Non-Profit Music Projects in the Eastern Cape, South Africa*

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This paper explores how two non-profit music projects, the Access Music Project (AMP) in Makhanda and Inkwenkwezi School of Artistry (ISA) in Port Alfred, act as catalysts for community engagement and social change in marginalised communities in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. It examines how these projects contribute to youth development, community engagement, and social cohesion in

contexts where access to formal arts education remains limited. Grounded in a Participatory Action Research framework and drawing on principles of critical social theory, the paper also examines how arts education can challenge structural inequalities and foster agency among youth. Data were collected through multiple methods to capture perspectives within the two projects. Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with the project managers of AMP and ISA to gain insight into the organisational structures, goals, and challenges of each project. In addition, two focus group discussions were conducted with students, each consisting of eight participants from the respective projects (n=16). Questionnaires were distributed to educators involved in both projects to gather their perspectives on teaching practices, student development, and community impact. Observation also formed a key component of the study, where the researcher attended weekly lessons, rehearsals, and project activities over four weeks at each organisation, documenting teaching practices, participant interactions, and the broader learning environment. As the founder of ISA and a community-engaged music educator working closely with similar projects in the region, the researcher occupied a dual role as insider-researcher. This position enabled deeper contextual understanding and access to participants, while ongoing reflexivity was employed to balance subjectivity with critical analysis throughout the research process. The findings revealed four key themes: inclusivity and representation, reciprocal relationships, community development, and personal empowerment. They highlighted that both projects foster inclusive learning environments that promote personal development, leadership, confidence, and social responsibility among participants. Despite challenges such as limited funding and infrastructure, the projects demonstrate how locally driven music education initiatives can act as catalysts for community engagement, empowerment, and long-term social transformation.

**Emanuel Matlala** – Durban University of Technology

*A134 Mapping Community Engagement for the Cultivation of Humanity: A Scoping Review of South African Scholarship (2020–2025)*

South African higher education institutions increasingly position community engagement (CE) as central to advancing humane, just, and socially responsive futures. Yet the conceptual terrain of CE remains diverse, fragmented, and evolving. This study undertakes a scoping review of South African literature published between 2020 and 2025 to map dominant conceptualisations, practices, and research trends related to community engagement and the cultivation of humanity. Following Arksey and O'Malley's scoping review framework, supplemented by PRISMA-ScR guidelines, 94 sources were identified, including peer-reviewed articles, policy documents, conference proceedings, and institutional reports. Forty-eight publications were included in the final synthesis. The review maps five major thematic clusters: Ubuntu and African epistemologies in engagement; critical service learning as transformative pedagogy; engaged research and knowledge co-production; universities as anchor institutions promoting local development; and institutional transformation and decolonial introspection. The findings show significant conceptual growth in Ubuntu-informed engagement models and increasing emphasis on reciprocity, solidarity, and relational ethics. However, the scoping review

also highlights uneven methodological rigor, limited longitudinal impact evidence, and fragmented monitoring systems across institutions. While innovative practices exist, a cohesive national framework for reparative engagement remains underdeveloped. Unlike systematic reviews that evaluate effectiveness, this scoping review maps the breadth and contours of South African CE scholarship, identifying gaps, emerging directions and under-researched areas such as community-defined impact indicators and structural accountability mechanisms. The paper argues that mapping this knowledge landscape is a critical step toward strengthening dialogic partnerships and advancing reparative engagement in the Global South. It recommends coordinated national research agendas, integration of Ubuntu-informed metrics, and deeper South–South knowledge exchange to enhance the cultivation of humanity through community engagement.

**Iain Paterson, Kim Weaver** – Rhodes University

**A135** *Co-Learning through Community Engagement Activities in Cactus Control*

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Invasive alien cactus plants are a serious agricultural and environmental pest in South Africa and particularly the Eastern Cape. Biological control is required by society to reduce the negative impacts of cactus plants. Biological control agents are specialist insects that only feed on target cactus plants and are harmless to all other organisms. The agents are mass-reared and then released at cactus infestations all over the country by the research team, where they eat the cactus and permanently reduce cactus densities, providing agricultural and conservation benefits. Most of the releases that are conducted are at the request of the public and it usually requires the cactus biocontrol team to be physically present on the land to release the agent, which has provided an excellent opportunity for engagement with land-users. This engagement is used as an opportunity to learn for both the cactus biocontrol team and the custodians of the land impacted by the cactus. The Centre for Biological Control team has been working in the Eastern Cape and other parts of South Africa since 2015. Knowledge that land-users share include the consequences of the cactus invasion, to what extent biocontrol solves the problem, and whether new cactus species that are not targeted by biocontrol are becoming problematic. This information guides and informs future research, identifies new targets for biocontrol research and development, and informs research as to whether biocontrol has been successful. Land-users learn about biocontrol from the cactus team. Biological control is more complex and nuanced than traditional control methods such as herbicides and physical removal, so education empowers land-users to better utilise the control method. New knowledge is generated through these relationships, as land-users who understand biocontrol can provide better insights to how well biocontrol works, what the benefits are, and how the science and practice could be improved. The research team releases at around 80 sites throughout the country each year of which most are in the Eastern Cape, and many of these sites are monitored too.

**Kamvelihle Buwa** – Rhodes University

**A136** *Translating with Care: Rhodes University as an Anchor Institution through isiXhosa Translation of Sexuality Education Resources*

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South Africa, as a multilingual country where twelve official languages coexist, English continues to dominate educational and health resources. This linguistic imbalance often limits access to important information for many communities. As anchor institutions, universities have a responsibility to promote equity, inclusion, and social transformation within the communities they serve. When understood through an Ubuntu lens, anchoring recognises universities as institutions that belong to and are constituted by the places and communities around them. Working as a translator at Rhodes University for the UCDP Language Development Project, I came to realise that translation in this context is far more than a linguistic exercise; it is also an act of community engagement. By translating knowledge resources into isiXhosa, this work contributes to making important information more accessible and culturally meaningful to the communities in which universities are embedded. This reflection draws on my experience translating the KT Care Website, a digital platform that provides age-appropriate information on bodies, gender, sexuality, and relationships, from English into isiXhosa. When I first began this work, I underestimated how challenging it would be. I assumed that my fluency in isiXhosa and familiarity with the subject matter would be sufficient. Instead, I encountered constant moments of uncertainty: How do I translate consent in a way that resonates culturally? What term captures gender identity without erasing the complexities of the amaXhosa worldview? How do I navigate topics such as sexuality education that carry cultural weight and, for some, discomfort or even taboo? Through these challenges, translation became a process of learning about language, ethics, and cultural care. I began to understand translation as a practice grounded in an ethics of care, one that foregrounds empathy, cultural sensitivity, and responsible decision-making when working across languages and communities. This reflection offers insights into how translation can function as a form of inclusive engagement. It demonstrates how universities, as anchor institutions, can contribute to human flourishing by supporting multilingual knowledge production and designing knowledge resources with communities in ways that honour linguistic diversity and shared humanity.

**Divya Singh, Flip Schutte** – STADIO

**A137** *From Start-Up to Anchor Institution: Embedding Community Engagement as Reparative Practice at STADIO Higher Education*

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As senior academic leaders directly involved in the design and oversight of community engagement (CE) at STADIO Higher Education, we critically reflect on our institution's formative journey towards embedding CE as a structurally integrated and reparative practice. Writing from within the governance structures we analyse, we acknowledge our dual role as architects and evaluators of this transformation, and we intentionally foreground reflexivity in examining the tensions, blind spots, and constraints that shape this work. STADIO, a young private higher education institution cele-

brating its fifth year, began formalising CE in 2022. Rather than expanding outreach activities, the institution prioritised governance frameworks, policy clarity, and curriculum integration. Drawing on Senate-approved documents, institutional reports, and findings from an independent staff survey, this reflective case study examines how a start-up private university navigates the ethical and structural challenges of embedding CE in a resource-constrained environment where teaching and research traditionally dominate institutional incentives. Through Ubuntu, engaged scholarship, and the notion of the reparative university, the paper interrogates how CE shifts from an outward-facing activity to an inward-facing catalyst for structural introspection. We examine how workload models, recognition systems, risk management processes, and programme design either enable or constrain meaningful engagement. In doing so, we critically question our institutional assumptions about expertise, authority, and the relationship between university and community. The analysis reveals a strong normative commitment to CE among staff and students, alongside persistent tensions over time allocation, funding, and epistemic positioning. We argue that reparative community engagement requires more than well-designed projects; it demands institutional humility, the redistribution of recognition, and a willingness to confront internal cultures that marginalise engagement work. By situating ourselves within the transformation we describe, this paper contributes to Theme 7 by showing that structural introspection is a necessary condition for universities seeking to move towards sustained, relational, and humanising community engagement.

**Cathy Gush** – Lebone Centre

**A138** *Ecosystem Partnerships for Literacy Development: Promoting Community Participation in Reading Through Partnership Networks*

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Children's literacy development is dependent on an ecosystem of support that includes parents, teachers, libraries, NGOs and higher education institutions. In Makhanda, these finely crafted networks are having the effect of moving children's literacy scores well above the national average. The presentation will focus on a few key programmes within the Lebone Centre's Pipeline of Support, which serves children in Makhanda from birth to 9 years. Some 30 families are involved annually in a programme of home visits that encourage early stimulation, while another 30 families participate in a family literacy project that aims to build communities of readers in the greater Currie Park area. At the Grade R level, the Centre has collaborated with the Rhodes University Education Dept on a service learning project involving 70 third-year B.Ed students and about 80 Grade R learners at a no-fee paying school. All of these projects involve a number of partnerships and collaborations, and the presentation will see to explore some of the realities of collaborative work: the relationships, shared purpose, and commitment that sustain it, as well as the tensions and complexities involved.

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The Standard Bank Tutuwa Community Foundation

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Or [www.linktr.ee/ruengagement](http://www.linktr.ee/ruengagement)



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Settlers Hospital: 046 602 5000

Ambulance Guardmed: 073 065 6660

Dr Gainsford & Partners: 046 636 2063