

NATIONAL SUPPORT FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF ENGAGED SCHOLARS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Although most South African universities have institutionalised community engagement, research indicates that engaged scholars need national support for professional development. This article focuses on the findings of a qualitative action research study undertaken by 11 board members of the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum (SAHECEF). The study's appreciative inquiry summit method was steered by the question: How can SAHECEF become a flourishing community of praxis for national support of engaged scholars' professional development? Guided by a semi-structured interview protocol, collective data generation occurred through paired appreciative conversations, while data analysis occurred in small and large group dialogues. The appreciative inquiry resulted in SAHECEF discovering its value-based best practices and organisational character strengths, serving as a foundation for designing an action plan to deliver national support for engaged scholars who profess the praxis of engaged scholarship.

Keywords: appreciative inquiry, engaged scholarship, professional development, service-learning, South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

Today, most South African universities institutionalise community engagement as mandated by the government and, by implication, community-engaged service-learning (CESL) as an academic strategy for implementation (Department of Education 1997; Department of Higher Education and Training 2013; South African Government, “Higher Education Act 101 of 1997”). However, a recent review of the progress of the field in higher education indicated the need for a national support system to advance engaged scholarship at universities (Favish and Ngcelwane 2013; Favish and Simpson 2016). This need may stem from the argument that alongside and in competition with the functions of teaching-learning and research, the practice of community engagement is challenged by a lack of funding and the absence of institutionalisation (Johnson 2020).

The absence of a national support system to establish career pathways for engaged scholars may hamper the quality delivery of community engagement (HEQC 2004; Zuber-Skerritt, Wood and Louw 2015).

The practice of community engagement is spread across the functions of teaching-learning and research, as confirmed by this international definition:

“[C]ollaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial creation and exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity ... to enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity; enhance curriculum, teaching, and learning; prepare educated, engaged citizens; strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility; address critical societal issues; and contribute to the public good” (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education 2023).

As mentioned above, community engagement requires partnerships to serve as network platforms for uniting diverse stakeholders, societal sectors, institutional functions, processes, structures, and systems, from local to global (Sandmann, Saltmarsh and O’Meara 2016).

Considering the complex context of community engagement, professional development for engaged scholars should not be provided by outside experts (Zuber-Skerritt 2015). An outside expert approach may lead to a disconnect between theory and practice (Wood 2020; Zuber-Skerritt et al. 2015). Scholars cannot inquire into their practice without active engagement, which is critical to professing praxis (Zuber-Skerritt et al. 2015). Instead, engaged scholars should self-direct their professional development career pathways. An involved engaged scholar should take part in goal-driven and work-related lifelong learning to develop praxis, to become “truly professional” (Zuber-Skerritt 2015, 123). Engaged scholars require a praxis-orientated professional development approach that facilitates an “interdependence and

integration – not separation – of theory and practice, research and development, thought and action” (Zuber-Skerritt 2009, 113; see also Zuber-Skerritt et al. 2015).

In addition, research suggests that the South African Higher Education Community Engagement Forum (SAHECEF), because of its networking ability, should explore and share a best-practice solution regarding national support for the career development of engaged scholars (Favish and Simpson 2016). Since SAHECEF was launched in 2009, the organisation has been the only national champion to support engaged scholarly professional development. The service of SAHECEF is regulated by a board consisting of community engagement leaders and representative of all South African public universities. Board members share leadership for the organisation’s management and functioning (SAHECEF 2020). As an organisation, the service of SAHECEF is guided by three constituted objectives that involve the following:

- “Advocating, promoting, supporting, monitoring, and strengthening community engagement at South African universities.
- Furthering community engagement at South African universities in partnership with all stakeholders with a sustainable social and economic impact on South African society.
- Fostering an understanding of community engagement as integral to the core business of higher education” (SAHECEF 2020).

This article reports on a qualitative action research study conducted by SAHECEF, using an Appreciative Inquiry summit for organisational strategic planning. In contrast to traditional problem-based research, Appreciative Inquiry follows a collaborative 5D (define, discover, dream, design, deliver) phased research process, guided by an aligned semi-structured protocol. The following main research question *defined* the inquiry: **How can SAHECEF become a flourishing community of praxis towards national professional development support for engaged scholars?** In order to address this question, secondary research questions further guided the remaining 4D’s to *discover* the positive core (current best practices and strengths) of SAHECEF, envision a *dream* and *design* an action plan to *deliver* a best practice solution.

To provide background of the research, the article first shares a conceptual–theoretical framework, unpacking the main concepts and sharing the theories and paradigm that underpins the Appreciative Inquiry.

The next section describes the methodology and explains the Appreciative Inquiry research process in detail. Thereafter, a discussion of the findings is shared followed by a reflective conclusion that summarises the findings, highlights the limitations and suggests future action research.

CONCEPTUAL–THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The **concepts** of *community engagement*, *community engaged service-learning (CESL)*, *engaged scholarship* and *engaged scholars* are unpacked.

From a South African perspective, *community engagement* is defined as “initiatives and processes through which the expertise of the higher education institution in the areas of teaching and research are applied to address issues relevant to its community” (HEQC 2004, 24). In its broadest frame, community engagement involves a “combination and integration of teaching and learning (e.g., service-learning), professional community service by academic staff and participatory action research, applied simultaneously to identified community development priorities” (Bender et al 2006, 11).

As a pedagogy, *CESL* refers to learning gained from reflection on service experiences that address specific community-directed needs; such knowledge is integrated into the curriculum. It “could be credit-bearing and assessed and may occur in a work environment” (HEQC 2004, 37). Being a value-driven pedagogy, *CESL* is underpinned by the principle of reciprocity and philosophy of citizenship, democracy, social justice, and social responsibility (HEQC 2004; Petersen and Osman 2013; Shumer, Stanton and Giles 2017; Stanton, Giles and Cruz 1999).

After unpacking these two concepts, the question around the difference between traditional and *engaged scholarship* may arise in the mind of an emerging scholar still unfamiliar with the practice of community engagement. In traditional scholarship, knowledge creation aims at growing the knowledge bed of scientific disciplines and the research is mostly driven by a postpositivist paradigm that is disengaged from the situational context to affirm objectivity. Therefore, the researcher does not involve the so-called “subjects”/participants being studied, in the research process (Zuber-Skerritt et al. 2015). In contrast, an engaged scholarship requires the application context of community–university research partnerships (CURPs). In CURPs, engaged scholarship involves the process of relationship building and the co-creation of action-orientated knowledge for the common good of society (Tandon and Hall 2015). Engaged scholarship requires an interlocking of extended knowledge functions: discovery, integration, sharing, and application (Boyer 1996; Boyer 2016). Although not always the case, but usually so in South Africa, by being practiced in a collaborative, democratic, and transformative paradigm, engaged scholarship involves people whose lives are negatively impacted by inequality, poverty, and unemployment to enable them to self-emancipate through knowledge (Tandon and Hall 2015; Wood 2020). For praxis, an engaged scholarship should integrate community engagement, teaching–learning (e.g., *CESL*), and research to unite the academic’s responsibilities to deliver scholarship that is actively engaged,

inclusive and holistic (Zuber-Skerritt et al. 2015). Nevertheless, like traditional scholarship, engaged scholarship should be characterised by “clear goals, adequate preparation, appropriate methods, significant results, effective presentation, reflective critique, rigor and peer-review” (Tandon and Hall 2015, 2).

In final clarification of the research context, the concept of *engaged scholars* is highlighted, as it is used interchangeably in this article. When viewed from a bigger perspective, engaged scholars involve university academics who practice engaged scholarship. More specifically, from the participants’ perspective who engaged in this study, *engaged scholars* refer to the SAHECEF summit participants whose vocation is to lead community engagement and practice engaged scholarship in South African universities.

The **theoretical framework** of this research is grounded in the learning theories of *social constructionism and generativity*, which underpins an Appreciative Inquiry research approach (Bushe 2007; Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros 2008; Gergen and Gergen 2008; Mertens 2015; Stavros and Torres 2018; Tracy 2013). Appreciative Inquiry is a strength-based genre of action research, rooted in the field of positive psychology and guided by a transformative paradigm (Cooperrider et al. 2008; Peterson and Seligman 2004; Mertens 2015; Stavros and Torres 2018; Tracy 2013; Wood 2020; Zuber-Skerritt et al. 2015). *Social constructionists* focus on power and privilege, cultural diversity, democracy, social justice, historical context, and the use of specific language/discourse when generating and analysing data (Gergen and Gergen 2008; Stavros and Torres 2018). In turn, *Generativity* involves a collective discovery of information to co-create new ideas for improved future scholarly practice (Bushe 2007; Stavros and Torres 2018). These two theoretical lenses embrace the notion of knowledge democracy and partnership, which values the use of multiple knowledge forms, sources and lived realities, for such collaborative epistemology, ontology and methodology (Mertens 2015; Tracy 2013).

METHODOLOGY

By using an Appreciative Inquiry approach, the study followed a qualitative action research design and methodology (Cooperrider et al. 2008; Stavros and Torres 2018), in the applied case context of the SAHECEF board. This choice of SAHECEF board members as participants (hereafter referred to as “the group”) was based on their expertise, knowledge, mentorship, and practical wisdom gained from their diverse academic disciplines and their vocation as community engagement leaders at South African universities, implying their commitment to establishing a career in engaged scholarship. Hence, the group’s participation as information-rich engaged scholars notably contributed to the authenticity and credibility of the research

(Mertens 2015; Tracy 2013; Wood 2020). The Faculty of Education at the University of the Free State provided *ethical clearance* to conduct the research (UFS-HSD2016/0200).

The group held a start-up workshop to share information on the application of the 5D (define, discover, dream, design, delivery) Appreciative Inquiry process to drive the summit. In alignment with the 5D process, the group made use of a semi-structured interview protocol to guide the research (Stavros and Torres 2018) (see Figure 1).

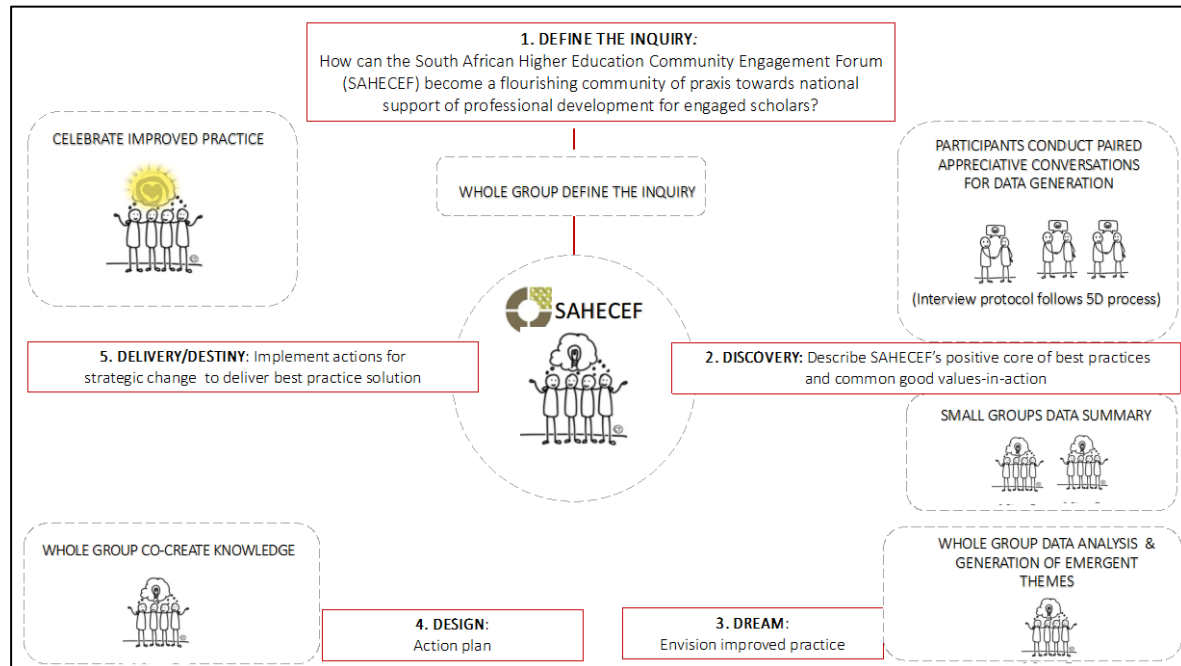


Figure 1: SAHECEF's Appreciative Inquiry summit 5D process (adapted from Stavros and Torres 2018, 89)

During Phase 1, the group jointly *defined* the inquiry, driven by the affirmative topic of the need for national support of engaged scholarly professional development in higher education, using the following main research question: *How can SAHECEF become a flourishing community of praxis towards national professional development support for engaged scholars?*

After defining the inquiry, the group progressed to Phase 2, namely, to *discover* the positive core, by describing SAHECEF's previous and current best practices and common good values. During Phase 2, the group members first engaged in paired appreciative conversations for *data generation*. This discovery phase was exploratory and descriptive. On completion of the paired appreciative conversations, the participants formed two small groups for reporting their data generated during the paired interviews, to enable a *collective data summary*. The two groups then joined again to form a *whole-group for data analysis*, using reflective dialogue to generate emergent themes (Wood 2020) (see Figure 1). *In* Phase 3 (*dream*), the whole group built on the themes that were generated in Phase 2 to collectively craft a *dream*, guided by the

following secondary research question: *“Imagine the service delivery of SAHECEF in the future, after becoming a flourishing community of praxis. How does it differ from the current practice?”* During Phase 4, drawing from the *dream* crafted in Phase 3, the group collectively *designed an action plan* to enact the dream. In Phase 5, which took place after the summit, the group evaluated if the actions were delivered.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This section reports on the findings aligned to the 5D Appreciative Inquiry process. The findings and discussion are presented in an integrated manner, supported by confirming literature. We present the findings in a descriptive form, supported by verbatim quotes, yet shared from a group perspective, without any specific attribution to participants.

Phase 1: Define the inquiry

The participants defined the inquiry as follows: *How can SAHECEF become a flourishing community of praxis toward national professional development support for engaged scholars?*

Phase 2: Discovery

The findings of Phase 2 described SAHECEF’s *best practices and values*, which can also be referred to as the positive core of SAHECEF. The group painted a positive core map for visually capturing the following generated themes (see Figure 2 from left to right and top to bottom): *collaboration, shared leadership and reflective dialogue for shared learning, as well as experience* (top row); *commitment, diverse intercultural perspectives and supporting relationships* (middle row); and lastly - *knowledge, wisdom, and understanding* (bottom row). The group summarised these themes as one common theme, namely: SAHECEF functioned as *a national learning “commons” for engaged scholarly professional development*.



Figure 1: SAHECEF's positive core map (Co-created by leading engaged scholars in SAHECEF)

National learning “commons” for engaged scholarly professional development

The group described SAHECEF as an organisation that functions as a national learning “commons” – this was a best practice. The *commons* concept denotes a shared academic home for engaged scholarly professional development (Parks Daloz et al 1996; Shumer et al. 2017).

In the “commons”, as depicted in Figure 2 (top row), the SAHECEF board members met for regular meetings, where they engaged in *reflective dialogue* to share their best practices and challenges gained from *experience* in the field. Such reflection on the practice of engaged scholarship gained by academics at each public university provided a space for shared learning to inform the praxis of engaged scholarship, as described in the literature (Zuber-Skerritt et al. 2015).

Since the establishment of SAHECEF, the board members established national working groups that focused on teaching–learning (e.g., service-learning), research, volunteerism, partnerships, management and governance, and marketing. Whenever the board members met in the “commons”, as depicted in Figure 2 (middle row) they *collaborated* to accomplish the objectives of SAHECEF (see introduction). Regular meetings in the “commons” also created

time for informal teambuilding and fun, creating a balance between work and life. According to the group, this informal interaction deepened their *relationship* to a level of friendship, as confirmed by the literature (Wood 2020).

The “commons” further provided a space for establishing democratic, authentic, trusting, nurturing, and supportive relationships. As a result (see Figure 2), the group reported that their relationship was characterised by organisational strengths of care, fun (humour), *love* (for others and self), *nurturing*, *positive energy*, respect, reciprocity, ubuntu, *support*, and trust, as described in the literature (Peterson and Seligman 2004). One of the participants confirmed this sense of trust by stating: “I found a tribe that I can trust.” Another board member pondered the positive power of care and kindness needed to develop this relationship and stated: “There was no venom in SAHECEF’s meetings.” Relationship building is vital to engaged scholarly professional development (Wood 2020; Zuber-Skerritt et al. 2015).

To sustain this relationship, the group reported that they applied SAHECEF’s *values*, which embrace the practice of citizenship, democracy, intercultural diversity, equality, inclusion, integrity, and respect for human rights (SAHECEF 2020). The group further reported that SAHECEF valued the development of lifelong learning, mentorship by elders, reciprocity, partnership, openness, and honesty. Moreover, the group perceived that their *shared leadership* and social responsibility contributed to their value-driven behaviour, characterised by social justice, solidarity, unity, teamwork, and trust. These life-giving values-in-action (VIA) foster society’s common good (Peterson and Seligman 2004; Wood 2020; Zuber-Skerritt 2015).

The group reported that the “commons” also offered a *democratic space to confidently voice diverse intercultural perspectives* and tension. They were always “willing to learn more and serve better”, as one of the elder board members stated. When debating the praxis of engaged scholarship, they listened well, and acknowledged and respected each other’s knowledge. According to the group, this recognition of different knowledges created a sense of “dignity and worthiness”, as one of the members emphasised. The group also shared the courage to ask *difficult questions* that challenged the status quo about pressing societal challenges that hinder the well-being of society, such as inequality, injustice, and poverty. They took responsibility and *ownership* when building relationships (see Figure 2). The literature describes such relationship characteristics as portraying constant learning, leading to the reconstruction of relationships and development for improved actions to build improved partnerships (Tandon and Hall 2015; Wood 2020).

The group voiced that they applied positive conflict management whenever they experienced tension in the “commons”. An elder board member wisely captured their level of maturity and skill for positive conflict management as follows:

“We had lots of diverse perspectives, but we never had conflict about it because we engaged in dialogue and listened to all the voices. We did not allow power to create conflict because we collaborated and compromised to maintain harmony. We did not respect people for the sake of their positions but for their commitment to make a difference, driven by our shared goal of community engagement for the common good of society.”

Another board member addressed the issue of power and privilege by referring to the essence of fairness and justice as critical values for effective relationship development and stating that “*equalities dismantle holy cows*”.

Although the function of community engagement was nationally mandated (Department of Education 1997), the group voiced that it was a challenge to champion its practice at universities. According to the group, ironically, in contrast with social justice, the function of community engagement was mostly situated at the margins of universities, without national policy support and funding for the CESL field. This finding is supported by recent research (Favish and Simpson 2016; Johnson 2020). However, as leading engaged scholars, the group voluntarily had a personal and professional *commitment* to the mission of SAHECEF, because they shared a passion for the field in its broadest context. Such a group commitment is described as a community of practice (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015).

Due to the practical nature of engaged scholarship, as depicted in Figure 2 (bottom row), the group’s *knowledge, wisdom, and understanding* projected an element of emergent learning, as described in the literature (Zuber-Skerritt 2015). According to the group, they self-directed their lifelong learning and professional development in relation to their learning needs and found the sweet spot that each appreciated individually. In addition, they gained mutual benefit from their collective learning. Such emergent learning reaches beyond the acquisition of theoretical knowledge and enabled the real-life awakening of practical wisdom (Taylor 2011; Zuber-Skerritt 2015; Wood 2020). This wisdom can be described as a “form of noble intelligence – in the presence of which no one is resentful and everyone appreciative” (Peterson and Seligman 2004, 24). By engaging in continuous *reflective dialogue* about their engaged scholarly experiences, the group’s learning evolved into holistic (whole person) development, which is described in literature as “sensing, feeling, imagination, metaphor ... and analysis, logic, strategy, and application” (Zuber-Skerritt 2015, 116).

The group reported that the real heartbeat of their engaged and transformative learning emerged from affective, humane building blocks, such as the “*development of a positive mindset*” and “*a willing attitude to learn and serve*”, as stated by one of the group members. According to the group, they developed collective wisdom by sharing their practical (personal/tacit) knowledge in the “commons”, as described by Zuber-Skerritt (2015). They tapped into their collective wisdom when they had to make moral decisions (wise judgement) to co-create knowledge products, such as policies and strategies to flourish the future of engaged scholarly praxis, as described in the literature (Shumer et al. 2017; Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015).

The group also documented their collective wisdom as a resource for future practice improvement. SAHECEF thus became a “living” library and provided a unique source of tacit/personal knowledge. Drawing from their collective practical wisdom, they facilitated, generated, managed, and disseminated this tacit knowledge by establishing a national community engagement resource centre that provided access to the history and continuous practice of engaged scholarship as applied in a South African context. As part of SAHECEF’s service, they facilitated the organisation of national and international community engagement conferences, workshops, and seminars to provide platforms for debate about best practices, challenges, and evaluation of the progress in the field.

As leading engaged scholars, the group also ventured outside the borders of the “commons”. As the only national networking organisation for the advancement of the field, SAHECEF explored opportunities for *collaboration* between South African universities and other national and international stakeholders to encourage the establishment of community–higher education partnerships (CHEPs). In addition, they networked with like-minded scholars across disciplines, in different societal sectors, and from local to global (glocal). SAHECEF aligned its objectives, applied at the interface of CHEP projects, with inclusive development and transformation agendas. In this context, SAHECEF’s service advanced the balance of the so-called triple bottom line, which intends to flourish society, the economy (workplace), and the planet (African Union Commission 2015; National Planning Commission 2012; United Nations Development Programme 2015).

According to the group, SAHECEF played a significant role in advocacy, agency, and solidarity to promote CESL in South African higher education. As leading engaged scholars, they co-created policies to promote engaged scholarly professional development career pathways, as informed by evidence-based practice. They also informed the national higher education policy to advance and strengthen the field. For example, SAHECEF advocated for

inclusion of mandatory community engagement in the latest White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (Department of Higher Education and Training 2013). In addition, one of SAHECEF's exceptional best practices involved negotiation with the National Research Foundation to provide funding support to establish the field of engaged scholarship.

In reflection on these best practices, the group was reminded about the inquiry topic, which was to provide a best practice solution to deliver engaged scholarly professional development. They progressed to the next phases of the Appreciative Inquiry process, namely the *dream* and *design* phases for co-creating a collective dream and to design an action plan to reach the best practice solution.

Phase 3: Dream

In answer to the question of *imagining the service delivery of SAHECEF in the future, after becoming a flourishing community of praxis and how it differs from the current practice*, the group co-created a *dream* that involved five responses (5Rs) to improve practice. These involved the following creative, future-orientated provocative propositions, namely to (1) Reframe and Reform: *#Silosmustfall*; (2) Reflection and Relationship; (3) Regenerate and Revitalise; (4) Re-focus and Re-publish; and (5) Recognise and Reward.

Phase 4: Design

Phase 4, involved the *design* of an action plan to enact the five responses (5Rs) mentioned on the *dream* phase.

Reframe and reform for inclusive development: #SilosMustFall

The group envisioned that SAHECEF should *reframe* its service structure “to widen access to inclusive development by establishing six regional chapters (divisions)”. Thereby, SAHECEF can cascade its existing engaged scholarly professional development support from national to local levels. For quality assurance, the new inclusive “commons” can be managed by regional and local champions, mentored in action by national champions serving on the SAHECEF board. In line with widened access to the inclusive learning “commons”, SAHECEF advocates that “*#SilosMustFall*”, as one of the elder board members voiced. The group decided that rather than using national working groups to support university functions in silos (see the Phase 2

findings), SAHECEF should *reform* its approach towards “uniting the functions of teaching–learning, research, and public service”, for the praxis of engaged scholarship.

Reflection and relationship to develop the praxis of engaged scholarship

The group suggested that “SAHECEF should provide a supportive and engaged learning and inquiry environment” in the inclusive learning “commons” (see Figure 2), offering mentorship from champions. The learning should be collaborative, engaged, experiential, reciprocal, reflective, and relational, allowing for knowledge co-creation across diverse cultures, disciplines, and sectors. Scholars can engage in continuous *reflective* dialogue through Appreciative Inquiry into best *practices*, challenges, and strengths to gain collective practical wisdom. Such integrated learning should be underpinned by principles of reciprocity, reflection, relationship, and shared leadership (see Figure 2), motivating scholars to become reflexive practitioners who profess the praxis of engaged scholarship in the context of CURPs (Shumer et al. 2017; Stavros and Torres 2018; Wood 2020; Zuber-Skerritt 2015).

Regenerate CHEPs to revitalise CURPs as pathways to profess praxis

According to the group, SAHECEF should regenerate existing CHEPs by integrating scholarship to establish long-term CURPs that can serve as platforms to profess engaged scholarly praxis. Also, SAHECEF should strengthen glocal networking for engaged scholars to benchmark and scale up practice. The group planned to “host an international conference every two years”, where SAHECEF can support the capacity development of engaged scholars to present and publish their work to profess praxis. In addition, the group anticipated that SAHECEF could support accredited “continuous professional development in regional chapters” through webinars, workshops, and seminars.

Refocus to re-publish for a wider readership

The group voiced that SAHECEF should refocus on “establishing an open-access journal for publishing engaged scholarship”, which caters to a glocal readership at the interface of science and society (see Figure 2 – “the book”). In addition, the journal should publish the work of all partners who engage in CURPs. The journal can mobilise co-created knowledge for society's common good and well-being.

Recognise and reward

One of the group members stated that SAHECEF should “support engaged scholars in developing portfolios for recognition and reward” concerning professing the praxis of engaged scholarship. Academics can establish self-directed lifelong learning career pathways to profess the praxis of engaged scholarship.

Phase 5: Delivery/destiny

The *delivery* phase represented the conclusion of the 5D Appreciative Inquiry process and the beginning of an evolving Appreciative Inquiry learning culture for SAHECEF (Cooperrider et al. 2008, 200). This phase required the commitment of task groups to delivering action. The group established an evaluation date (i.e., December 2019) to review if the action plan reached the envisioned *destiny*.

When the group evaluated the *delivery* of actions, they could see the value of the research. SAHECEF accomplished the first four of the five actions. Although SAHECEF did not accomplish the last action, the organisation continues to alert engaged scholars about learning opportunities and recent publications via its updated website and newsletters. Continuous reflection on learning and development will support SAHECEF in reaching the last action.

REFLECTIVE CONCLUSION

The absence of national support for the professional development and promotion of engaged scholars opened an action research agenda for SAHECEF to explore and share a best-practice solution. The article described how SAHECEF created a best practice solution, in answer to the quest for supporting engaged scholarship development from a national level.

A collective of 11 SAHECEF board members conducted the Appreciative Inquiry summit. They delivered a 5R action plan (Reframe and reform; Reflection and relationship; Revitalise and regenerate; Re-publish; Recognise and reward) (see Phases 3 and 4) to provide a best-practice solution. SAHECEF adopted a strategic shift in the existing service delivery of the organisation regarding professional development support for engaged scholars by cascading its existing support for the professional development of engaged scholars from a national to a local context. As a result of its established networks, entry into these regional SAHECEF chapters can enable engaged scholars to develop transdisciplinary, cross-sectorial, and glocal networks to scale up the practice of engaged scholarship. Here, academics can find a collaborative

learning community, mentorship by champions, establish research partnerships, join a global network, and apply Appreciative Inquiry to start a self-directed lifelong learning career pathway to profess the praxis of engaged scholarship committed to the common good of society.

LIMITATION OF THE STUDY AND SUGGESTION FOR FUTURE ACTION RESEARCH.

The fact that the Appreciative Inquiry only included the participation of national leaders for community engagement without including community members and students, may have been a limitation of the study. However, the integrated nature of an Appreciative Inquiry summit is complex, which first required a “safe” “testing” application platform that could be championed by engaged scholars in the national context of SAHECEF.

After considering the findings, the next application context for future action research could be applied in the context of a local CURP, after creating a “blue-print” SAHECEF case study to utilise Appreciative Inquiry as a significant self-directed professional development tool to advance the praxis of engaged scholarship from a bottom-up approach. Then, engaged scholars, community partners and students can learn to holistically profess the praxis of engaged scholarship, based on the principles of collaboration, inclusivity and reciprocity.

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