Engineering Knowledge: An Ethnographic Analysis of Community Engagement in the Classroom

UCT Honours Thesis
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Image: 'Knowledge is Power!' Banner made at one of the student
protests at the University of Cape Town, 2015.

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Abstract

This paper is based on ethnographic research done over a four-week period with the *Social Infrastructures: Engaging with Community for Change* Course at the University of Cape Town. This course runs as a partnership between the Department of Professional Communications Studies in the Engineering and Built Environment (EBE) Faculty, and the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED). As a case study, the *Social Infrastructure* Course offers an example of how ideas of knowledge and power are being addressed in the classroom, in a way that encourages a more reflexive learning process and conscious growth in the student's ways of being. It is found that by bringing the elements of community engagement into the classroom, a shift occurs in terms of the ways in which knowledge is conceptualised, produced and experienced.

Through a theoretical lens of understanding knowledge and power as social processes (Foucault, 1980), and drawing on the works of Nyamnjoh (2012) and Dei (2014) with regards to the context of African universities, my focus is therefore on the student experiences of a curriculum designed around community engagement. This paper aims to offer empirical research in terms of what transformation might look like within our curricula, taking steps towards the decolonisation of the 'African institution'. Ultimately this paper argues for a stronger awareness of the dynamics of knowledge and power that exist in the classroom, in an attempt to promote transformational pedagogy. It is the kind of teaching and learning that encourages us to think, feel, act, and listen deeper.

Introduction

It was the 14th of June, 2015, the night before I began my fieldwork as a participant of the 'Social Infrastructures: Engaging with Communities for Change' course, at the University of Cape Town (UCT). I was flying back from East London to Cape Town. As we descended over my destination, I was able to look out of the window at all the houses below. It was night-time, and so, coming over the Cape Flats, I noticed how all the houses looked the same in neat orderly rows, lit up by glowing streetlights. The image came to mind of city officials working with miniature housing models, planning complicated infrastructure on tight budgets. As we flew on over the informal settlements of Khayelitsha, I could just see the tiny squares of corrugated iron, forming the roofs of homes, but apart from that it was complete darkness, no street lights. We passed over the N2, a major national road, and as we landed, I could see the informal tents across the highway, and remembered that this area was currently facing heavy eviction pressure, as the airport wished to expand its building and operations. The contrasts of the various areas could not have been made more evident, and what an appropriate introduction to the course I was beginning the very next day; a course on social infrastructure, and the role of people in spaces and places.

It was with great excitement that I came to class the next day, ready to begin a process of understanding the role of community engagement at institutions of higher education, through the perspectives and experiences of 100 engineering students who had all signed up for the Social Infrastructure, winter-school elective course. The aim of this thesis is therefore to explore and add to the constantly emerging research on experiences of social responsiveness at institutions of higher education, and comment on its connection to current discussions of curriculum transformation. It comes at a critical time when debates and dialogue around transformation at UCT are hot in the air. This research therefore places itself as one tiny slice within the broader context of curriculum reform and an interrogation of the idea of what it means to be an 'African' university. I question how UCT engages with notions of social responsiveness within the curriculum and what the impact is on students with regards to embedded knowledge structures and hierarchies.

In response to the question of how community engagement can contribute to the calls for transformation, this thesis will use the Social Infrastructure (SI) course as a case study to show how by bringing elements of community engagement into the classroom, we are

contributing to the process of transformation by disrupting the knowledge hierarchies that exist at institutions of higher education, and promoting a 'pluriversity' instead of a 'university' (Nyamnjoh, 2012:131). Community engagement as one approach to this, allows for students to interact with new forms of knowledge, all the while critically reflecting on their own values and experiences. The Social Infrastructure Course emerges as a case study where the unique pedagogy and focus on relationship building, allows for a new engagement with what constitutes knowledge, recognising knowledge in each other, and in our lived experiences. This furthermore creates a space for students think critically about their own positions in society, as students, active citizens and future professionals, contributing to the broader goals of transformation of institutions of higher education.

Context

The Rhodes Must Fall Movement at the University of Cape Town this year has created a wave of decolonisation and transformation discourse that has rightly shaken the walls of this ivory tower. Whether it has been enough to break the embedded colonialist mould is still to be seen, but what is clear is that the call for transformation in higher education now has the significant weight of student experiences and anger behind it (Jansen, 2015). Regarding the curriculum in particular, the call for decolonisation and 'Africanisation' of curriculum content is loud and clear. However, debates around curriculum transformation go deeper than just the content. It is about an epistemic shift in terms of knowledge production, how we value knowledge and subsequently interrogating existing knowledge hierarchies at every level (Jansen, 2009; Nyamnjoh, 2012).

In the context of the post-apartheid South African institution, transformation is an incredibly complex word that is used in many different ways. It is one of South Africa's much contested 'key words', used 'to describe, to mask, justify or vilify, or to preserve or mobilise the narrow interests of a few or the broad interests of many' (Reddy, 2008:221). As seen from the UCT Humanities Assembly on Transformation held in August 2015, for example, the issues brought forward under the banner of transformation ranged from Africanising the curriculum content, to the stereotypical nature of career expos, to being inappropriately addressed by food court shop owners (Humanities Assembly, 2015). It is therefore clear how transformation is embedded in personal experiences and identity politics, as a term ultimately used to represent some form of social change (Reddy, 2008:209).

Since 1994, shifts in education policy and practice have been crucial in attempts to address the historical legacies of Apartheid that still exist in institutions of higher education. In 1997, the Department of Education introduced White Paper 3, titled 'A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education', with the aim of highlighting 'a greater responsiveness to social and economic needs' as a key outcome of the policy initiatives in higher education (Department of Education, 1997:3). This meant that along with research and teaching, the concept of engaging with a broader community or being socially responsive, became a core component of institutions of higher education (Hall, 2010:1). At the University of Cape Town, this is embedded in the strategic vision and mission of the university. As stated in UCT's mission, the university aims 'to produce graduates whose qualifications are internationally recognized and locally applicable, underpinned by values of engaged citizenship and social justice' (UCT, 2006). Although the calls for transformation today have taken on a particularly decolonising discourse, the concepts and experiences of social responsiveness and community engagement provide one lens through which to interrogate this process of transformation.

Conceptual Background

The term 'social responsiveness' is often used hand-in-hand with the term 'community engagement'. In the context of UCT decision-making bodies such as the University Social Responsiveness Council, a conscious choice was made to use 'social responsiveness' instead of 'community engagement', because of the historically problematic assumptions with the word 'community' (McMillan, interview, 2015). Therefore in 2006, the UCT Senate adopted a broad conceptual definition of social responsiveness, recognising the wide variety of activities that fall under this category. A Social Responsiveness Policy Framework was then adopted in 2012, with the aim of encouraging academic engagement, and providing some guidelines in terms of integrating social responsiveness into the university 'culture'.

The Policy document outlines three forms of engagement: Engaged Scholarship, that encompasses forms of community engagement through research, teaching and professional development; Civic Engagement, which focuses on student involvement in forms of

'community service'; and Social Responsiveness for PASS staff[1], that 'covers activities where PASS staff engages with external constituencies using their professional expertise' (SR Policy Document, 2012).

Favish and Ngcelwane (2009) have defined social responsiveness as "scholarly-based activities that have projected and defined outcomes that match or contribute to developmental objectives or policies defined by civil society, local, provincial or national government, international agencies or industry" (Favish & Ngcelwane, 2009:22). Acknowledging the breadth of these definitions, it becomes clear that there is still much complexity in terms of the way the concept is put into practice. Ultimately in the context of UCT, the term social responsiveness is most commonly used in reference to using one's 'scholarship to engage with non-academic external constituencies' (McMillan, interview, 2015).

Under this broad banner and institutional policy of social responsiveness, lies the opportunity of community engagement and its impact on teaching and learning. Martin Hall[2] defines community engagement as,

> "a cluster of activities that includes service learning, problem-based teaching and research that addresses specific wants and needs, the pursuit of alternative forms of knowledge and challenges to established authorities that control and direct research systems and the allocations of qualifications" (Hall, 2010:7).

What is important in this definition is that it opens up the space for a quest into different 'forms of knowledge' and how these get contested and constructed in activities of community engagement. Similarly the term 'engagement' alludes to a partnership or relationship that is built, as well as a process of enquiry and knowledge sharing (Coetzee, 2012:504). These are all important concepts in understanding the context in which the Social Infrastructure course is positioned at UCT. Social responsiveness can therefore be seen as an overarching term, in which a course such as this forms part of socially responsive teaching and learning, or engaged scholarship at UCT. The focus on the term 'community engagement' is important in that it is the preferred term of use of the Course Convener (McMillan, 2015), but also

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[1] Professional, Administrative, Support and Service Staff, of the University of Cape Town.
[2] Professor Martin Hall has written extensively on community engagement in higher education policy, practice and strategy in the South African context, having been the Director of the Centre for African Studies (1983-1998), the Dean of the Higher Education Development Unit and a Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Cape Town (1999-2008).

because, as can be seen from Martin Hall's definition, it opens up the space for an investigation into knowledge production and relationships of power.

Theoretical Background and Main Argument

Transformation within the curriculum needs to begin with an understanding of knowledge. As an anthropologist, I understand knowledge to be a social process, which is influenced by the 'hierarchies of humanity and human agency imposed by particular power relations' (Nyamnjoh, 2012:130). Arce and Long (1992) capture this process by saying,

> "The production and transformation of knowledge resides not in category systems or classificatory schemata per se but in the processes by which social actors interact, negotiate and accommodate to each others life-worlds, leading to the reinforcement or transformation of existing types of knowledge or to the emergence of new forms. These processes and outcomes are shaped by sources of power, authority and legitimation available to the different actors involved" (Arce & Long, 1992:214)

Foucault provides a theoretical grounding from which to understand the intrinsic interconnectivity of knowledge and power, and how this influences the broader discourses that shape our society (Ball, 2013:19). For Foucault, knowledges are produced within power relations, with power described as a 'name given to a complex strategic relation in a given society', and not a force or institution (Foucault, 1980:236). Foucault's work provides a guide in terms of understanding how different discourses emerge that constitute hierarchies of knowledge in relation to power (Dimitriadis, 2006:112). In Foucault's terms, discourses of power and knowledge are the abstract forces that determine what will be known (Ball, 2013:13). Pedagogy and the education system can therefore be seen as a particular discourse, where certain forms of knowledge are made possible and structured through power relations (Ball, 2013:52).

Knowledge, values and power are therefore completely intertwined, and there is no better evidence of this than in the curricula of higher education institutions. The curriculum is not just about the skills and knowledge bestowed upon the student. It is about communicating a set of values from which to consider the skills and knowledge in question (Nyamnjoh, 2012:129). It therefore assigns value in terms of what is and is not considered important

'knowledge' at a particular moment in time (Garuba, 2015), defined by broader societal discourses. The curriculum is therefore a social construction that reflects the dominant values and epistemologies in society (Dei, 2014:170). It includes written and unwritten rules, institutional culture and has the power to legitimize and validate knowledge. This 'Deep Curriculum' (Dei, 2014:171), is what Jansen is referring to with the notion of 'embedded knowledge' or knowledge in the blood (Jansen, 2009:123). The curriculum is therefore about 'values, ideas, practices, as well as identities and how knowledge production is linked to identities, power relations and pedagogy' (Dei, 2014:171).

If we take Barnett's understanding of a curriculum as an 'educational vehicle to promote student development' (Barnett, 2009:430), the emphasis on the kinds of values and dispositions being developed become far more important. A curriculum therefore, 'determines the academic formation of a new generation' (Garuba, 2015), and it is for this reason that Garuba argues that the curriculum is a particularly good place to start in terms of transformation.

What we are seeing today through student movements is the continual call to Africanize and decolonise the university curriculum. Education was central to the colonial regime, and in today's academic institutions it can be argued that the residues of this colonial system are still very much evident (Kallaway, 2015; Dei, 2012). Nyamnjoh makes the argument that "education in Africa is the victim of a resilient colonial and colonizing epistemology…which takes the form of science as ideology and hegemony" (Nyamnjoh, 2012:129). In his article *Potted Plants in Greenhouses*, Nyamnjoh raises several crucial points in terms of deconstructing the colonial epistemology that has positioned 'Africa' in a state of inadequacy, and in doing so has limited the creativity, agency and value systems of popular epistemologies (Njyamnjoh, 2012:138). What Nyamnjoh is speaking to here are the hierarchies of knowledge that exist in our current education system.

Colonial epistemologies have therefore structured our current education system, and in doing so structured what and whose knowledges were valued when and where. Lesley Green refers to the three goddesses of reason, 'technical efficiency, economic profitability, and scientific objectivity that have long reigned in the cosmos of knowledge production' (Green, 2015:5). Green argues that the removal of the Rhodes Statue at the University of Cape Town, in April 2015, was symbolic of the shifting of these goddesses, leaving the question open as to what

and who would define the new era of knowledge production. 'Decolonising the mind' has been an important slogan of the Rhodes Must Fall movement, a student led movement positioned against the institutional racism and patriarchy that exists in the experiences of current UCT students, as well as in the broader society. Regarding the curriculum, one of the long-term goals of the movement is to

> "Implement a curriculum which critically centres Africa and the subaltern. By this we mean treating African discourses as the point of departure - through addressing not only content, but languages and methodologies of education and learning - and only examining western traditions in so far as they are relevant to our own experience." (RMF Statement, 2015)

The debates around curriculum transformation therefore go deeper than just the content. It is about an epistemic shift in terms of knowledge production, how we value knowledge and subsequently deconstructing existing knowledge hierarchies at every level. George Dei et al argues this point clearly when saying,

> "Institutions are not unmarked spaces of thought and action. Knowledge forms are usually privileged to construct dominance, and can be 'fetishized' so as to produce and sustain power inequities. Fetishized knowledges are assigned or come to acquire an objectified, normal status, *the status of truth.* Thus they become embedded in social practices and identities, as well as in institutional structures, policies and relationships." (Dei, Hall & Rosenberg, 2000:4)

It is clear how the hierarchies of knowledge production institutionalise and normalise embedded power relations and structural inequalities. This therefore comes to be manifested through things such as a university curriculum. Dei goes on to argue that there are three central tenets to decolonizing the curriculum, with 'Multi-centricity' being the first. By this he means taking a multi-centric or polycentric approach to the curriculum in acknowledging and cultivating multiple ways of knowing (Dei, 2014:171). This is similar to Harry Garuba's notion of a contrapuntal pedagogy where knowledge that has been previously marginalised becomes integral to the curriculum (Garuba, 2015). The second central tenet that Dei offers is that of 'Indigeneity'. 'Indigeneity' positions students as active knowers and contextualises education to the land and the life experiences of the students (Dei, 2014:171). It is about

bringing student experiences into the classroom, and in doing so, actively recognising the value of popular epistemologies. Reflexivity is the final tenet, which Dei described as 'the interrogation of interconnectivity of the self to the external world' (Dei, 2014:172). Muller makes the point that 'reflexivity is both the condition for knowledge and the means for its mobility and destabilization' (Muller, 2000:2). In other words, this process of reflexivity is a learning process that both builds and breaks down our perceptions of what constitutes knowledge.

These three key tenets to decolonising the curriculum become central in analysing the Social Infrastructure course. The Social Infrastructure course, offered as a Humanities elective for engineering students, is unique in the context of the University of Cape Town. Students participate in a four week programme that runs over the winter holiday, interrogating the notion of community engagement through issues of social infrastructure such as housing, sanitation and food security. 'Site visits' to different community contexts are used as text through which to think, feel and experience these issues. I have therefore used this case study to explore student experiences of a course that actively disrupts existing knowledge hierarchies, challenging students to think about where knowledge comes from and to reflect on their own value base as students, active citizens and future professionals.

Research Details

a) Research Aim and Question

The aim of this research was to offer empirical evidence of ways in which curriculum transformation can take place, particularly in the context of community engagement and university social responsiveness. Having been the Chairperson of Ubunye, one of UCT's student-led development agencies, my own experience of community engagement had purely been from a student-volunteer and student governance perspective. For a lot of students, myself included, there was recognition of a gap between our academic duties and the skills and values we were learning from our involvement in community outreach projects. Bringing community engagement into the curriculum, therefore emerged as an important task in trying to bridge this gap, and validate the learning that occurs in traditionally non-academic spaces. I therefore entered the field with the following set of questions: 'How is it that UCT as an

institution of higher education engages with notions of social responsiveness and community engagement within the curriculum, and what is the impact of this on student experiences?' Stemming from this, 'How can we move towards a curricula that actively recognises multiple knowledges, places learning within local contexts and encourages processes of reflexivity in students as a way of contributing to the reimagining of the 'African' university?' These broad questions paved the way for a more detailed case study, exploring the impact of curriculum reform at an individual course level, and contributing to the potential for wider scale transformation.

b) Unit of Study

To explore the impact of a pedagogy designed around community engagement at UCT, I have used the 'Social Infrastructure' (SI) course as my main fieldsite and case study. This course runs as a partnership between the Department of Professional Communications Studies in the Engineering and Built Environment (EBE) Faculty, and the Centre for Higher Education Development (CHED), and draws on content particularly from UCT's Global Citizenship Programme, of which Dr Janice McMillan is the Convener. At UCT, Engineering students are required to take two Humanities elective courses as part of their degrees. The Social Infrastructure course, therefore, fulfils this requirement. The course runs for four consecutive weeks over the winter school period, during the June-July term vacation. Campus is generally quiet over this period of the year, allowing students to fully immerse themselves in the course programme, with three or four hour sessions each day. This is one of the factors that make the SI course unique.

The organising team is made up of the course convener and course lecturers, as well as four 'student facilitators', each of whom were responsible for a group of about 25 students. These groups of 25 acted like 'tutorial groups' in the sense that small group reflections and site visits would happen in these groups. However the change in name from 'tutors' to 'student facilitators' was intentional in terms of promoting a more equal relationship between student participants and facilitators, and changing the assumption of where knowledge comes from.

By the end of the first day of the course, the room was buzzing with excitement. Students had come with a range of expectations, some merely trying to complete their electives to graduate and others having heard great things about the course from their peers. One of the very first activities we did was to get into groups of three with people we did not know and introduce

ourselves, explaining the reason we were interested in doing this course. After I'd explained that I was an Anthropology honours student doing my research on this course, the one student in my group explained that he had really not enjoyed the Anthropology elective he had done last year, and was looking forward to this elective that he hoped would be more relevant. He ended by looking at me and saying, 'no offense'. I responded with a smile and said, 'none taken'. The other student said she was excited that this course brought in the people element to engineering as engineering students often think only about the number crunching and practical side of things. Both of these expectations - the need for a course that is relevant to the experiences of students as well as one that brings in social knowledge in contrast to the technical knowledge of engineering - speak volumes in terms of what the SI course aims to achieve. In terms of the course focus and content, the course outline clearly states that,

> *"The term 'social infrastructures' in the course title refers to the facilities and mechanisms that support the establishment of services like education, health care, community development and social welfare. The concept of 'social' implies that development and any other form of 'service' cannot be looked at without considering the needs of people, of communities" (Course outline)*

The course is therefore structured in two parts, with part one exploring the challenges and opportunities of community engagement and the importance of understanding multiple perspectives. This material is drawn mostly from the Global Citizenship Programme, which runs as a non-credit bearing course at, UCT, engaging students with issues of social justice and citizenship. The second part of the course revolved around a series of guest lecturers, each with a different topic relating to social infrastructure. The topics of part two included urbanisation, food security, climate change, water, sanitation and disabilities (Appendix 1). In addition to this, students get to experience and explore community engagement in action, by going on 'site visits', to various different community locations, and interacting with community members for the day.

There were eight different site visits (Appendix 2), and each student went to two of them. Five of the sites had been chosen and arranged through a partnership with the Development Action Group (DAG). The DAG is a non-profit organisation that aims to offer technical and professional advice to civil society organisations and community groups threatened with forced removals in Cape Town (Development Action Group, 2015). This partnership had

come about through the course convener's connection with one of DAGs programme coordinators. The other three sites, Valhalla Park, VPUU (Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading) in Khayelitsha, and Mothers Unite in Lavender Hill, were also through personal connections that the course convener had made either through her own research or through the Global Citizenship Programme. The model of relationship-building and partnerships of collaboration that formed the main content of the curriculum was therefore being modelled through these engagements with different community partners.

The model of engagement with community partners used in the SI course is the main reason that this course provides a pertinent case study for interrogating the possibilities of community engagement as a process of transformation. The course is also relevant in the way that cross-disciplinary approaches have often come up in the 'quest to re-anchor and endogenize education in and about Africa' (Nyamnjoh, 2012:148), and as a Humanities elective course, the Engineering student participants are offered a new disciplinary gaze through which to view the world. The SI course speaks to the challenges and tensions that arise in doing community engagement, and it really stretches the students to think about engagement in terms of intentions, working with depth and integrity, and recognising multiple perspectives.

Each day we would arrive in Classroom 3B of the Snape Building, blown in from Cape Town's wet winter winds, to the warm environment of friendly faces, being greeted by the student facilitators and signing the register. We wrote our names on a sticky label, in four different colours, representing the four different groups students were divided into. These name labels, which we had for every single day of the course, became symbolic of the importance of greeting people by name, the first step in relationship building, which, as will be shown below, becomes the fundamental starting point of community engagement. As a general overview, the three-hour sessions spent together each day were a mixture of presentations, interactive activities, 'buzz sessions' and small group reflection time. Flip-chart paper and different colour markers were spread across the classroom, as we worked in small groups, sharing our experiences, in relation to key course concepts, or responding to given readings.

c) Research Methods

Using participant observation as my main research method, I attended each day of the course and participated as a student, doing the required readings, and participating in class discussions and activities. As a method, participant observation involves establishing rapport in a new space, observing events as they happen, and becoming a participant as much as possible, gaining an intuitive and aware understanding of the way things occur (Bernard, 1995:141). Before the course began, I attended two site visit meetings with the course conveners, as well as student facilitator meetings, and meetings with contributing lecturers. Observing these initial engagements gave me a sense of the direction and purpose of the course, and the underlying epistemology of a focus on relationship-building that frames the course. At each of these initial meetings, emphasis was placed on 'who was in the room', creating a space of mutual respect and a sense of equality. Similarly after the course, I attended a debrief meeting with the course convener and DAG, as well as an afternoon where UCT students presented their course presentations and interacted with DAG facilitators.

Being a student myself, I was easily able to immerse myself in the classroom and engage in course content. I moved between being an active participant, and observing classroom dynamics. There were some moments where fellow students saw me as a student facilitator, or expected me, as a Humanities student, to have done all the readings and provide all the answers, so these were interesting situations to take into consideration. At the end of the course one student even asked me for my notes for a day he had missed. Therefore, there was definitely an awareness of my presence as an 'outsider' and researcher, while at the same time I was welcomed into the student group by my peers. I attended four of the site visits, and observed the student responses and engagements on these trips, as well as reflecting on my own experiences. My observations, fieldnotes and own personal learnings from the course were fundamental in experiencing one of the ways in which community engagement takes place at the University of Cape Town.

Building on my observations, I conducted eight student interviews, as well as interviews with three of the student facilitators. In selecting the eight students, the aim was to get as diverse a group as possible to capture a wide range of perspectives and experiences. There were 100 participants in the course, representative of thirteen different African countries and one student from South Korea. In general the majority of the 100 students were African males

from a wide variety of African countries. The wide range of different life stories and experiences is, therefore, almost impossible to capture in a small study like this; nonetheless, the qualitative methods I have used allow for an in-depth reading of the experiences of some students. With the consent forms, I asked students to indicate if they would be willing to engage in further conversation with me around their experiences of the course. Fifteen students said they would be, and so I sent out an initial online survey to this group, to learn a bit more about them, and also to capture some of their initial thoughts at the beginning of the course. Ten students responded to this survey, and I subsequently conducted interviews with eight of them, recognising time constraints as a limiting factor.

The aim of the interviews was firstly to understand the students' reasons for choosing the SI course in connection to their own life stories and aspirations, and to discuss notable learning moments and challenges they experienced from the course content and site visits. I particularly asked students to compare their experiences of the SI course to their other courses, seeking to unpack some of the embedded knowledge structures that exist in our institution. The in-depth qualitative data from my interviews therefore forms the core of my research findings. Key learning moments from students show the impact of community engagement and my observations of the way in which it was brought into the process of teaching and learning, points to a unique pedagogy that can hopefully contribute to furthering the discourse of transformation of higher education.

The group of eight students with whom I conducted more in depth interviews, were made up of four male students and four female students. From the group of males, Matthew[3] and Jack were white[4] and had grown up in Cape Town in relatively privileged areas. Ncedo was black, born in the Eastern Cape, but grew up in an informal settlement in one of Cape Town's township areas. Matthew and Ncedo were civil engineering students, and Jack was studying mechanical engineering. Joseph was originally from Ghana, but grew up in the Eastern Cape, and studies electrical and computer engineering at UCT. From the group of females, Kim was the only student from South Korea, studying mechatronics. Amy was the only humanities student who participated in the course; she was a white female from Cape Town. Finally, Yumna and Busi, were two female chemical engineering students, Busi was originally from

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[3] Pseudonyms have been used for all students.

[4] Since race still accords social meaning in the context of South Africa, I have used racial classification here. Race is present as an ongoing issue in debates of transformation in higher education.

Lesotho, and Yumna was Indian and from Cape Town. The diversity in conversations I had were therefore representative of the diversity of the group, and gave insight into the ways in which a curriculum can provide for students coming from different backgrounds. For Janice McMillan, the course convener, this was an important element of curriculum transformation.

My final form of data collection was to use content from student's written reflection papers, which were written as part of the course requirements. While aware that these reflection papers are graded, and therefore are written with a certain purpose from the side of the student, I found that what was written often mirrored the answers I was given in interviews, as well as in general class discussions. One student even commented after an interview, that our discussion had helped him formulate his thoughts for his reflection paper. In this way, I found that students were genuinely eager to talk about their experience of the course and reflected honestly.

Finally as a course participant, I am drawing on my own experiences and reflections from the course. Bernado, Butcher and Howard show that in doing community engagement research, 'relationships with the community involve listening to one's voice and being aware of the interior dynamics that shape the way we define ourselves' (Bernado et al., 2014:116). Therefore by attempting to deconstruct frames of knowledge of students at UCT, I recognised that I have embarked on a journey of deconstructing my own epistemology, and therefore have incorporated my own reflections into my research findings.

Also, it is important to acknowledge that my findings are drawn from particular events, moments in time and specific reflections in relation to a specific space, place, time and context. Therefore had it been a different group of students or different site visits on a different day new findings would have emerged. That being said, this does not limit the value made by this thesis in contributing to a conversation on curriculum transformation through community engagement.

A final disclaimer to make is to say that these conclusions have been drawn from one individual case study. In her reflections, Amy, the one other humanities student, made the comment that it was interesting to see what studying engineering was like, 'through the reactions to this different way of learning (referring to the SI course)'. Therefore this thesis is

not a comparison, but rather offers conclusions drawn from the reactions of students based on their own experiences at UCT.

d) Ethics

In terms of analysing my research data and presenting this thesis in an ethical manner, I am aware of the implications my research may have on the various parties involved. I received ethical consent from the Humanities Faculty to conduct my research with UCT students and staff members (Ref. No.: HUMREC201506-01). Each student completed a consent form, which gave permission for me to observe and participate in classroom conversations, and use student responses, respecting the terms of privacy stipulated by the student. Lecturers, student facilitators and community partners who were responsible for the various site visits also completed consent forms. In conversation with the course convener, permission was given to name both the course, and Dr Janice McMillan as the course convener. Lectures also agreed to be named. Names of site visits were negotiated with community partners themselves, but interestingly all were happy with the site being named in terms of advocating their story and struggle. I have used pseudonyms for names of the students as a general preference.

Social responsiveness brings with it its own set of ethical questions, in terms of the ways in which communities are represented and positioned within a certain narrative. How does the university engage with and respond to needs of a wider community, who is the community, where does the power lie, and how are expectations and needs addressed in an ethical non-harmful manner? The work of Winkler, Oldfield, and Favish and Ngcelwane are particularly useful in understanding these questions in the context of UCT (Winkler, 2013; Oldfield, 2008; Favish & Ngcelwane, 2009). These questions therefore framed the background of my study as I stepped into a space where 'the university', in the form of the SI course and its participants, is actively engaging with a variety of community-based organisations and challenging participants' understandings of these exact questions. I am therefore aware of these dynamics, however the aim here is to focus on the impact of this course on student learnings and experiences and what this means in terms of the way that universities position and validate knowledge.

Therefore in accordance with the ethical guidelines of Anthropology Southern Africa (Anthropology Southern Africa, 2015:142), understanding that this Honours thesis be

published for the Anthropology Department of UCT, I have committed to not publishing any information that may prejudice any of the research participants, or put them in any harm.

Chapter Outline

From the students' perspective, the learnings from the course are completely different to what they would normally experience as Engineering students. The difference therefore emerges between the cumulative or 'technical' knowledge, that defines the knowledge hierarchy in the Faculty of Engineering, in contrast to the Faculty of Humanities, where knowledge is usually focused on the 'capacities and dispositions of the knower' with regards to developing a disciplinary gaze (Morreira, 2015:5). In this way, students are taken on a journey of recognising and validating different forms of knowledge that encourages a critical engagement of their role as students, future professionals and active citizens. Chapter One therefore explores this difference between the gazes of Humanities and Engineering, in the context of the SI course. Using Barnett's (2009) understanding of ways of knowing and becoming, the chapter examines how the SI course's focus on relationship building encourages a new way of learning, focusing on finding knowledge in each other.

Chapter Two takes more seriously the experience of the site visits in being active texts through which students were able to engage their academic material with real life experiences. What becomes evident is that even though the SI course is taking great strides in bringing in local knowledges into an academic space, there is a broader discourse of development that needs to be interrogated in terms of how the students positioned 'the community'. What is important, however, is how the lived experiences of community members become an integral part of the pedagogy, following Nyamnjoh's (2012) call for popular epistemologies to be validated against the history of a colonial education system.

Moving from this, Chapter Three places this course within the conversation of decolonisation of the 'African' curriculum, using George Dei's (2014) recommendations of multicentricity, indigeneity and reflexivity as the three central tenets of this process. It is found that with each of these requirements, the Social Infrastructure course is doing something unique, in bringing in new forms of knowledge, validating student experiences and adopting a teaching and learning that encourages us to think, feel, act, and listen deeper.

Ultimately therefore the argument is made that in the context of a South African university, such as the University of Cape Town, currently facing the critical question of its role in society, with regards to transformational objectives, and emerging from a colonial and Apartheid past, there is a need for institutions to be socially responsive to local contexts. Bringing community engagement into the curricula, therefore, provides one way in which students can begin to engage with multiple sources of knowledge, rooted in their own contexts and lived experiences, and start to critically reflect on their own value systems and ways of being.

Chapter 1 – Transformational Pedagogy

*My entire academic life has seen a personal and institutional focus on the **technical and scientific facets** of the world we live in. It does not surprise me that I struggled to find my feet in the unembellished **social and human-centred education** environment, which this course threw me into. Perhaps the reason I enjoyed this particular task the most extends past the freedom of expression and exploration to a **deeper-set transformation** in my cerebral articulation of our modern world; one which can only be accredited to the **new perspective** which completing this course has induced within me.*

- Extract from Matthew's reflection paper, (emphasis mine)

Matthew, as a third year civil engineering student at UCT, has grown up in Cape Town and is doing engineering with the intention of working in the field of renewable energy and sustainable development. He spoke about his passion for the environment and how he does volunteer wild fire fighting. The extract above, which he wrote as the introduction to his reflection paper, is representative of the many levels of transformation that the SI course aims to achieve and to the fact that for the most part it is successful in doing so. For Matthew, the biggest shift in his thinking was recognising the single story that he had grown up with of Cape Town's informal settlements. The Ted Talk video by Adichie (Adichie, 2009), the danger of a single story, was one of the first videos we were required to watch, where she stresses the importance of multiple perspectives to different situations (Adichie, 2009). This then became an important concept through which students were able to reflect on their experiences of the site visits. Matthew, for example, spoke about how for him he had grown up with a single story of what Khayelitsha, as the biggest informal settlement on the outskirts of Cape Town, was like.

"I have this picture in my head of shacks that I drive pass along the N2 on the way to the airport. And then going to where we went in Khayelitsha, which is very well developed, a very successful development with informal traders, no vandalism, very clean, very safe area, it changed my whole perspective, and I realised that you can't just class the whole of the Cape Flats as an informal settlement" (Interview)

This change in perspective, of recognising the danger of a single sided story, was something that many of the participants reflected on. By creating the space for students to share their opinions, learn from each other, and step outside their perceived comfort zones in the way of community site visits, the SI course encouraged students to expand their experiences in terms of what constitutes 'knowledge' through a pedagogy founded on relations of being. The focus of this chapter will therefore be to unpack the experience of this social and human-centred education environment, in contrast to the technical and scientific knowledge of engineering, in order to argue that it leads to 'deeper-set transformation' and new perspectives, in the quest of deconstructing colonial epistemologies and moving towards a less problematic education system in Africa.

Disciplined Knowledge

As a starting point, many of the students reflected on their learning experiences by contrasting them to their usual engineering courses and ways of learning. The fact that the SI course adopts a unique pedagogy in comparison to what the participating engineering students were familiar with, says something about the ways of learning embedded at institutions of higher education and within specific disciplines. Basil Bernstein (1999) shows how in the structure of higher education knowledge is organized differently in relation to different disciplines. The natural sciences, a category in which engineering would fall, tends to focus on an increased amount of knowledge about a particular object or topic. In other words, the natural sciences have a vertical knowledge structure, whereas the social sciences, in the form of a horizontal knowledge structure, focus on the relationship between the knower and the knowledge and are therefore entangled with identity (Morreira, 2015:4-5). The argument made by Nyamnjoh is that colonial epistemologies have 'resulted in social science disciplines and fields of study that have sacrificed morality, humanity and the social on the altar of conscious or implied objectivity' (Nyamnjoh, 2012:131). Colonial epistemologies have therefore left behind an education system that places the knowledge of the natural sciences above those of the social sciences, and structures knowledge in a particular way.

This dichotomy and hierarchy between the social, 'people-stuff' and the objective 'technical knowledge' was a distinction that the students were very aware of. As Kim, the student from South Korea said, "right now we are taught with technical knowledge, without knowing why

we are learning it". In student interviews the metaphor of being turned into a machine also came up quite a lot with regards to way in which students experience their other courses in contrast to the SI course. Students reflected on the 'step-by-step', 'solution-driven', 'spoon-feeding' approach to attaining 'discipline' knowledge. They contrasted this to the 'aspects of being human', 'dignity', and the 'shifting perspectives' that they were experiencing in this 'unique learning environment', where the lecturers 'actually care about what you think about what you're taking in' (all quotes are extracts from interviews).

There were several moments on the course where this difference became clear. The first one was when reflecting on the site visits and the experience of the course, students would get frustrated about not being able to *do* anything on the site visits, in the sense of physical labour or service. In response to this, Janice McMillan reminded students that it was a Humanities elective, and said 'I wouldn't dare lay down a brick, as I'd spend the rest of the day deciding whether a brick should go there or there'. The intention of the site visits was instead to see and listen, developing that disciplinary gaze. This tension in the sense of the Engineering students expecting to do some kind of physical labour or 'lay the bricks' and Janice wanting to think critically about where the brick should go, is representative of the distinction between the pedagogical lenses of Engineering and Humanities respectively.

Another example was at the end of the course when student groups were required to prepare a presentation of their main learning outcomes in relation to a specific topic chosen from the course content. Panic and confusion swept across the classroom as students asked for more clarity in terms of what was required, was there a marking rubric, what did they actually have to *do.* I couldn't help laughing to myself thinking about the completely different response you would get giving this task to a group of Humanities students. Similarly Amy, the Humanities student, reflected on how doing projects and essays in a Humanities context there are always many different understandings of the task, all of which are accepted. But what we were seeing here were students used to being assessed with clear marking rubrics with the aim of getting the 'right' answers, showing their amount of knowledge, instead of feeling comfortable showing their learning process, and their relationship to the knowledge. Both these examples speak to the embedded disciplinary gazes that frame our knowledge sets.

If we see the curriculum as a mode to develop in students a particular gaze, through which to view and interact in the world, the questions in terms of what kind of gaze, and from whose

viewpoint become very important. This is not to say that all humanities courses are the 'preferred gaze', but instead that the SI course offered a unique opportunity for students to experience something different, and a transformational pedagogy that contrasted with their previous learning experiences. This is where cross-disciplinary learning becomes a powerful tool of engagement. Through a pedagogy focused on relationships, it encouraged in students themselves, an openness to recognising new knowledges and perspectives, which could lead to the 'deeper set transformation' that is so needed in our education system.

Knowledge in Each Other

Barnett makes the distinction between knowledge and knowing, with knowledge being a set of understandings of the world, and knowing being the process of developing ideas or individual worldviews (Barnett, 2009:432). The process of coming to know, therefore, brings forth dispositions, qualities or aspects of being human. In general, I found that students' reflections and main learnings that they expressed fell into this category of dispositions and qualities, therefore being the way in which human beings engage with and make their way in the world (Barnett, 2009:433). Students spoke about 'eye-opening experiences', learning acceptance, respect and dignity as a few of many examples. For many students, it was a different kind of 'knowing' that was being developed. This therefore links with the theory of transformational learning, where learning is aimed at changing not only *what* we know, but *how* we know as well (Kegan, 2009:42). The process of learning is inherently socially embedded, and to understand learning and development, one must understand the cultural and historical factors as well as the institutional and social context in which this process of knowledge production occurs (Ardichivili, 2002:35).

On the second day of the course, we divided into small groups to begin a discussion around the word 'community'. The student facilitators used numbers to divide us into groups with people we would not have previously interacted with. We swivelled our rather heavy green chairs round so that we formed an attempt at a circle on either side of the long desk. I could sense a bit of hesitation in my group to engage, and so we began by discussing the complexities of the word 'community' and the different ways it can be used with regards to geography, interests or shared values. As we became more comfortable with each other, we spoke about our own experiences of communities. The conversation then turned to the theme of segregation, and the different ways we experience this. We spoke about segregation at

UCT, and two of the international students in my group, one from Zimbabwe and one from Rwanda, expressed their concerns about not feeling a part of the UCT community. When they go home, they are identified as UCT students, but here, they feel quite excluded. Two of the male group members also gave an example of racial segregation in their residences dining hall. The conversation reached a level of honesty that opened our eyes to the hearing and learning through each other's experiences. We were therefore able to engage with the concept of 'community', through different lived experiences. Therefore by actively recognising student voices and experiences as valid, we began to open ourselves to new forms of knowledge.

As one of the lecturers said, during a session on the challenges of sanitation, 'knowledge is not only that I can express a formula of how water runs down a hill'. What the SI course is doing is disrupting that notion of what constitutes 'knowledge' by encouraging an engagement with real life experiences and relationships. Nyamnjoh refers to 'a meaningful dialogue' needing to happen between different forms of knowledge, particularly in relation to the creativity of popular epistemologies in contrast to the knowledge hierarchies of the colonial education system. By the end of the first week, every student I spoke to commented on the small group interactions, sharing and deep level of engagement between each other as being the most interesting and valuable part of the course thus far. One student expressed the impact of this by saying,

> "*It is the level of engagement amongst each other and the way burden is placed on the students to search for answers and dig deeper in conversations, other than spoon feeding them. This is a great way of creating lasting significance and impact*"

Therefore the processes of coming to know are emphasised through an experience of a deeper interaction and engagement that encourages students to think critically about their worldviews. A similar large group activity brought this forward as we all stood in the front of the lecture venue, and the facilitators read out statements around global power dynamics, which we had to respond to by moving to different sides of the room, depending on whether we agreed or disagreed with the statement. For each of the statements there was always a split between those who agreed and those who disagreed, and those in the middle who couldn't make up their minds. The act of physically standing for what you believe in was a powerful experience in questioning why something was important to you. These activities disrupted the

traditional 'lecture-style' format that students were used to, encouraging engagement and learning between students. Janice McMillan described the course as a 'noisy course', encouraging us to ask the tricky questions in the safe space of learning. This was all evidence of the pedagogical emphasis on finding knowledge in each other.

Building Relationships

One of my key informants Ncedo[5] was a fourth year civil engineering student, who was originally from the Eastern Cape, and grew up in an informal settlement in one of Cape Town's township areas. His eyes twinkled as he recalled childhood memories of playing in the streets of his informal settlement, dropping his bag off at home and rushing down with his friends to the field, 'the field was the thing' (Interview). He spoke about how for him engineering was about one day being able to better the situation from which he came. Ncedo commented on the challenges of studying in an environment where social capital (Bourdieu, 1986) often means more in terms of what you are able to achieve. Social capital therefore refers to the cultural resources one accumulates through networks of connections that create mutual and to some extent institutionalised relationships (Bourdieu, 1986).

Ncedo spoke about the insecurities he often felt in situations where others had more resources than him, saying "…you get these guys, they get like 98 [percent] or something (*chuckle*), and then you got like 55 in this one thing, then you're put in a group with them…and it's very difficult for you to say anything in those circumstances." Ncedo expressed this experience of relative privilege and social capital when he said,

> *"They have brothers, or master students they're friends with them, and they got all this information, like okay you're going to get a project like that, and they're going to help you out, and they sort of tell you what it is exactly, and they give you their paper or their test that they did, and it was similar to what you were doing, you don't have to put that much effort actually, if you have those resources."*

This statement expresses the context of institutional hierarchies and power structures that favour a certain set of norms and values, leaving some students experiencing a sense of inadequacy. Morreira's work speaks to this as she outlines how particularly black students

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[5] Pseudonyms were used for all student participants.

are positioned as somehow deficient 'in that they lack the (Eurocentric) cultural capital the institution demands' (Morreira, 2015:3). However, for Ncedo, the SI course was different:

> *"This course, it's everyone. It's like, let's all learn. The people I talk to, it feels like they're also like me. It feels like they also care about what I have to say, about learning what I have"*

Ncedo continues to show how this level of engagement transcended perceived boundaries between students,

> *"I was talking even with that other guy, he's from Constantia[6]. And I'm like yoh, I would never ever talk to this guy. I mean, we're so different, very different. But we're really not that different. It's just this time, we got to interact with this course. But normally I would feel like, ah this guy's from Constantia…ah you're from there. I don't think I would have been like 'hey man'."*

Therefore Ncedo's experiences provide insight firstly into the way in which social capital plays a role in perpetuating social divides and a sense of inadequacy amongst some students as they navigate the Eurocentric institutionalized culture of universities. Jansen describes it as a "problem of social, cultural and intellectual recognition" stemming from the symbolic invisibility of black students in institutions that "still convey an overwhelming sense of whiteness from the complexion of the professoriate to the cultural rituals and symbols of everyday life" (Jansen, 2015). However, the SI course attempted to disrupt this narrative by creating spaces for students to simply talk to each other and share experiences.

Conclusion

Throughout the course, the emphasis on relationship building and crossing perceived boundaries, taking in new perspectives and engaging with each other's life experiences as valuable sources of knowledge became a fundamental learning point for all of us. By stressing the importance of relationships, and through this, treating student experiences as valid sources of knowledge, the colonial epistemologies of knowledge hierarchies begin to unravel. Therefore by 'practicing a kind of epistemic disobedience' (Morreira, 2015:11),

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[6] Constantia is a wealthy area in the southern suburbs, historically reserved for white people, and often used as a metaphor for the rich, white upper class.

through a pedagogy focused on relations of being, new forms of knowledge were brought into the classroom. The site visits were the next important element in this process of recognising new forms of knowledge, and give deeper insight into the impact of community engagement in the learning process.

Chapter 2 – Community Engagement

Morreira's research shows that in the context of an English-speaking, 'white' university, in the sense that 'colonial epistemologies have privileged an ahistorical mode of thinking', there is a need to adapt teaching and learning to the cultural resources that students bring (Morreira, 2015:4). Nyamnjoh makes the similar argument that the education system in Africa has 'failed to contextualise standards and excellence to the needs and conditions of Africans' (Nyamnjoh, 2012:142). This point could not be more relevant in the context of current student protests that have spread like wild fire across South African universities, calling for an education system that recognises and responds to the needs and local contexts of the students themselves. From the experience of the SI course participants, many students spoke about enjoying the relevance of this course and how they now felt they could engage more with the social issues around them.

This chapter will look specifically at the impact that the site visits had on students, in their learnings and experiences of community engagement. Including elements of community engagement in the curriculum not only makes learning more relevant to current social issues, but also creates the space for students to interrogate what they 'know' in different contexts. Whereas the manner in which community engagement occurs quite rightly raises questions of power, positionality and who benefits, it is ultimately one way in which the narratives of everyday life become active sites of learning, reconnecting academia to local and national socio-cultural contexts. What becomes evident is that even though this course has taken great strides in emphasising the relationship building, mutual respect and knowledge-sharing aspects of community engagement, a critical question needs to be asked with regards to the broader societal discourses that frame students approaches to 'the community'.

Community Members as Educators

The challenge of curriculum transformation is around how to make a curriculum resonate with the experiences of the student in relation to context, or as McMillan said, 'how do we provide for students coming to the curriculum from different backgrounds?' (McMillan, 2015). In theory, the site visits are aimed at creating the space for students to think about what they had been learning regarding the role of infrastructure in community building, through the lives and experiences of local communities members themselves. At each of the

site visits, Janice McMillan was clear about positioning the community partners in full control over what they felt the students ought to know and see. In an initial interview with McMillan, she described it as, 'So when I say I do community engagement and service learning, or community service, it's because we don't serve the community, the community serves us, and teach my students' (Interview). The community partners are therefore positioned as the educators for the day, adding to the change of perspectives in terms of where and whom knowledge comes in relation to specific socio-economic contexts.

As the red group[7] stepped out of the bus, comments flew about the unavoidable touristic-nature of bringing twenty-five UCT students into an area such as Valhalla Park. Valhalla Park is a predominantly coloured, and Afrikaans-speaking community, positioned on the outskirts of the city of Cape Town, towards the airport. It has faced huge challenges in terms of gang violence and drug abuse, which are some of the issues that the Valhalla Park United Front Civic Association seeks to address through their youth programmes. We were ushered into the community library and found a place to sit around small desks in a space between rows of colourful books, the children's section of the library. We sat facing towards a row of six or seven middle-aged coloured women, who we would soon find out formed the members of the Valhalla Park United Front Civic Association, and who would be our guides for the day.

Janice McMillan had done her PhD research in this area, and had built long-lasting relationships, particularly with the community leader Gertie. Gertie sat in the middle, and as a way of introduction, asked us all to introduce ourselves and say where we come from. She stressed the importance of saying where we came from, saying that she had worked with students from all over the world. As the first student introduced himself, one of the older ladies made a comment about asking if he was single or not, which had everyone laughing and immediately feeling more relaxed. With all the introductions, there was quite a lot of teasing, with comments like 'I can see from your cheeky face', and '…ah you're vannie Kaap'[8], generating more laughter, which seemed like their way of making the students feel welcome and a part of the group.

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[7] Referring to the different colour groups that students were divided in for the purpose of the site visits.
[8] Afrikaans slang for 'van die Kaap', meaning 'from the Cape'

For the rest of this introductory session in the library, students sat transfixed as Gertie shared her story and the work of the Civic Front. Gertie spoke of being a single mother with three children and living in a shack. She explained how when she moved into a house, she kept being evicted as she could not pay the rent. However, she went to the rent office, and explained her situation and was able to negotiate with them, to allow her to stay and work out how she would pay the rent based on her salary. From then on, people would come to her for advice, and ask for her assistance with the rent office, and she soon became a spokesperson for the community, becoming involved in community activism full-time.

She recounted many experiences of the struggles of evictions, such as times when city officials and police would take belongings out of people's homes, and community members would come and carry everything back inside, or how they hung their washing outside the Civic Centre in Town, in a form of protest to get running water in the area. Gertie glowed with pride as she recounted these stories and successes of the United Front Civic Association. The students were all listening very carefully, transfixed by her dynamism of storytelling. This initial engagement paved the way for the rest of the day, where we walked in smaller groups, each with one of the United Front Civic Association members, through to the clinic, the school, the informal settlement and the recreational centre. In each group community members avidly shared their stories in connection to what we were seeing.

The community partners are therefore positioned as the educators for the day, adding to the change of perspectives in terms of from where and to whom knowledge comes in relation to specific socio-economic contexts. Similarly on the site visit to 'South Road', the challenges of transport routes and city infrastructure was brought to life through the knowledge and lived experiences of the members of the South Road Family Association. South Road is a long and narrow road that runs through Plumstead and Wynberg in the southern suburbs of Cape Town. During Apartheid, South Road acted as a divider between the middle-income white area of Plumstead, and lower-income coloured and black area of Wynberg. Today it is a racially integrated community, however the income divide can still be seen in terms of the housing and infrastructure provided in each area, with the houses in Wynberg being a lot more compact with gates right onto the road, whereas the Plumstead houses have larger yard areas and trees down the pavements. The City has planned to implement a MyCiti bus route down South Road, demolishing the homes of 26 families in order to create space for the six-lane highway required. Residents of these households, some of whom have lived there since

being evicted from District 6 during Apartheid, received eviction notices from the city, without a proper public participation process, and therefore formed the South Road Family Association, taking the City to court.[9]

As we walked down South Road, again in small groups each with a member of the South Road Family Association, I was overwhelmed by the amount of information and knowledge that the gentleman leading our group was able to share with us. He told us about the details of the cities transport plans, where the money comes from, what different roads and routes mean, as well as the rights they were claiming in terms of their court case. From the slow speed that the other groups moved along the road, I could tell that they were in a similar position of having many questions to ask with an endless source of knowledge and intellect to receive answers from.

In terms of challenging 'epistemological xenophilia' and knowledge hierarchies, Nyamnjoh says that one of the main ways of providing for popular epistemologies is through 'considering and treating the everyday life of social spaces as bona fide research sites [which] entails, inter alia, taking the popular, the historical and the ethnographic seriously, and emphasizing interdependence and conviviality' (Nyamnjoh, 2012:147). Through the site visits, students were forced to engage with the historical, social and spatial narrative of the city in understanding the daily experiences that were being shared by community members. They questioned the role of city officials and state authority, thought through power dynamics in relation to space and infrastructure, and considered critically their own professional journeys as future engineers.

Who Benefits?
Winkler argues that 'while community-university engagements yield various benefits for students, faculty, and nongovernmental organisations, engagements are not always necessarily of benefit to the members of a community with whom we engage' (Winkler, 2013:216). Winkler evaluated a community engagement project, involving students, community members at two particular sites, and a partnering organisation, in terms of the values of Participatory Action Research Methodology. These values included empowerment,

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[9] The South Road Family Association have since won their Court case - http://beta.iol.co.za/news/crime-courts/victory-for-south-road-families-1928891

social justice and equity, supportive relationships and inclusion, mutual learning and reciprocal education, and respect for diversity and power sharing (Winkler, 2013:217). Her evaluation suggested that in terms of these values, it was the students and community organisation that benefitted the most, above community members themselves. Winkler suggested that the reasons for this include the poor management of expectations, stemming from poor communication between all participants in the group (Winkler, 2013:224). Whereas the context and specifics of the course Winkler is referring to is considerably different to the case study at hand, the recommendation of clear communication of expectations is an important one in any form of university-community engagement. The question of who benefits, provides an ethical dilemma through which to interrogate broader conceptions of community development.

In a conversation with Janice McMillan in her car, as we drove out to meet with one of the community partners, she explained that for her the benefit to the community was a sense of investing in the minds of future engineers, and that it was a long-term benefit, and not immediately tangible. This came across very strongly at the South Road site, where the community spokesperson Clive spoke very emotively, stressing the importance of the day in influencing the students as the future engineers of the country. There was a clear sense from the side of the community members present, that they were there to share their story with the students. As the day at South Road came to an end, the spokesperson said he wanted to leave us with one thing. He said,

> *'When an employer asks you to do something you don't want to do, when one does not question the how's and why's, when you stop caring...that is when you lose your humanity' (Fieldnotes)*

He went on to say,

> *'I know I'm turning you into activists now, asking these kinds of questions'.*
> *(Fieldnotes)*

The message and intention was clear, 'to develop communities you have to start with communities' (Fieldnotes). This therefore shows that in the case of the South Road, the expectation of the community members were in relation to the students' future engagements

as engineers. Interestingly, of our own accord a group of students wrote a letter of support to the South Road Family Association for them to use in their court case, symbolising one way in which the process of reciprocity gets negotiated in spaces of university-community engagement. At Valhalla Park, one of the community members brought around a raffle as we were all eating lunch, asking for financial contributions to the local youth centre. The forms of reciprocity were therefore not clearly defined, but get negotiated and are specific to the different contexts.

This was different to what some students experienced at other sites, where they felt community members were sharing their stories with an expectation that the students would go away, develop a solution and come back and help. Joseph, from Ghana, described it in the following way:

"Because the way they presented their problems, the way they showed us around, it was like okay you guys are looking at this, then you're going to go back to UCT and going to design things or talk to people, or something's going to happen. But that's not the case. This is just a course. What they don't know is that we're just getting knowledge to write our essays, and unfortunately this is the only course we have like this. So as soon as we pass this, if individuals decide to apply this to their lives or not, they're just going to move on."

Therefore at this particular site visit, the experiences were different in terms of community members' expectations. In a debrief meeting with members of DAG, after the course, the comment was made that community members do not have high expectations of the students, and that they just want their story to be heard. In discussing the perceived benefits of the site visits to community partners themselves, one of the DAG members said that it was about strengthening the facilitation skills and knowledge of the community members, as they were the ones to show the students around. Therefore each site visit was unique in the way that expectations of reciprocity were either communicated or not, both verbally and otherwise. There were also different expectations from the positions of the course lecturers, community partners and students themselves. What this shows is the unique learning environment that the site visits provide for students and community partners to experience a new kind of engagement, negotiating power dynamics and ways of knowing and being in the moment.

Development Discourse

Students definitely valued the diversity of the site visits, and were easily able to make critical comparisons in terms of what they saw and experienced. Often distinctions were made between 'failed' community engagement, and 'successful' community engagement or commenting on the dynamics of power and tension that they witnessed. Students reflected on their main learnings from the site visits being through experiencing different emotions, such as guilt, moments of tension or unease, feeling helpless, recognising privilege or contrasts of different lived realities. Therefore each student experienced the site visits in connection to his or her own lived realities, and most of them were able to make the connection to the importance of the site visits in relation to their future careers. As one student said,

> *"I've had a massive change of mind-set since last week…it goes beyond whether you care or not…they don't have basic human rights…it's blatantly unacceptable. So that's what's impacted me"*

The site visits therefore provided the space for the negotiation of power, privilege and knowledge, challenging students to think through social issues in relation to a specific historical and spatial context, all the while encouraging them to be self-reflexive in terms of their own values and knowledge base. Whereas the concern with this kind of work is often, 'well how do the community benefit?', benefits get manifested and negotiated in different forms through the relationship building process. These site visits could not have happened without the intentional relationship building from both sides of Janice McMillan and the course conveners with the different partnering organisations and community members.

That being said, when interviewing the student facilitators, there was a real concern that the participants would just forget what they had learnt and get caught up in 'the system' once they left the course environment. The concern was that, 'they're going to step out of this, and step into third year urban design, where it's purely about using a computer to be able to make water move in a certain way, [where] you don't consider 'social' at all' (interview with student facilitator). This concern speaks to the fact that there is a broader discourse against which this course is positioned.

This was also evident in the fact that the student responses after the first site visit were rather romanticised, in the sense of commenting on the courage of community partners, and how

surprised and impressed they were at how much the community had achieved under such hardship. There was also quite a strong sense of 'us' and 'them', which needed to be interrogated in more depth. As the conversation was wrapping up, one student raised the point that he felt there was a social contract in the room in terms of what people were saying and having to give positive praise about what they had experienced and witnessed on the site visits. Whereas Janice McMillan did respond to this by encouraging students to be critical, the student facilitators also felt the course needed a clear 'devils-advocate position', to 'free the space' (interviews with student facilitators). Keenan, one of the student facilitators who is an engineering student and had been a participant and tutor of the Global Citizenship programme, captured this concern, and the need to address a broader, more powerful and ingrained development discourse.

> *"So I think a lot of the students approach the course, with a mind-set of, I'm going in to learn about how to engage with the community, and that's it. Like I got the feeling throughout the whole course, and even towards the end now, that some of the students didn't grasp the fact that we're just seeing that communities can fend for themselves, that they are innovative, that they should be included in the process because they know what they're talking about, rather than…I think a lot of them still view it as, they should be included in the process, because we're told to."* (Interview)

Keenan is referring to a very important question here, asking if the role of community engagement at a teaching and learning level, is simply just to add community engagement as a skill for engineers, or is it about a shift in perspective from seeing and engaging with the world as a living system instead of a machine that needs to be fixed? He goes on to say that,

> *"So that's maybe an area where, you can see that, that is the courses intention, but perhaps because of the background of engineers at UCT, it's so well ingrained in us, that we do things this way, that to break out of that mould is really difficult."* (Interview)

Breaking this mould is therefore about addressing the broader development discourse that positions 'communities' as static, and in a state of needing to be developed. Hobart explains how this is part of a long history of western representation of other societies, in which the discipline of anthropology is no different, and how western scientific knowledge has influenced the development discourse in the sense of indigenous knowledges being ignored or dismissed (Hobart, 1993:2; Escobar, 1995). Scientific epistemologies that have framed

existing knowledge hierarchies have therefore influenced the development discourse in the sense that 'the relationship of developers and those-to-be-developed is constituted by the developers knowledge and categories' (Hobart, 1993:2).

At every level the SI course attempts to disrupt this discourse by bringing in indigenous knowledges as an active voice in the conversation. For example, at the end of the course, the community partners were invited to campus to hear the group presentations. It was made clear that the students were not presenting *to* the community partners, in the sense of providing advice or telling them what to do, but instead it was about sharing their learnings with each other. This was for the most part successful, however the broader discourse of positioning communities as bounded places of inadequacy that need to be fixed, remains a concern.

Conclusion

Therefore although the SI course attempted to disrupt the assumptions of engineers working in 'development spaces', it was just a beginning in terms of addressing the 'macro-powers that are exercised at the level of daily life' (Foucault, 1980:59). What was important was that the way in which this was done, began to open up the space for different forms of knowledge to exist, particularly through positioning community members as active educators in the course process. Through the site visits, students were exposed to a new form of learning, engaging with real life experiences as text through which to apply their thinking, as well as reflect on their own expectations and values in settings embedded with power and privilege. Overall the emphasis on relationship building, explored in Chapter 1, continued into the process of the site visits, as the production of knowledge was recognised as a social process of co-creation.

Chapter 3 – Decolonising the University

In a session on 'dialogue for community interaction', a guest lecturer asked us all, on a rough piece of paper, to simply draw a house using our non-dominant hand. After a few moments of excited chatter as we all attempted the exercise, she took in some of the drawings from the students and projected them onto the screen. The majority of people had drawn a square house, with a slanted roof, two windows and a doorknob on the front door (Appendix 4). The lecturer quickly made the point by asking us how many of us had actually lived in, or seen a house that looked like this. She stressed how these were classic 'European' houses, that we'd seen in story books, with slanted roofs for the snow, and old-fashioned doorknobs that hardly exist anymore. The challenge was to think about or embedded 'evoked sets', or concepts that frame the way we engage with the world.

This exercise provides a metaphor for the way in which our university curricula are 'still caught in the tentacles of Eurocentric knowledge production' (Dei, 2014:166). We are required to reproduce the 'house', being the valued knowledge of colonial epistemologies that celebrate dichotomies of social science and objective science, nature and culture, the real and unreal, all the while producing a sense of inadequacy and devaluation of 'African creativity, agency and value systems' (Nyamnjoh, 2012:138). And the act of drawing it with our 'non-dominant hand', is symbolic of the mode through which this knowledge is translated, namely an unfamiliar pedagogy to our indigenous ways of being and knowing, often in an unfamiliar language. The question therefore is how to move towards a curricula that celebrates different forms of knowledge, draws on and validates local lived experiences and encourages a process of self-reflexive learning, being aware of the disciplinary gazes we obtain.

Multi-centricity

In one of the pre-site visit meetings, we met with members of DAG and the community members of PJS Nonqubela, site 89, an informal settlement in the middle of Khayelitsha. I was with Janice and two other lecturers, all of us white and in a position of privilege in this context. I was very aware of the uncomfortable sense of "poorism" that I felt as we walked down the narrow dust road, which the leader said was called Mandela Road, in between tightly packed homes, a mixture of shacks and more formal housing, stepping over large

puddles of leaking sewage and ducking under colourful washing lines. The informal settlement of site 89 was built on a wetland, and is in a bowl shape, so the water flows down into the centre, which is where the city has placed four or five rows of concreted-in toilets. This toilet area in the middle of the informal settlement is therefore overflowing with water, as many of the pipes are broken or drainage systems not working. I watched a group of children playing in the sand, incredibly close to the overflowing leaking toilets, while the Phil Collins song 'True Colours" blasted from one of the nearby homes, in a way that seemed to mock the situation.

As we walked back to the car, I tried to ask the community leader what he thought of the UCT students coming, and whether it was a good thing. He answered briefly by speaking about them bringing the knowledge and the surveys, and then he continued with sharing his own knowledge and experiences of the struggles of water and sanitation in the area, as if my initial question wasn't that interesting or important. The same thing happened at Gertie's house, where seated on her couch in her small home in Valhalla Park, the smell of hot curry cooking in the kitchen, we asked specific questions regarding community engagement and the role of the university in community spaces. The way in which Gertie answered was to give a powerful recount of her own personal story, weaving in her interactions with lecturers and students at the University of Cape Town, but ultimately sharing with us a small part of her struggle.

In both these scenarios, it was as if our conversations represented the clash and then the coming together of two different kinds of knowledges. Myself and the other academics, asking specific 'academic-style' questions, searching for metaphors and meaning, in contact with the real life struggles and experiences of every day people. The different knowledge sets could not be clearer as well as the power of embedded institutional knowledge in framing the way I approached the situation through the questions I asked. Once I realised this, I began to open my mind to the different ways in which knowledge flows and is used in different situations.

Dei argues for the need to remake our institutions, through practical strategies of Africanizing the curriculum (Dei, 2014:176). The first approach here is to integrate different knowledges, creating a multi-centric learning space that breaks down existing knowledge hierarchies (Dei, 2014:177). The SI course adopts this approach of being a multi-centric learning space on a

variety of levels. Firstly, as can be seen in Chapter One, the emphasis is placed on the students lived experience as a fundamental source of knowledge. Building on this, the course is structured in such a way with guest lecturers and speakers, increasing the number of stakeholders contributing to the course material. The course material itself is also diverse, with the course outline including newspaper articles, academic articles, and videos. The site visits form the main text in terms of disrupting conventional forms of knowledge production, and positioning community members as educators. Dei refers to this as a 'dialogical curriculum co-creation' (Dei, 2014:178), involving students, educators and local communities, in integrating multiple ways of knowing into the curriculum. Students therefore recognise that knowledge exists in different forms and different spaces, as well as the importance of recognising multiple perspectives in different situations.

Indigeneity

The danger that lies in this conversation, is by advocating for 'other' forms of knowledge to be recognised, you are continuing to re-centre the 'north/western' as the 'original', continuing to place African indigenous knowledge as the essentialised 'other'. This is only changed at an epistemic or embedded knowledge level. The second step towards decolonising the curriculum, put forward by Dei, therefore revolves around the notion of 'indigeneity' in the sense of recognising student identities and life experiences as valid and integral to the learning process. Dei writes that "African indigenous knowledges speak to a local cultural resource knowledge base expressive of ideas, norms, cultural knowledges and philosophies possessed by local people/communities concerning realities of everyday living and survival" (Dei, 2014:167). Therefore indigenous knowledge in the sense of local experiences of place and space, are crucial to reframing the 'African' university.

Joseph, from Ghana, is studying electrical and computer engineering, but wants to work in investments, funding social entrepreneurship initiatives across the continent. Based on his own life experience, he was able to comment on how important it was for him that his education be rooted in the African context.

> *"We claim the position of Africa's best university, and yet we do not work in the*
> *African context. When our parents come here for graduation, UCT looks like a*

European university. The buildings itself look like a European university. I do not want to study in a university that isn't brought up in my own continent"

Dei argues that 'the starting point and the finishing line of education should be students' immediate life experience and local context' (Dei, 2012:171). Knowledge itself is a product of experience (Chitonge, 2015), and we need to bring ourselves more into the experiences of knowledge production. More than anything on a practical level, personal experiences give access to deeper understandings of knowledge.

In preparation for the site visits, Janice McMillan emphasised the point that some of the places we would be going to, would not be unfamiliar to some students in the class, as they would have grown up in similar areas or be living there currently. She said that it would be important to draw on these students as resources in our conversations about the site visits. The emphasis was therefore to talk about the site visits and course material from the starting point of your own experience. It is important then to recognise the different starting points from which students come to engage with their academic curricula. Indigeneity will therefore have different meanings, depending on social context. However what is important in the process of decolonising the curriculum, is to acknowledge these differences as valid forms of knowledge production.

Reflexivity

Bringing in local experiences and validating multiple forms of knowledge, is further encouraged by a process of self-reflexive learning and reflexivity. Tanja Winkler explains the intention behind forms of engaged scholarship as hoping to inspire students to become sensitive to the everyday hardships of many of the people who are often just left on the outskirts of city planners' projects. In adopting a process of 'applied and self-reflexive learning students begin to grasp the importance of developing interpersonal skills, and an openness to the experiences and perceptions of diverse others' (Winkler, 2013:215). This leads to recognising and respecting local knowledges while reflecting on their own values. Through their reflection papers as well as the countless opportunities to reflect in small groups throughout the course, an emphasis was placed on this process of reflection.

Both Matthew and Amy reflected on the experience at the PJS Nonqubelo site visit, where as a way of introduction, seated in the small crèche just on the edge of the informal settlement, each person was invited to introduce themselves in their home language. Once they had gone around the group, about 10 different languages had come up, giving rise to multiple reflections on the impact of language and power dynamics. Amy spoke about this experience saying,

> *"It immediately created a different dynamic in the group, and it was really interesting to feel how excluded you could be. I was so aware of how powerful language is, but how included we were being, and how much care there was to make sure everyone understood and was part of it."*

Similarly in his reflection paper, Matthew wrote about the experience in the following way,

> *"Social, cultural and class based barriers had been lowered, all feelings of power imbalance had been diffused and the sense of the world's inequality had somewhat vanished. Up until then I had not realised how much being fluent in English has privileged me, and how disempowering it can be to expect someone to communicate in your mother tongue as opposed to theirs"*

Both of these statements show the students clear ability to engage with an experience at a deeper level, thinking about their own positions in society in connection to values and knowledge. By incorporating active reflection into the curriculum it validates these experiences as worthy.

In the SI course, reflection pieces formed the main method of assessment, with two shorter reflective writing pieces, a conceptual essay and group project on one of the course themes, and a longer reflection essay at the end of the course, making up the students' submissions for assessment. The students were therefore assessed on their ability to engage with the course concepts from the position of three overlapping identities; being a student at UCT, being an active citizen in a wider country context, and being a future professional engineer. Every student I interviewed was able to make the connection between what they had learnt as part of the SI course, and their future careers. Similarly from the course evaluations the phrase 'eye-opening' was used multiple times to describe the experience of the course and

key learning moments. Reflection therefore became the means through which assessment was made, looking at how students were able to identify their own learning moments and develop new ways of seeing their position in the world. Valuing reflexivity as an active part of our curricula and grading requirements is therefore a central part of decolonising our universities.

Conclusion

Through the different pedagogical approaches used in the SI course, steps are being taken in following Dei's central tenets in decolonising the curriculum of African institutions. Particularly through a process of deconstructing embedded epistemologies, the SI course challenges students to think about knowledge in a new way, recognising multiple sources of knowledge, rooted in local experiences as vital to creating a reflexive and socially responsive education system.

Conclusion

On the 14th October, 2015 an email popped up on my screen from Janice McMillan, saying that a group of students were gathering to continue the discussion of what they had gained from the SI course, recognising the need to take the conversation further and not lose touch with what they had learnt and experienced. I rushed over to Snape 4B, and entered the room to find a group of about fourteen students sitting in a circle at the front of the lecture hall, continuing the SI tradition of disrupting the classroom set up of seats and desks in rows. I was warmly welcomed into the circle and introduced to the discussion question of, 'why do you feel that these two hours are best spent in an SI discussion session?' Students spoke about wanting to take SI to a next level, saying that they are not taught the social impact of their work as engineers effectively, and reflecting on how the SI course brought in the human element and moulded their personalities. One student described it as being treated as a human with agency in the SI course setting, and going back to other courses and being treated as a student number, or in his words, the 'source of wrong answers to technical questions'.

Similarly in the follow up of the course, certain students took it upon themselves to hold a meeting with the Dean of the Engineering Faculty, to advocate for why the SI course should be compulsory for all engineering students. The students are therefore speaking for themselves in terms of showing the impact that this course has had. With this in mind, the aim of this thesis was simply to contribute in the sense of theoretically framing the importance of making our education system relevant to the student experiences and needs of local communities.

Therefore to take up Nyamnjoh's call for the role of universities and research produced to be more relevant to the countries and communities they serve (Nyamnjoh, 2012:148), social responsiveness and community engagement in teaching and learning provides one such avenue. As per the 1997 White Paper on Transformation of Higher Education, a large emphasis was placed on reviewing the broader curriculum in terms of 'content, relevance, design and delivery', under the guiding fundamental principle of equity and redress (Ministry of Education, 1997). A commitment was made to exploring the potential of programmes that incorporate community engagement, "to answer the call of young people for constructive social engagement" (Ministry of Education, 1997: point 2.36). Today, nearly twenty years

later, the call from young people is getting even louder, questioning the role of the university in responding to local needs and contexts.

The findings from this thesis have therefore shown that by adopting a pedagogy that integrates our historically different disciplines, taking students knowledge and experiences as a starting point, and encouraging deeper interactions between students, crossing perceived social boundaries; new forms of knowledge become validated in an academic space. Community engagement, in the sense of positioning community members as educators, is one way in which the narratives of lived experiences become texts through which to consider academic content. In doing this, there needs to be an awareness of the ingrained power dynamics and broader development discourse that exist in community-university contact zones. But ultimately, it allows for popular epistemologies to enter and disrupt the current knowledge hierarchies, contributing to students' personal growth, critical awareness and the broader transformation of institutions of higher education.

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Appendix 1

SI Course outline:

W1	Mon 15th June Part 1 Intro: Key concepts (JM) PM Movie: Shamiela's House & discussion (SO)	Tues 16th PUBLIC HOLIDAY	Wed 17th What is 'community'? case study & problem of a single story PM Community engagement: challenges & opportunities (MBL/TW)	Thurs 18th Dialogue for community interaction (JE)	Fri 19th Field visit Details to be confirmed 2pm-3pm reflection on field visit
W2	Mon 22nd Field visit Details to be confirmed 2pm-3pm reflection on field visit	Tues 23rd Understanding perspectives: case studies, group work & input	Wed 24th What is 'development'?	Thurs 25th Development & global studies/ public service: perspectives from the global north (Dr Nick Longo Providence College USA)	Fri 26th Field visit Details to be confirmed 2pm-3pm reflection on field visit & Part 1
W3	Mon 29th Part 2 Overview: Urbanisation & social infrastructures (VW) PM Movie: Waste recycling in Lagos	Tues 30th June Sustainability – intro and link to concept of SI (HvB)	Wed 1st July Community engagement: challenges & opportunities (TW/MBL)	Thurs 2nd Field visit Details to be confirmed 2pm-3pm reflection on field visit	Fri 3rd Food security (JBL)
W4	Mon 6th Climate change (ERC)	Tues 7th Water & sanitation (UR)	Wed 8th 10am-12pm Critical issues (JM) e.g. disability HIV/AIDS 2pm-3pm Careers Service	Thurs 9th Preparation for presentations	Fri 10th 9am-4pm *Issue-based group presentations (20%)*
W5	Mon 13th Revision/work on papers	Tues 14th Revision/work on papers	Wed 15th *EXAM: 9am hand in of final paper in 2 parts (2x 25%=50%)*		

Appendix 2

List of different sites:

Site Name	Description
South Road	South Road refers to the members of the South Road Family Association who came together after having received eviction notices from the City of Cape Town
Valhalla Park	Valhalla Park refers to the members of the Valhalla Park United Front Civic Association who are a community activist organisation
Egoli – Philippi Horticulture Area	Egoli is one of several informal settlements in the Philippi Horticultural Area.
Mothers Unite	Mothers Unite refers to a community organisation based in Lavender Hill.
Freedom Park	Freedom Park is an area within Tafelsig, Mitchells Plain, which was previously an informal settlement that then was upgraded into formal housing.
VPUU	The Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU), works with city officials and community organisations on infrastructural development, through a model of community participation.
PJS Nonqubela	PJS Nonqubela is an informal settlement in Khayelitsha.
Spine Road	Spine Road is a small informal settlement in Woodstock.

Appendix 3 - Rough guide of Interview Questions

These questions formed a rough outline of my interviews. However, with adopting the method of informal interviews, the participants themselves directed the conversations, and follow up questions were asked around points of interest.
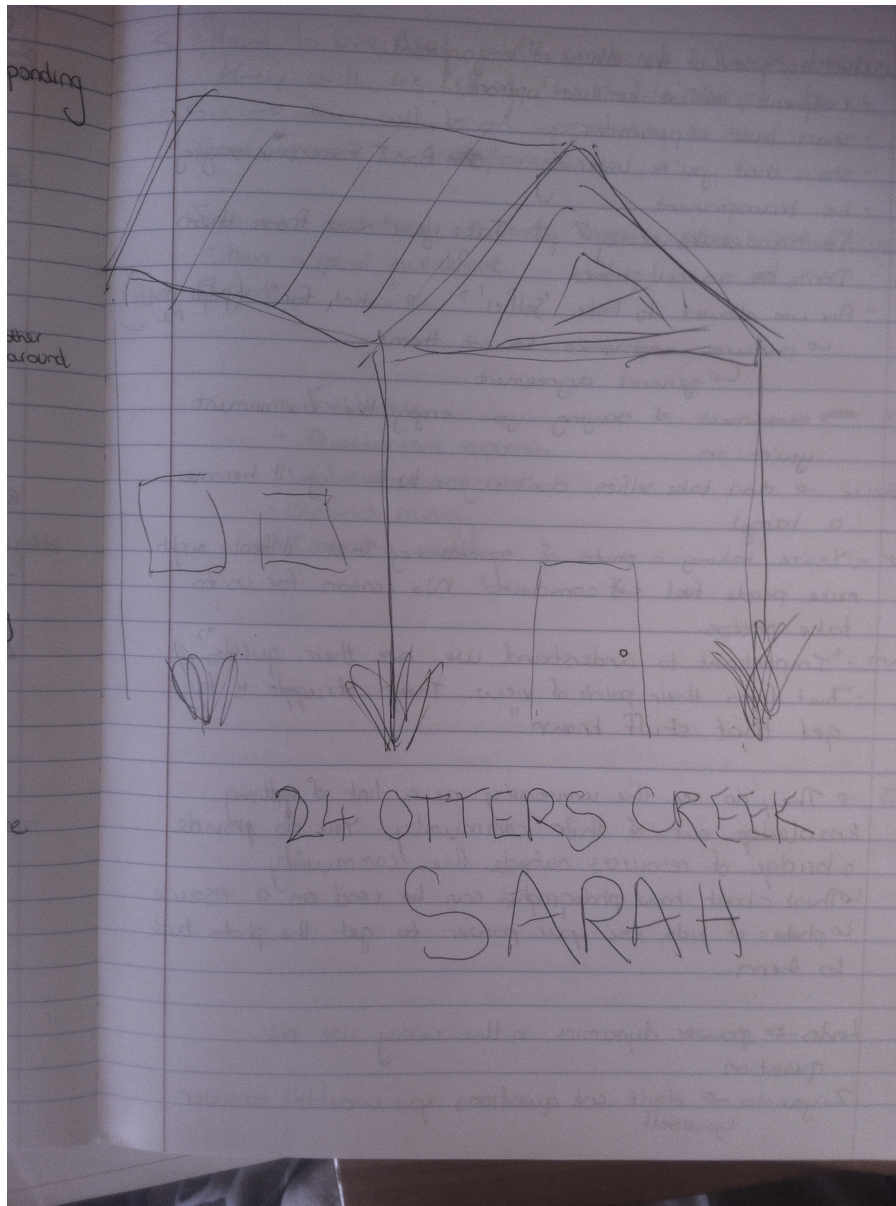
Interview Questions for Students:

1. General introduction - what are you studying, where do you come from…etc.

2. Reasons for choice of study field? Choice of university?

3. Is this course very different to your other courses, if so how?

4. What's been the biggest learning experience for you?

5. How do you define community engagement?

6. What do you think about the content of this course? Readings? Themes?

   a. Which readings/content have stood out for you most?

7. What are your thoughts on the role of engineers in society?

8. How were the site visits for you?

Interview Questions for Tutors/Facilitator:

1. General Introduction

2. So how did you get involved as a facilitator for this course?

3. What have been some of the learning experiences for you during this course?

4. What have been some of the challenges?

Appendix 4

My own drawing of a house, from a class activity (Chapter Three):