Community- School- Universities Partnerships Imbizo

Background

In 2013 the Centre for the Community School (CCS) at the then Nelson Mandela University hosted a visit involving the University of Cape Town's Schools Improvement Initiative (SII) and School Development Unit (SDU) staff members. This created an opportunity for constructive engagement between Education Faculty members from both institutions, CCS staff, principals and teachers involved in the Manyano project. This conversation continued during discussions at SAERA in 2017 where we agreed that a follow-up meeting would be valuable to continue the discussions that were started and to critically reflect on some of the issues that were raised both during the conference sessions and in our informal conversations. A symposium was held at UCT on 14th and 15th March 2018, with representatives from the CCS and SDU/SII community-school-university partnership projects around various aspects of our work, in particular the nature of our engagements with communities and schools. A summary of the discussions that took place during this symposium is captured in a formal report, which will be made available to all stakeholders. One of the key resolutions, which emerged from the symposium, was a call for a national conversation on community-engaged school partnerships. In order to respond to this resolution, an Imbizo was suggested as a vehicle through which a national conversation on community-engaged schools partnerships could be held. The national 'Imbizo' would be centred on the inputs from the represented stakeholders of the Cape Town symposium and is intended to generate a firm commitment to collective responsibility that encompasses solidarity, planning, reflection and action.

South Africa has a long history of community and civic struggles in education since the 1900s. Widespread concern about the persistent and profound inequalities within our society, and the effects of social class, poverty and poor educational performance on the majority of South Africans, constitute the rationale for this continued engagement. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) argued that "development is not about the delivery of goods to passive communities, but it is about active involvement and growing empowerment" (RDP, 1995:5). The sentiment that emerged strongly from the UCT symposium was that education is a societal issue and as such we need to engage more broadly, critique more deeply, and allow both to culminate in actions that help cultivate the optimal conditions for learning, particularly in poor, working class contexts.

Community engagement and participation is therefore a vital and significant component of functioning democratic societies.

Purpose

The Cape Town Symposium identified the following focus areas which would require critical engagement from participants of the national Imbizo.

- What are the multiple forms of consultations that need to take place to establish authentic partnerships among the formal, informal and non-formal categories of education?
- How do we build relationships across our partnerships and explore at deeper levels what our individual and collective understanding of partnerships may be?
- How do we ensure that no voices are left behind in the co-construction of relevant, contextual responses to the challenges confronting education?
- What kinds of spaces need to be created to ensure that these multiple voices are continuously heard and validated in the process of responding to these challenges?
- How do we co-construct a cohesive action plan which values the contribution that all these categories in education; formal, informal, and non-formal, can make in dealing with the complex challenges confronting education, particularly in poor working class contexts?
- How does the mutual reciprocity of such multi-stakeholder collaboration contribute to solidarity in dealing with these complex challenges?

As with the UCT Symposium the Imbizo will start from the perspective of the *schools in community*, seeking to deepen our understanding of the theoretical, practical and contextual elements as outlined above. Our goal is to generate insights that strengthen and deepen community – school -university partnerships which lead to action to address the multiple, complex challenges confronting education.

The proposed themes from these focus areas are:

1. Education and the community school
2. Engagement and scholarship
3. Teaching and learning and the community

Possible outcomes of the Imbizo

- **Knowledge and Language -** The commitment to opening spaces for multiple and diverse experiences, interpretation and understanding that may lead to new knowledges and may require the reclaiming or the development of a new language which is more responsive to the complex 21st century challenges confronted by poor, working class communities in particular. The Imbizo aims to produce critical, socially relevant, and action-oriented knowledge.

- **Categories of Education** – The commitment to acknowledge, value and validate the diverse contexts where education occurs, namely formal, informal and non-formal. The Imbizo attempts to weave together these three categories to support optimal conditions for learning, particularly in poor, working class contexts.

- **A Call to Action** – The co-construction of a framework for a programme of action to be responsive to the challenges facing the majority of schools in the country. Critical for this call to action is the ability of the formal, informal and non-formal categories of education to collaborate in solidarity to address the societal challenges in communities and schools.

- **A Call to Research** – The co-construction of a set of research priorities with a focused research project to be taken forward as a collaborative project. This would create opportunities to discuss and generate scholarship that is gained through praxis and allows for the co-creation,

interrogation, documentation and dissemination of knowledge in appropriate ways and accessible to multiple stakeholders.

Venue

- Nelson Mandela University, Missionvale Campus

Suggested - Duration and Date

- Three full days -
- During university and school recess
- 25, 26, & 27 September 2019

Participants

- Maximum of 130 participants
- All organisations who have expressed an interest in attending
- Participant breakdown
    - Participants of the UCT Symposium (or persons nominated in their place) - 40
    - Representatives from Higher Education Institutions – max. 2 per organisation - 20
    - Government- National
        - DHET - 3
        - DBE - 2
    - Funder organisations – 5 (1 representative per organisation) - 5
    - Union Representatives –1 rep per union - 3
    - Community based organisations operating in education – max 2 per organisation - 20
    - Members from the local community - 9
    - Teachers - 3
    - Learners - 6
    - Principals - 3
    - Session facilitators - 6
    - Participant admin supporters - 10

Methodology

The Imbizo should be structured in such a way that it allows for maximum participation of all present. It should be interactive and should allow for multiple forms of expression. The Imbizo seeks to disrupt the pedantic conference format by creating a space where vibrant dialogue could be had around the specific themes, which will be able to speak to the focus areas identified by the Cape Town symposium.

Format

1. ***Bus dialogues*** – participants will be divided into multi-stakeholder groups who will visit three schools located in three different geographic locations across the city. Each group will be hosted by a school in the area. Each bus will have dialogue facilitators during the bus trip as well as during the visits to the schools. The three areas identified are the northern areas; township and western

suburbs. Each bus will only visit one geographic area and participants will reconvene in a plenary at the end of the trip.

2. ***Dialogical Space*** – Imbizo will be convened in one venue. The programme will be structured to accommodate dialogue around the main themes of the conference. Each session will be preceded by a 20 minute multi-stakeholder panel presentation on the themes. Participants will then engage, in multiple stakeholder groups (20 groups, 10 participants in each group), around the presentations. At the end of the group conversations participants (individually or in pairs/small groups) will then express their thoughts around the specific theme, using any form of expression that they are comfortable with e.g. drawing; image; short narrative. These responses will be displayed in demarcated areas and will be used at the end of the three days to posit a vocabulary around the themes to be used in our various spaces of engagement.
3. ***Displays*** – participant organisations will be afforded an opportunity to show case their work and a walk around session will be built into the programme