18 THE UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM AS ENGAGING WITH EXTERNAL NON-ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES

A GROUNDED THEORY INQUIRY APPROACH

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INTRODUCTION

The university curriculum needs to be central to South African higher education debates. Curricular content is expected to be commensurate with the expectations of a wide array of stakeholders of which students, their parents, the government and future employers of students are but a few (Botha 2009). This array of expectations and the consequences for curriculum design, however, make any discussion on the curriculum a complex matter and hence a worthwhile topic to research. Curriculum design is the incubator of the curriculum and has been established as one of the sub-fields of higher education studies (Bitzer & Wilkinson 2009). Community engagement, a further sub-field of higher education, has recently emerged and is closely connected to curriculum design of specifically experiential learning-based curricula. Such curricula which complement vocational training as prescribed by professional boards, thus bringing students in touch with practice, may contribute to students developing a sense of social responsibility towards society as a whole (Smith-Tolken 2010). Experiential learning pedagogies are based on engaging students in experiences that enhance learning. Community work may be one such vehicle that can provide such experiences. When these experiences are structured as part of the curriculum to foster social responsibility and provide exposure to practice in their field of study, such pedagogies add more complexity to curriculum design.

Extensive theoretical frameworks have been developed for the learning process and outcomes for students, based on experiential learning theories (Kolb 1984), but studies on the curriculum as engaging with external communities is a neglected area of study. Literature on curriculum design tends to be descriptive and a-theoretical (Hefferman 2001; HEQC/CHE 2006; Mouton & Wildschut 2007). Theoretical grounding or engagement with theory has also been found to be one of the weak points of higher education studies and subsequently higher education curriculum design studies (Tight 2004). Grounded theory is a methodology that is conducive to conducting an

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inquiry for the purpose of constructing theory (Bryant & Charmaz 2007b). It is also considered to be one of the research methodologies that are conducive to small-scale educational studies on a micro-level functioning with an interactive and emergent character (Creswell 1998; Denscombe 2007; Merriam 2002). Such studies focus on interaction with the self or others on an ongoing basis as being the phenomenon under study. Through its systematic comparative analysis it could shed light on interactive educational processes such as educator-learner, educator-educator, educator-institution and so forth.

However, the aim of this chapter is to give a brief overview of community engagement as the third core function of higher education institutions and its implication for higher education curricular design. A brief summary is given of what grounded theory methodology entails and how it is conducive to curriculum studies in higher education. I draw on my own work where I used the methodology in a study of seven experiential learning modules that included engagement with external non-academic communities. I also draw on other studies to demonstrate its application, which leads me to evaluate the method from both a positive and a negative perspective.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND THE HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULUM

The concepts 'community engagement' and 'the higher education curriculum' are central to the content of this chapter and thus require clarification. The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC 2004:19) describes community engagement (CE) in the South African context as

> ... initiatives and processes through which the expertise of the institution in the areas of teaching and research are applied to address issues relevant to its community.

CE typically finds expression in a variety of forms, ranging from informal and relatively unstructured activities to formal and structured academic programmes addressed at particular community needs (service-learning programmes). Some projects might be conducive to the creation of a better environment for community engagement and others might be directly related to teaching, learning and research. These initiatives and processes take a variety of forms and might be differently structured in each higher education institution.

In the United States of America (USA) the term 'civic engagement' is commonly used. It refers to a particular way of doing teaching, research and service with and in the community. It means very much the same as the term 'community engagement' that is used in South Africa, but it places engagement at the centre of all the activities that emanate from the three university functions (Hatcher & Erasmus 2008; Thomson, Smith-Tolken, Bringle & Naidoo 2008). In the US service learning (SL) is perceived to be the preferred avenue through which civic engagement can be accomplished (Kenny & Gallagher 2002). In South Africa the US perspective is echoed in that SL is one of the methodologies that is prominent in both community and civic engagement, because

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it provides a framework through which service may be integrated into curricular work (Kenny & Gallagher 2002; Le Grange 2005). I define SL in the South African context as a form of community-based experiential learning and a curriculum-based, credit-bearing and carefully structured educational experience in which students participate in an organised community interaction activity that meets identified and agreed upon community goals; reflect on the service activity in order to gain a deeper understanding of module and programme content; acquire a broader appreciation of the discipline and develop an enhanced sense of social responsibility towards society as a whole (adapted from Bringle & Hatcher 2007).

Service learning differs from other forms of experiential learning by giving prominence to reflection as a bridge between service and learning and it strives to transform students' attitudes towards active, socially responsive citizenship in partnership with others (HEQC/CHE 2006; Lazarus 2007). To enable such processes of service, learning and transformation, a curriculum design that is conducive to engaging with non-academic communities is paramount.

Clarifying the HE curriculum is a bigger challenge, as curriculum studies in general focus mainly on the school curriculum and school modes of learning. According to Barnett and Coate (2005:27-28), the higher education curriculum "remains largely unknown" and has emerged as "tacit notions of curricula" that are shaped within certain social contexts rather than based on rigorous research in the field. Barnett and Coate (2005:28-39) point out that these tacit notions frame the HE curriculum as:

- *Outcome pressured* by demands rather than based on research;
- *Content* in terms of breadth and depth;
- *Culture* in the sense that the curriculum misshaped in a fragmented manner, favouring disciplines rather than programs or subject matters;
- *Social reproduction of divisions in society* as a result of the 'hidden curriculum' that favours certain students who has attained a functional literacy as preparation for university rules and forms of communication between lecturer and student;
- *Consumption* where modules provide open choices to recreate programs to fit the purpose of the student as consumer;
- *Liberal education* where the focus is on the expansion of the mind and developing an ability to learn beyond university curricula and which allows personal engagement. (Author's emphasis)

These different frames perpetuate the complexity of studying the higher education curriculum as they are intricately related in shaping it. In this chapter I frame the curriculum as engaging with external non-academic communities which could encompass some of the frames above. The focus in such a curriculum is not only to bridge the theory-praxis divide, but on developing the student as a person, professional and a citizen of society. In my doctoral study, I focused on this framing of the curriculum which implies two main components: service in a community and

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learning while serving. Very few studies, if any, have focused on the actions and process of service, while extensive theoretical frameworks have been developed for the learning process and outcomes for students based on experiential learning theories (Furco 1996; Kolb 1984). Service in this context is a construct and a means developed by the higher education system to benefit student learning and the discovery of knowledge. However, studies in the field tend to concentrate on refining experiential learning and SL theory, with little focus on what kind of theory underlies the service part that is involved (Alperstein 2007). The service part often represents how the community voice is heard. Other studies on service focus on the actions of academic staff in the university as institution rather than the service to non-academic communities, which gives yet another interpretation of the construct 'service' (Macfarlane 2005, 2007). It became evident that clear conceptualisation of the construct 'service' is paramount in order to render it as beneficial to both community and students. This clarity will also impact on the way faculty members engage with communities of placement and will ensure that both parties attach the same meaning to the construct. In this regard I asked the following question: What meanings are developed around service and how does the curriculum become conducive to such engagement? By using grounded theory methodology, I could trace the meanings as well as the processes involved in such engagement between university and community on a micro-curricular level. Below, I give a brief overview of what grounded theory methodology encompasses.

OVERVIEW OF GROUNDED THEORY

Grounded theory emerged from the use of grounded theory methodology (GTM), which comprises "a systematic, inductive, and comparative approach for conducting inquiry for the purpose of constructing theory" (Bryant & Charmaz 2007b:31). In GTM, theoretical frameworks are developed from data which inform and focus further data collection through a form of purposive sampling called theoretical sampling. Concepts and theories are developed through constant comparison of codes that are derived from the data (Denscombe 2007; Glaser 1978). Theory emerges from the data gathered and is likely to offer insight, enhance understanding and provide guidance to action in the context in which the theory was developed. It is explorative in the sense that the researcher keeps an open mind about the field of study and does not have preconceived ideas about the relevance of the concepts or the hypotheses (Denscombe 2007). This does not mean that the researcher has a blank mind, as he or she should have studied the area in order to develop the research question and make sense of the data (Glaser & Strauss 1967).

What should be noted though, is that GTM consists of specific methods and strategies. The former refers to the techniques and methods associated with it in general (e.g. theoretical sampling and coding) and the latter to how those methods are applied in building theory (Charmaz 2002; Denscombe 2007). In all variants of GTM, the following strategies remain the same: simultaneous data collection and analysis; pursuit of emergent themes in early data analysis; discovery of emerging social processes

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in the data; inductive construction of abstract categories that link these processes; and sampling to refine the categories into a theoretical framework specifying causes, conditions and consequences of the studied processes (Charmaz 2002:677).

Since the inception of GTM in 1967, its founders (Glaser & Strauss 1967) developed this methodology in somewhat opposing ontological and epistemological directions, resulting in endorsing a strong positivist (Glaser 1978) and postpositivist (Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998) notion of the original more open-ended grounded theory (Charmaz 2002). Though some of the basic elements of the method remained unchanged (such as coding, categorising and comparative analysis; memo writing; theoretical sampling), the most important criticism against both stances remained their realist ontology and objectivist epistemology (Charmaz 2000).

The paradigmatic influence of post-modernist and post-structuralist qualitative research developed GTM into a further mutation of constructivism with a strong symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective, juxtaposing itself to the objectivist perspective of GTM.

TABLE 18.1 Differences between GTM approaches

Approach	Objectivist	Constructivist
Ontology	▪ Assumes external reality ▪ Assumes discovery of data ▪ Assumes conceptualisations emerge from data	▪ Assumes multiple realities ▪ Assumes multiple constructions of data ▪ Assumes researcher constructs categorisations
Epistemology	▪ Positivist/Postpositivist theoretical perspective ▪ Assumes the neutrality, passivity and authority of the observer ▪ Etic interpretation of data while giving voice to the observed ▪ Views data analysis as an objective process ▪ Aims at parsimonious explanation	▪ Constructivist/Symbolic interactionist perspective ▪ Assumes observer's values, priorities, positions and actions affect views ▪ Emic interpretation of data through inter-subjective interaction with the viewed ▪ Acknowledges subjectivities in data analysis, recognises co-construction of data; engages in reflexivity ▪ Aims for interpretation
Methodology	▪ Guidelines are didactic and prescriptive ▪ Uses axial coding and conditional matrix leading to testable hypotheses ▪ Gives priority to researcher's view ▪ Focuses on developing abstractions	▪ Guidelines are flexible ▪ Uses sensitising concepts embedded in the researchers' discipline and in relation to the research problem ▪ Seeks participants' views and voices as integral to analysis ▪ Focuses on constructing interpretations

Based mainly on Charmaz (2000, 2002, 2008) and Denscombe (2007).

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Table 18.1 depicts the differences between these approaches in terms of ontology, epistemology and methodology through an analysis of the views of the original founders (Glaser & Strauss 1967), the later interpretations of their associates (Glaser 1978, 1992; Strauss & Corbin 1990, 1998), and the view of more recent critics (Bryant & Charmaz 2007b; Denscombe 2007). In the work of the original proponents there is a clear leaning towards the positivistic roots and a mechanistic procedural research process, prompting me to draw heavily on the work of Charmaz (2000, 2002, 2008) in compiling Table 18.1.

In Table 18.1, I categorise the positivist and postpositivist notions as objectivist and the symbolic interactionist notions as constructivist. The role of the researcher plays a defining role in the approach. In the objectivist approach, the traditional detachment and expert view prevails, while in constructivism, there is a close interaction between respondent and researcher. Interactionism focuses on meaning of experience rather than factual evidence of a given situation and complements the constructivist approach in GTM (Charmaz 2000, 2002; Denzin 2001). This form of GTM promotes flexible strategies as the process unfolds and the development of sensitising concepts which give direction to the abstraction of data, while valuing adaptability and pragmatism as principles in the theory-building process (Charmaz 2000, 2002).

The constructivist grounded theory approach is associated with analytical strategies to generate data rather than with data collecting methods (Charmaz 2000). This means that the researcher will purposely choose a set of actions to enhance her analytical ability. Unstructured interviewing is the most common method of data gathering, but aligned with the flexibility of the approach, rich data can be drawn from multiple sources, for example, observations, public records, organisational reports, respondents' diaries, and the researchers' own memos and reflections (Charmaz 2000, 2002, 2007; Denscombe 2007). Data are narrative reconstructions of experience, inter-subjectively shared by the researcher and respondent, which are recorded for analysis.

In the next section, I discuss the GTM analytical framework as it is applied in the constructivist notion.

The analytical framework of GTM comprises five interconnected components, namely the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher; theoretical sampling to generate data during analysis; coding or labelling of phenomena; constant comparison of codes; and from this, the development of concepts and memo writing (Glaser & Strauss 1967). I briefly discuss some of these components of the GTM that are applicable to this study. Theoretical sensitivity is a personal quality of the researcher and indicates an awareness of the subtleties of the meaning of data. The theoretical sensitivity of the researcher is developed from a number of sources (Glaser 1978; Strauss & Corbin 1990).

- The first is the literature, which gives the researcher a rich background of information about the topic and sensitises her to the phenomena under study.

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- Professional experience is another source of sensitivity which develops through years of practice in a field.
- Implicit knowledge from experience is incorporated into the research situation and gives the researcher an ability to gain insight into the situation more rapidly than someone without such experience.
- In addition, the analytical process itself provides an additional source for theoretical sensitivity, as the insights into, and understanding of, the phenomena increase as the researcher interacts with the data (Charmaz 2008; Strauss & Corbin 1990).

A fundamental feature of the emergence of data in GTM derives from active researchers who will interact with data and interpret the data (Charmaz 2008). Theoretical sampling is closely related to, and dependent on, the theoretical sensitivity of the researcher and has been described as "a form of non-probability sampling in which the new sites are consciously selected by the researcher because of their particular characteristics" (Denscombe 2007:99).

Initially the researcher deliberately chooses a site and/or group to be studied that fits the research question and will generate the relevant data (Strauss & Corbin 1990). During analysis, data generation becomes cumulatively aligned with the emerging themes in the data. This implies that the researcher decides what data will be gathered next and where to find them on the basis of provisional theoretical ideas. In this way, it is possible to answer questions that have arisen from the analysis of, and reflection on, previous data (Boeije 2002).

Coding is a process of labelling. Analysis is done by studying the data and doing line-by-line coding through interpretation known as 'open coding', which starts the chain of theory development (Glaser & Strauss 1967). Preference is given to action codes that are synthesised into categories through constant comparison. Coding is highly dependent on constant comparison throughout the analysis, a critical technique in GTM comprising the following actions in close relation to one another (Strauss & Corbin 1990; Charmaz 2008):

- Comparing data with data;
- Labelling data with active specific codes;
- Selecting focused codes;
- Raising telling focused codes to tentative analytic categories;
- Comparing data and codes with analytic categories;
- Constructing theoretical concepts from abstract categories;
- Comparing category with concept;
- Comparing concept with concept.

When the researcher compares data with data, the information may emanate from the same person at different points in time or different persons in the same situation. It may

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also involve comparing incidents with incidents (Boeije 2002; Strauss & Corbin 1990). Constant comparison interprets open codes in relation to one another by identifying 'axes' or central codes and this is referred to as 'axial coding' (Strauss & Corbin 1998). I prefer the term 'selective or focused' coding (see bullets 3 and 4 above) as per Charmaz (2000, 2008), which amounts to sorting and synthesising initial codes. Categories are developed from the focused codes, which subsequently begin to coalesce into abstract configurations of the data – this is ultimately the beginning of a framework. A complexity of categories may be clarified by assigning dimensional properties that evolve from the data and give shape to analytical frameworks (Charmaz 2000; Glaser 1978). This serves the purpose of developing a richer understanding of the phenomena under study.

Memo writing is the middle ground between coding and the completed analysis. The researcher uses memos to remember observations, interpretations and ideas that surface throughout the process and uses them to refine interpretations (Charmaz 2000, 2002, 2007; Creswell 1998; Denscombe 2007).

In the next section, I describe how these components unfold into a research process.

The grounded theory research process occurs in cycles of research activity. Data collection and analysis occur concurrently and researchers move reiteratively between empirical data and an emerging analysis, which becomes progressively more abstract and theoretical (Bryant & Charmaz 2007b).

In a cyclic process the researcher follows certain steps until theoretical saturation is reached. The researcher:

- enters the field of interest;
- decides on a purposive initial sample;
- collects data through interviewing and other sources;
- records the data;
- codes it through interpretation;
- compares interpretation codes from different cases (and different contexts of one case) to develop categories of codes;
- builds concepts from categories;
- orders concepts in a relational order to form theory (Creswell 2002; Denscombe 2007; also see Kunkwenzu and Reddy (2008) for a graphical depiction of this process).

Theoretical sampling evolves and is informed by the emergent theory. If no new concepts emerge, the theory is saturated and can be written up. If not, the cycle goes on.

Data analysis begins during the fieldwork and continues after the data development process is completed (Bowen 2006; Brott & Myers 2002; Kunkwenzu & Reddy 2008). Memo writing throughout the process ensures recording of continuous thinking and analysis by the researcher for writing up when the research process has been completed

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(Charmaz 2002; Denscombe 2007; Glaser 1978; Strauss & Corbin 1998). Sequential interviewing with participants to control interpretation of data ensures that theory is derived from data (Charmaz 2000; Glaser 1978).

APPLICATION OF GTM IN HIGHER EDUCATION CURRICULA AND OTHER RELATED STUDIES

According to Denscombe (2007:99), the grounded theory approach is especially conducive to "small-scale projects using qualitative data for the study of human interaction, and by those whose research is exploratory and focused on particular settings".

Substantive community engagement is closely linked to the empirical situation and practice of a specific context and setting, compared to formal theory, which is more conceptual and generally applicable beyond specific settings (Denscombe 2007). GTM is designed to develop middle-range theoretical frameworks that explain the collected data (Charmaz 2000), which strengthens the selection of this approach for curricular studies.

Kunkwenzu (2007) explored the first-year teaching experiences of home economics teachers in Malawi by using GTM. She mapped their experiences and developed a substantive theory of their challenges and coping mechanisms (Kunkwenzu 2007). Bowen (2005) conducted a study of the working relationships between funders and community organisations which is relevant to community engagement enquiries studying the collaboration between the university as organisation and community-based organisations.

The descriptors for the grounded theory approach fitted well into the purpose of my study, as I was interested in the interaction between the actors in the process of engagement during service-related actions. By exploring the implicit meanings these actors gave to the actions, it was possible to derive a substantive theoretical framework to guide similar actions in future in the context of CE at a particular institution. Below I give an overview of the steps I took to arrive at the envisaged theoretical framework as an example of grounded theory inquiry.

A grounded theory inquiry

During 2009-2010, I conducted a doctoral study titled *Community engagement at a higher education institution – exploring a theoretical grounding for scholarly based service-related processes* (Smith-Tolken 2010). The construct of scholarly-based service-related action is construed from the (re)definition of scholarship by the American educator Ernest Boyer. The work of Boyer (1990) made a significant contribution to the way CE was conceptualised in South African higher education (HEQC/CHE 2006). Boyer (1990) presents an expanded view of scholarship as having four overlapping functions: discovery, which refers to the contribution and advancement of (all forms of) knowledge; integration, referring to connections across disciplines in the larger context;

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application through service as dialogue between theory and practice; and teaching, which refers to the understanding of knowledge by the teacher, and the facilitation of the student's learning. In his explanation of the scholarship of 'application', he distinguishes between citizenry service activities (which by definition is volunteer work) and scholarly actions in which "service activities must be tied directly to one's special field of knowledge and relate to, and flow directly out of, this professional activity" (Boyer 1990:22). It requires the rigour and accountability traditionally associated with research activities. He swiftly asserts, however, that application does not imply a one-way direction, but a two-way flow of knowledge where theory and practice meet.

For the purpose of this study, I drew on this understanding to define the construct of scholarly-based service-related processes as:

> A series of actions by staff members and/or students of a higher education institution in collaboration with community members or representatives of community organisations which relate to the specialised field of the staff and/or student knowledge base, the core functions of the university, as well as the needs expressed by the said community members, culminating in a meaning-giving process over time. The assumption is that this collaboration is agreed upon by the participants.

In the study I traced the service-related actions of the lecturer as the module coordinator (CO), the student(s) (ST), the community organisation representative (COR) and the community member(s) (CM) in seven different programme-based modules through unstructured interviews, the most common data generation method in GTM. The responses of these actors were triangulated and I developed insight into how the actions take place, how meanings are developed and finally cumulate into a coherent process which consists of four interrelated processes. The ultimate purpose of the study was to contribute to a theoretical grounding for 'service' processes that are connected to underlying knowledge systems and that take place in community spaces with shared interests by the actors involved in these processes.

The grounded theory analysis took place in three levels of comparative analysis. In the first level the actions of the four distinct groups were listed and compared according to their causality and interrelatedness (known as 'open codes'). An example of open action coding would be in the case of the CO 'decide' as action and 'which sites match module', which students may participate', 'time frames of service' and 'structure of interaction' as descriptors or the 'what' of the action. The first level of coding indicated a process of interchange which happens in cycles of action as students move backward and forward from campus to community which was labelled cyclical interchange. In this level of coding, I found the Paradigm Model in GTM developed by Strauss and Corbin (1990) very helpful. It consists of an analytical schema that provides five features for constant comparison, which enhances density and precision:

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- The first feature is the *phenomenon*, which refers to the central idea or action to which the data refer.
- The second is the *causal conditions*, which lead to the development of the phenomenon.
- The third is the *context*, referring to the set of conditions within which action takes place in response to the specific phenomenon.
- The fourth is the actual action/interactional *strategies* directed towards managing or responding to the phenomenon.
- The fifth feature is the *consequences* that are the outcome of the action taken.

In the second level analysis the open codes are collapsed into focused codes to form subcategories of action and meaning. Loosely aligned with the paradigm model, the focused codes were grouped into four themes that emerged from the focused codes.

In the third level of analysis, sub-categories represent the attributes of preliminary categories. Themes emerge from these preliminary categories to become main categories that give direction so that a theoretical understanding of the actions and processes involved can be developed. The first theme consisted of the relevant micro-contextual conditions necessary for integrating community work into a curriculum; the second theme comprised the approach or strategies in managing linkages between the university and community actors; the third theme captured the actions and interactions that take place during on-site and off-site activities; and the fourth theme captured the evaluation process and outcomes.

Each of the themes consisted of three or four preliminary categories substantiated by the focused codes linked to them. Each preliminary category has properties that link it to other preliminary categories and focused codes that refer to more than one preliminary category. In this type of research process, caution must be taken not to oversimplify the process by deducing that the conditional and strategy themes lead to the actions/interactions and consequences. The actual process is much more complex. Each of the preliminary categories and its properties is constantly influencing other preliminary categories. For example, to be able to structure goal-focused tasks as a strategy, one needs a compatible community setting to fit both the module goals and the organisational goals, while on-track verifications will ascertain whether actions are being diverted from goals or agreements. Actions on site can potentially be derailed if institutional support falters or organisational agreements are not honoured.

I theorised that the first three subcategories – module structuring conducive to community work, comparative community setting and organisational/institutional support – could be grouped under the category 'Establishing common ground for interchange' between the four identified actors or actor groups. The actors' approach or strategy was labelled: 'Steering interaction towards goals' through structuring tasks, mediating agreement and gate-keeping (to prevent) diversions from planned action.

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What became the key to the final theory was the process through which the actions and interactions were performed. I labelled this 'Facilitating cyclical interchange'. This refers to the moving back and forth of actors between personal and joint meanings as well as geographical locations, coupled with working together and separately at times. I labelled the evaluation and outcomes theme 'Assessing change and opportunities', consequently giving greater clarity to the equivocal trend in the literature about the benefit of scholarly-based service activities to the community. This culminated in a thematic structure that became the thematic framework of the theory according to the features of the paradigm model. These four themes clustered the sub-categorical processes into an integrated cyclical process of interchange. In Figure 18.1, I illustrate how the four processes are interlinked in the overall process of interchange. In the cyclical motion of interchange, the four processes are constantly integrated in different ways. For example, conditions are constantly in flux due to the actions and strategies of actors, while consequences indicate how future relationships will continue or terminate.

After developing the thematic framework, I coded all new data in the same way until no new ideas or codes emerged from the data. Saturation means that the researcher has explicated all properties of the developed theoretical categories and has sought data that fill those properties (Charmaz 2008). I subsequently interpreted the absence of new ideas as saturation of the emerging theory as outlined in the overview of GTM. This framework led me to rethink the conception of the phenomenon in question and the sensitising concepts which I will explain shortly. I refined this framework and used it to further analyse and formulate the theory. What emanated from this part of the analysis was students' contribution to actions that could be interpreted as scholarly. By using exit-level modules of the chosen academic programmes for community integration in the curriculum I was able to infer that students do engage in scholarly work by applying theory in practice. There is some strong evidence that they co-create new knowledge with community actors, leading to the production of viable enabling products. However, this theorising is done in close consultation with the data. Each of these components has to be explicated and substantiated by data derived from the unstructured interviews and other forms of data generation.

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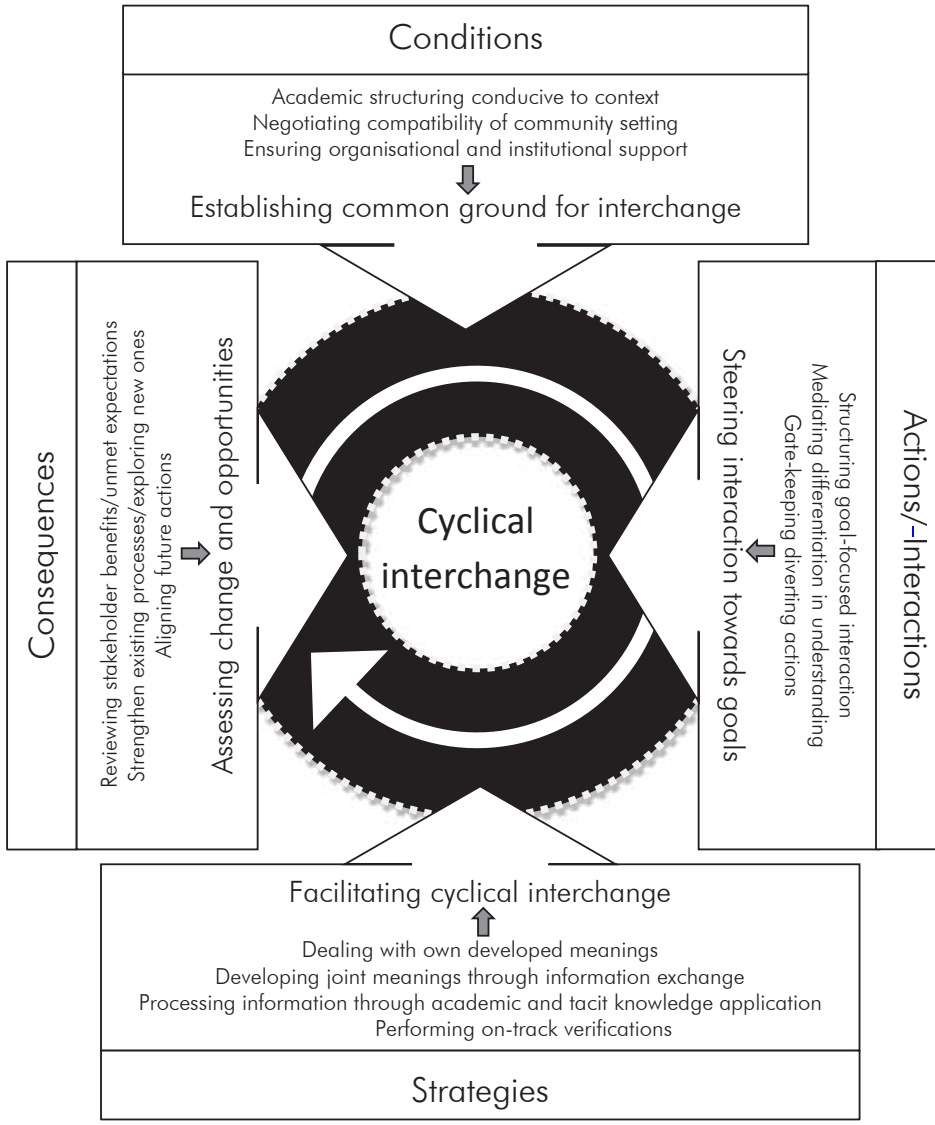

FIGURE 18.1 Thematic framework of the emerging theory (Smith-Tolken 2010)

Through such explication, a researcher can develop further insight into the phenomenon under study. In this case, the concept 'scholarly service activities' emerged, qualifying service as a scholarly activity. Based on the attributes of this concept, it was defined as:

> The act of applying implicit and codified knowledge in a community setting, directly or indirectly, focused on the agreed goals or needs while ascertaining growth through the acquisitioning of skills and an enhanced understanding of the meaning-making content by all the actors involved.

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At the same time 'community service' developed into a new meaning of the 'community' offering the service. In the context of scholarly service actions, the community actor offers a service to the university actor by accommodating and engaging with them. Conceptual clarity also emerged about the character of the relationship through which this interchange takes place. The data challenged the idea of 'partnership' as an interdependent relationship between actors and reframed it as agreements on different levels. What also emanated from the data was the production of tangible and intangible commodities that were exchanged between actors. These commodities could be variations of tangible physical resources of the organisation or university, literary products such as pamphlets and booklets, or intangibles such as human resources like mentoring, knowledge sharing, access to expertise and enabling activities.

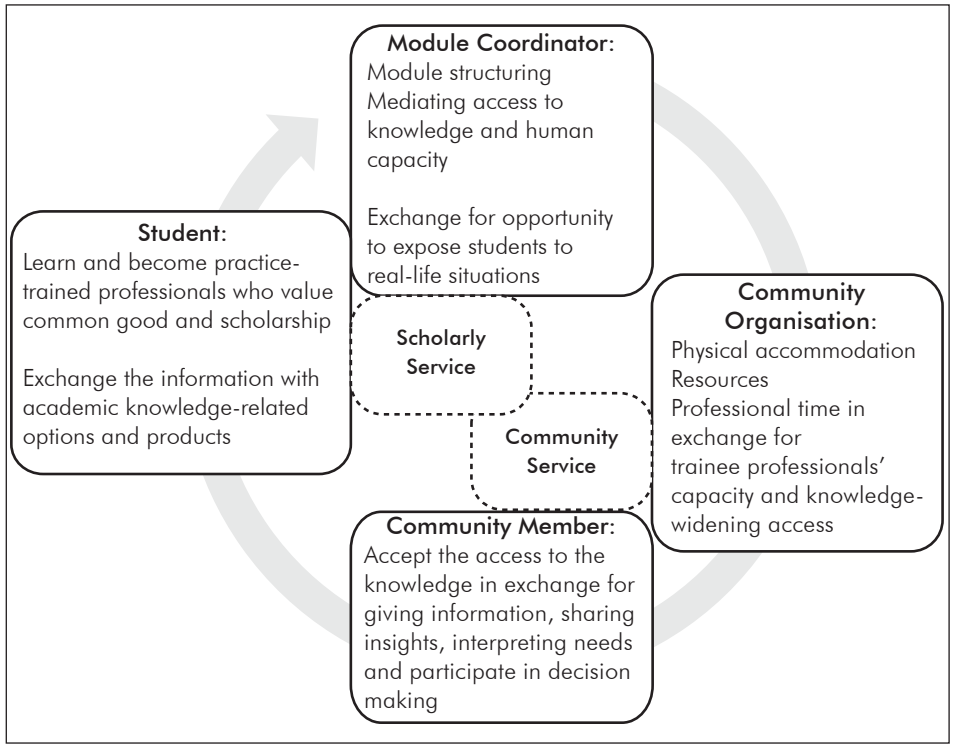

FIGURE 18.2 Exchange of social commodities (see Smith-Tolken 2010)

Each of the actors' contribution to the interchange process is depicted in Figure 18.2.

'Cyclical interchange of social commodities' was chosen as the core category. This category encapsulated the mutual giving and taking, the cyclical sequences and the results that emanated from this action. From the data it was also clear that new knowledge was co-created through this process. Module coordinators integrated their scholarship of teaching with engagement as they innovatively expanded experiential

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learning theories into practice, culminating in new forms of knowledge transfer and access. They further demonstrated scholarship by steering, in a trans-disciplinary way, the integration of all forms of knowledge in the unfolding process. These forms of knowledge emerged as community wisdom, and the practical know-how of practitioners being merged and exchanged with STs' knowledge. Students critically synthesised their tacit knowledge creatively with codified knowledge to produce customised social commodities. They used methods such as information gathering, brainstorming ideas, presenting them in new forms and testing them in real-life situations to produce the social outcomes that were customised to the specific community context. This type of knowledge creation was earlier referred to as 'useful knowledge', meaning that the knowledge is socially accountable in the context in which it is generated (Kraak 2000). After clarifying and (re)defining the core emerging categories that were to become the core concepts, I could now deductively propose a framework for the emerging theory which I could inductively link with data.

The theoretical framework that was developed, consisted of four interrelated concepts that defined the main phenomenon of cyclical interchange (Figure 18.3), namely scholarly and community service, agreement-based relationships, social commodities and co-creation of useful knowledge. This interchange takes place in close relation with the concurrent meaning-giving contexts of the community and the student's learning process. The meaning-giving context in the centre of the figure is closely linked to the meaning-giving context of communities in general in society. The context is viewed as meaning-giving as it refers to the life experiences of the people who acquire meaning in the context within which past and present events, ideas and objects (including any developmental action) are interconnected. This context is constantly in flux, caused by the constant influence of parts on each other as they interact and the boundaries between the parts and the whole are blurred (Kotzé & Kotzé 2008). The meaning-giving context of interchange consists of the meanings that are developed through the interchange process of actors reflecting individually or interactively with other actors. The assumption that people can and do think about their actions rather than merely responding to stimuli is aligned with the formal theory of symbolic interactionism which "assumes society, reality, and self are constructed through interaction", reliant on language and communication (Charmaz 2006:7).

On curricular level, the meaning-giving context is dependent on favourable conditions for interchange, namely the reciprocation of scholarly and community service. This implies the reciprocal interchange of community assets for scholarly assets in the cyclical process of giving and receiving.

When the student or staff member interacts with community actors, an interchange of social commodities takes place within a typology of strategic relationships that may vary in intensity, commitment and length. These relationships may be labelled as *ad hoc* contacts, agreements, collaborations or partnerships, depending on the meaning associated with them. What is different about these relationships is that they are not

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linear and neatly fitted into phases. In the meaning-giving context they are constantly fluctuating. The social commodities take on different forms, which may be tangible or intangible, depending on the meanings that are developed during the interchange. The overarching attributes of social commodities are their relation to student learning and development, as well as their enhancing of current practice in community organisations and creating an enabling environment for community members. As a consequence of the interchange, useful knowledge is co-created through the application of codified, implicit (professional know-how) and tacit knowledge, culminating in new custom-made knowledge in the context where it is developed.

The application of this framework potentially impacts on three spheres of the context in which it was developed. The first is the direct link with programme and modular planning and subsequent qualification offerings in higher education institutions. This framework provides insight into the value of a community-based environment as bridging the gap between theory and practice, but at the same time developing the student's professional persona and laying the foundation for future scholarship and citizenship. It further provides an understanding of the underlying processes that occur concurrently with classroom teaching and the responsibilities that accompany the utilisation of community assets for teaching and learning.

This study shows how GTM may be applied in a curricular context. Using this example, the value of this approach can be considered.

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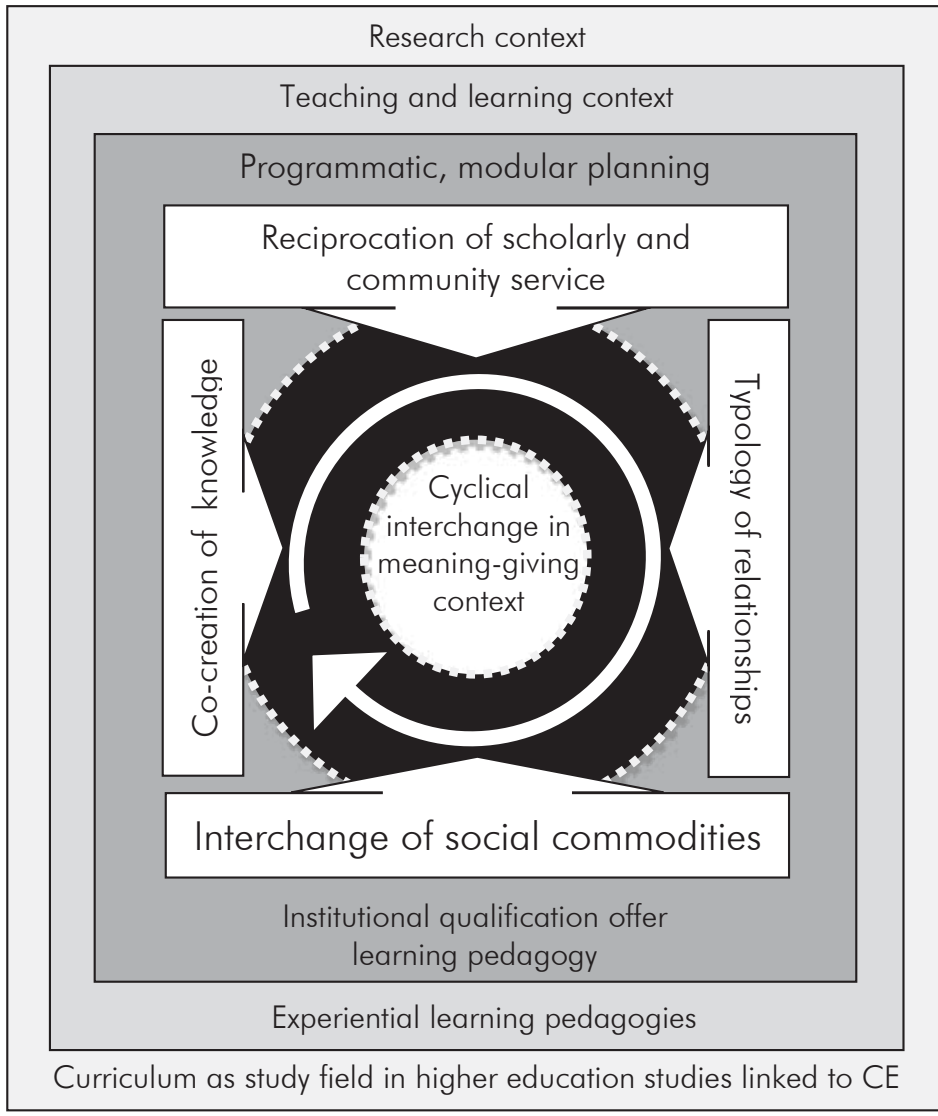

FIGURE 18.3 Theoretical framework for scholarly service processes (see Smith-Tolken 2010)

THE VALUE OF GROUNDED THEORY METHODOLOGY STUDYING THE CURRICULUM

From a positive perspective

Various authors (Babbie & Mouton 2007; Cresswell 1998; Merriam 2002) contend that thick description and theoretical sampling allow the reader to decide if research findings are transferable to other settings, because comparison to their own settings is simplified. The transferability of grounded theory studies rests predominantly on

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the understanding that theory is developed from the phenomenon under study within the particular context and setting. The derived theory is normally transferable to similar contexts and settings. Multisite designs such as this one also strengthen both transferability and generalisability because of the variations in sites – in this case, covering different SU faculties (Creswell 1998). GTM enables the researcher to trace actions and processes as they happen in the own words of the respondents. Meanings are then interpreted and induced without moving away from the generated data. The benefit of such a micro-tracing research inquiry illuminates the finer nuances of actions and interactions which are often overlooked in other research processes. The context and the action become intertwined and reflect valuable insights from both, providing the ground for revision of perspectives and alternative action. The most important spin-off is that this form of inquiry enhances the conceptual clarity of constructs and concepts that are haphazardly used in both community and curriculum context. The formulation of substantive theories within a particular context makes an invaluable contribution to broader perspectives of more formal theory. In my study, it was interesting to see how the cycle of scholarly service coincided with the cycle of experiential learning as depicted by Kolb (1984) and how the meaning-giving context used in community interactive processes informed the context in which the framework was developed. GTM is an in-depth reflexive process which sharpens the researcher's senses and requires a fair amount of higher-order thinking. Accountability is a priority and no deduction is made unless there is enough evidence in the data to support it. A meticulous process of recording data, revisiting every form of data and constantly checking with respondents about interpretation, ensure a rigorous process of research.

From a negative perspective

GTM is one of the research methodologies that have gained considerable ground in qualitative research designs. At the same time, criticism against it has also flourished. Without quoting the multiple sources that go into detail about the negatives, I will resort to my own experience. GTM must be studied intensively before any effort is made to use it as a format for research inquiry. As a result of the different versions that have developed since its initiation it is not easily understood. Some of the criticism refers to the methodology as reductionist and too procedural. My stance would rather be that it is open to misuse by researchers who have the impression that 'everything goes' and that GTM can be adapted to fit the purpose of any study. The procedures that ensure credibility might be compromised if a researcher does not follow them rigorously. However, one would imagine that epistemic scrutiny would uncover such omissions.

Personal note

Reflecting on my first GTM research project, I realise that this experience has changed my approach to curriculum research as just a clinical process; it has developed my confidence to release control, and deepened my understanding of CE on macro- and micro-level. The most important lesson I have learned is never to take anything

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that happens in a process for granted, or to label it before ascertaining that the label actually represents the action or meaning. As I reflected on my own work and experience in community development, I realised that practitioners and researchers in CE should constantly reflect about their work in order to be sensitive to changes in society. In contemporary society, a community is seldom a homogeneous grouping. Contemporary communities are hybrid and tend to be more like open social fields of interaction. A constant change of meaning occurs as people interact, thereby influencing those involved. This creates fluidity in interpretations which need repeated re-visitation. Scholars in CE tend to underestimate the people who are not part of the university in the knowledge-creation process by weighing local knowledge against codified knowledge. Codified knowledge is reliant on relevance to practice which emphasises scrutiny by society. If this scrutiny is perceived to be redundant, academic knowledge will remain isolated from society or can do more harm than good.

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