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Community Involvement in Course-Based Higher Education Activities: Exploring Its Definition, Guiding Principles, and Strategies—A Narrative Review

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Abstract

Higher education institutions are becoming increasingly embedded in their surrounding communities in order to learn from and respond to their often complex problems. Potential mutually beneficial—or reciprocal—collaborations between students, faculty members, and communities are being set up, but few researchers have explored how community actors are involved in collaborative decision-making processes. To fill this gap, this narrative review explores the current literature on community involvement processes in course-based higher education activities. Our research yielded a framework of definitions, guiding principles, and strategies to achieve more successful community involvement in this context. Seven guiding principles and related strategies are presented: alignment, shared ownership, balancing power relations, joint learning and knowledge creation, representation, immersion, and relationship building. The narrative review gave insights into the way community involvement is currently approached in course-based higher education activities and established a basis for understanding and shaping higher education–community collaboration.

Keywords: community involvement, higher education, reciprocity, community engagement, collaboration

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are increasingly connecting with their surrounding communities, seeking to respond to complex societal issues (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010; Schwab, 2017). Experiential knowledge—acquired in the everyday experiences of community actors affected by those complex societal problems—is to a growing extent considered appropriate for the production of valuable and responsive new knowledge (substantive argument) and its implementation in the community (instrumental argument), and creates opportunities for community decision-making power (normative argument; Ahmed & Palermo, 2010; Király & Miskolczi, 2019; Polk, 2014). In recent years, HEIs have invested in collaborations among students, faculty members, and communities (organizations and individual members) for the exchange and/or integration of academic and experiential knowledge, as well as the attendant learning process (Fluegge et al., 2019; Barnes et al., 2009). Although collaborations are sustained through their potential for mutual benefits—or *reciprocity*—this is also their main challenge (Clifford, 2017; Dostilio et al., 2012; Dempsey, 2010).

Typically, collaborations between HEIs and community are set up around a coidentified societal issue, which students, teacher(s), and community actors seek to address together within single or multiple course-based higher education activities (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Tijsma et al., 2020). For this type of course-based higher education activity, different terminologies are used, such

as service-learning, community-based or community-engaged learning, or engaged scholarship (Henry et al., 2013; Vincent et al., 2021). Moreover, there is ambiguity in the focus and implementation of these course-based activities. However, in general they include activities that are organized within the context of a course (from here on referred to as *community-based course activities*) and give students as well as community actors the opportunity to learn from current social issues, deal with existing social dynamics, and address these together (Budhai & Grant, 2018; Dostilio et al., 2012). The outcomes depend on an equitable relationship in which "all participants are viewed as teachers, learners, researchers, knowledge generators and administrators" (Hammersley, 2017, p. 127). The collaboration dynamics are complex, however, as they are sensitive to the different interests and cultural structures (personal and organizational) of all parties involved (students, teachers, community actors) and exposed to ever-changing circumstances (different projects, different people, different values; Brown-Luthango, 2013; Nelson & Stroink, 2020; Sweatman & Warner, 2020).

Although community involvement processes are argued an essential element in course-based higher education activities with community actors (Davis et al., 2017; Saltmarsh et al., 2009; Stewart & Altruz, 2012), most of the literature focuses on implications for HEIs (e.g., institutionalization, student learning, teacher guidance) and less on the involvement of community actors (Astin et al., 2000; Shor et al., 2017). An increasing amount of literature, however, pays greater attention to the perspectives and experiences of community actors in their collaborations with higher education, which highlights the importance of concepts underpinning an equitable relationship between HEIs and communities, such as reciprocity, social justice, empowerment, and solidarity (Bringle & Hatcher, 2002; Clifford, 2017; Davis et al., 2017; Dempsey, 2010; Kliewer et al., 2010; Kniffin et al., 2020; Olberding & Hacker, 2016; Strier, 2014; Tryon & Stoecker, 2008). A growing emphasis is on the process of community involvement rather than simply delivering a product (Sweatman & Warner, 2020; Clayton et al., 2010). In this article, we consider community involvement in course-based higher education activities to be the active involvement of community actors in and their influence on decision-making processes in course-based activities (Ahmed & Palermo, 2010; Kenny et al., 2015). Our rationale is that the way community actors are involved in course-based activities influences the experiences and outcomes for all involved (Kimmel et al., 2012).

A greater emphasis on the active involvement of community actors aims at *working together with* rather than *working for* communities (Boyle & Silver, 2005). Although much has been written about community involvement in a broader context, less is known about community involvement in the challenging context of course-based higher education activities, wherein the dynamics are influenced by the student learning environment, the changing of student groups and teachers, and the higher education structures. This gap in the literature calls for a more critical understanding of how community involvement processes are currently explicated in course-based higher education activities and how community actors should be actively and successfully involved. We therefore analyzed the literature on descriptions of the process of achieving community involvement in course-based higher education activities, leading to guiding principles and strategies to provide direction in evaluating, building, and/or improving community involvement in higher education. Lastly, this article seeks to contribute to the theory and practice of community involvement in course-based activities in higher education by reflecting on our findings in light of the broader literature scope on community involvement.

Methods

The concept of community involvement and descriptions of community involvement processes in course-based higher education activities are scarce in literature that describes course-based higher education activities. For this reason, we conducted a narrative review based on a systematic search to enable a rich exploration and understanding of this concept (Greenhalgh et al., 2018). We adopted a flexible and interpretive approach to the entire screening process in order to formulate a more precise and critical understanding of the concept (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). For the initial search, a review protocol was developed based on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) statement (Moher et al., 2009). A comprehensive search was undertaken

in four bibliographic databases: EBSCO/ERIC, EBSCO/PsycINFO, Web of Science (Core Collection), and Scopus from inception to April 26, 2019, in collaboration with a librarian. The following terms (including synonyms and closely related words) were used as index terms or free-text words: "service learning," "community involvement," "community impact," "higher education." The full search strategies for all databases are available from the authors on request. After removing duplication, all titles were screened and appropriate abstracts reviewed.

Screening

The criteria for both abstract and full-text screening were increasingly sharpened to include only those articles that truly describe the process of community involvement in course-based higher education activities (Table 1). First, a broader understanding was used to select articles based on our definition of community involvement processes in course-based higher education activities and a distinct focus on community (rather than students or faculty). Second, the criteria for full-text screening were tightened, focusing on articles that described community involvement processes. For example, we included articles with descriptions of ways community actors were actively involved or experienced their involvement throughout the course (e.g., articles that included descriptions of ways that community actors have contributed to the design, execution, and/or evaluation of the course-based higher education activity). Simultaneously, we excluded articles that described only community outcomes. For example, many articles did describe tangible outcomes for community actors or the community in general but did not include descriptions of the community actors' contributions or how these outcomes came to be. Moreover, articles were only included that described specific cases of single or multiple course-based higher education activities within a community with a clear course, case, or methodological description. This approach produced a set of articles that give insight into how community involvement is approached in specific course-based activities (case studies), rather than more general reflections on how community involvement processes should be approached, and from which guiding principles and strategies could be extracted.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Title/Abstract and Full-Text Screening

Title and abstract screening	
Inclusion criteria	*Exclusion criteria*
• Course-based activity with involved community actors concerning a societal issue • Higher education • Published after 2009 • Written in Dutch or English	• Noneducational community outcomes • Non-course-based community activities • No community-identified problem • Other than higher education • Not a primary focus on community outcomes, e.g., student outcomes or teacher guidance • Published before 2009
Full-text screening	
Inclusion criteria	*Exclusion criteria*
• Community involvement as part of course-based activities in higher education • Community-based activity as main goal in course, thus an activity in which students collaborate with community actors by exchanging or integrating knowledge and/or skills • A community-based activity beneficial for community • A clear case or course description or clear methodology	• Same as described above and: • No described process criteria • Full text not available • Not peer-reviewed • Book chapters and theses • Community-based activity as means, e.g., for student learning • Reflexive works with no distinct case and methodology

Title and abstract screening were undertaken by author MV and a colleague. Author CP was consulted in the event of disagreement. The first 250 abstracts were screened independently by MV and a colleague, which resulted in a Cohen's kappa coefficient (κ) of 0.88999 (McHugh, 2012). As this result is equal to an almost perfect agreement (94%) on the manner of abstract screening, the remaining abstracts were screened separately. Full-text screening was undertaken by MV in consultation with CP.

Data Extraction

An Excel worksheet was used to extract key practical, empirical, and theoretical elements of the included articles. For each article, data were extracted according to characteristics of the study, course-based activity, and community involvement processes. A more detailed overview of all characteristics is shown in Table 2. The data extraction was undertaken by MV.

Data Analysis

A random sample (n = 10) of the included articles was read carefully and coded inductively. This inductive approach allowed for an exploration of this field in course-based higher education activities (Chandra & Shang, 2019). The initial set of codes of this first sample was imported in ATLAS.ti 8 Windows, then compared and cross-connected through axial coding (Williams & Moser, 2019). Seven themes emerged: alignment, shared ownership, balancing power relations, joint learning and knowledge creation, representation, immersion, and relationship building. These themes formed the basis of the codebook and were subsequently used to selectively code and recode all included articles, including the first 10. In addition, a distinction was made between a theme as either a goal or a strategy. In this second round of analysis, open and inductive coding was applied again for a more comprehensive and complete understanding of themes. The goals and strategies belonging to these themes—or *guiding principles*—were analyzed, compared, and rearranged. The data analysis was discussed in depth with author CP for intersubjectivity.

Results

A total of 21 articles were included for analysis (Table 3). The PRISMA flow diagram in Figure 1 shows that the initial search identified 3,658 records. Then 1,667 works were screened by title and abstract after deduplication and removing records published before 2009. The latter were excluded to examine community involvement in the most recent higher education context and its conceptualization, and 534 records were subsequently full-text screened for eligibility. A large number of records were included for full-text screening, as many seemed to have a focus on community involvement. On more careful reading, many contained no specifics about community involvement, or were focused on communities from the perspectives of students or higher education.

We present the results in four sections. First is an overview of the article characteristics; second, a conceptualization of community involvement; third, seven guiding principles for community involvement; and finally, eight related implementation strategies. These results give insights into how community involvement is currently approached

Table 2. Article Characteristics for Data Extraction

Study	Course-based activity	Community involvement
• Author	• Course description	• Type of community
• Title	• Type of course-based activity	• Role of community
• Year	• Discipline	• Level of involvement
• Study design	• University	• Start of involvement
• Study aim	• Faculty	• Aim of involvement
• Participants	• Students	• Involvement strategies
• Duration of study	• Community	
• Country of origin		
• Country of course-based activity		

in course-based higher education activities and provide a foundation for understanding and shaping this involvement, although the detail of the description of these insights differed across the articles.

Article Characteristics

An overview of the final set of 21 articles is provided in Table 3. They originate from eight countries: the United States (1–4, 6–11, 16–17, 19), Canada (5, 21), South Africa (12, 18, 20), Japan (13), Australia (11), Colombia (10), and Uganda (14). Two are written in partnership with other HEIs, one is a cross-country study (Colombia, Spain, U.S.; 10) and one within country (South Africa; 18). Five articles investigate international course-based activities, of which four originate in the United States and are set up in Nicaragua (8, 19), Ecuador (7), and India (2), and one in Colombia through an exchange with Spain and the United States (10). All articles offer empirical data describing case studies of single or multiple collaborative course-based activities regarding an identified societal issue. Eleven articles describe a single case study (1–7, 11–12, 19–20) and 10 a multiple case study (8–10, 13–18, 21), with mostly a qualitative design (1–15, 17–19, 21). Two articles describe a mixed-methods approach (16, 20).

A Conceptualization of Community Involvement

The concept of *community* often remains vague in the selected articles and refers to different kinds of actors (residents, organizations, key figures), including various groups of people (entire neighborhoods, minority groups, employers). Community is defined in only three articles (7, 19–20), which argue for its complexity and heterogeneity due to the numerous coexisting perspectives in any given community. Descriptions of ways to take these internal differences into account, however, are rarely touched upon. The 18 other articles (1–6, 8–18, 21) generally use the term to indicate a physical place where students and teachers go to help or learn, such as "where we work" (1) or "where the learning takes place" (15), pointing out the central role of HEIs and students toward community in community-based course activities in higher education.

Figure 1. PRISMA Flow Diagram of Article Screening

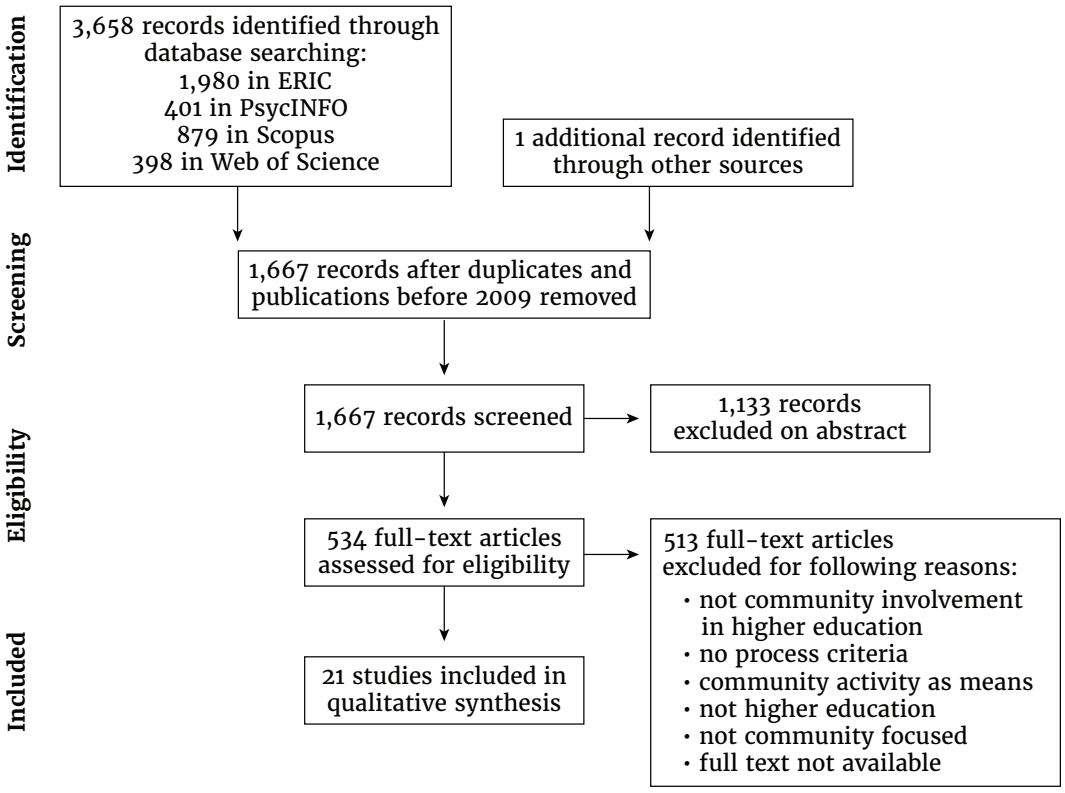

Table 3. An Overview of the Articles Included in This Review

#	Author	Year	Title
1	d'Arlach et al.	2009	Voices From the community: A Case for Reciprocity in Service-Learning
2	Brown et al.	2018	Service-Learning With Tibetan Refugees in India: A Small University's Experience
3	Bucher	2012	Old and Young Dogs Teaching Each Other Tricks: The Importance of Developing Agency for Community Partners in Community Learning
4	Chen et al.	2015	Sustainable Futures for Linden Village: A Model for Increasing Social Capital and the Quality of Life in an Urban Neighborhood
5	Curwood et al.	2011	Building Effective Community–University Partnerships: Are Universities Truly Ready?
6	Donaldson & Daughtery	2011	Introducing Asset-Based Models of Social Justice Into Service Learning: A Social Work Approach
7	Gadhoke et al.	2019	Minga, Participatory Action, and Social Justice: Framing a Decolonization Process for Principled Experiential Learning Among Indigenous Shuar Communities in Amazonian Ecuador
8	Gates et al.	2014	"A Pesar de las Fronteras"/"In Spite of the Boundaries": Exploring Solidarity in the Context of International Service Immersion
9	Goertzen et al.	2016	Exploring the Community Impact of Service-Learning Project Teams
10	Hufford et al.	2009	Community-Based Advocacy Training: Applying Asset-Based Community Development in Resident Education
11	Irazábal et al.	2015	Enabling Community–Higher Education Partnerships: Common Challenges, Multiple Perspectives
12	Jones et al.	2018	Service-Learning Partnerships: Features That Promote Transformational and Sustainable Rural and Remote Health Partnerships and Services
13	Kawabe et al.	2013	Developing Partnerships With the Community for Coastal ESD
14	Mbalinda et al.	2011	Assessing Community Perspectives of the Community Based Education and Service Model at Makerere University, Uganda: A Qualitative Evaluation
15	Mtawa & Wilson-Strydom	2018	Community Service Learning: Pedagogy at the Interface of Poverty, Inequality and Privilege
16	Muwana & Gaffney	2011	Service-Learning Experiences of College Freshmen, Community Partners, and Consumers With Disabilities
17	Petri	2015	Service-Learning From the Perspective of Community Organizations
18	Preece	2016	Negotiating Service Learning Through Community Engagement: Adaptive Leadership, Knowledge, Dialogue and Power
19	Pillard Reynolds	2014	What Counts as Outcomes? Community Perspectives of an Engineering Partnership
20	Van Schalkwyk & Erasmus	2011	Community Participation in Higher Education Service Learning
21	Valaitis et al.	2016	Street Smarts ↔ Book Smarts: Three Neighborhoods and One University School of Nursing Partnering for Health

From the articles, three types of community actors can be distinguished (Table 4). This typology touches upon the different community actors involved: community members (1, 3–11, 13–16, 18–21), community leaders (2, 4–5, 7–9, 11–15, 21), and organization representatives (2, 4–7, 12, 15–17, 19, 20). A distinction can be made from how these community actors' roles are formulated in the articles. Eight articles formulate them as recipients (1–2, 4–5, 8, 12–13, 16) of service or knowledge (1, 21). Despite community involvement in the course-based activities, such as interviews with community members, these articles formulate the community as a target group of the HEI's intervention (1, 5, 8, 16) or in need of aid or assistance (2, 4, 12–13). Related to this type of formulation, students often consult community actors (mostly members) and take along their views to inform agenda-setting and outcomes of community-based course activities. In contrast, 13 articles (3, 6–7, 9–11, 14–15, 17–21) describe the community as contributors, such as community mobilizers (12), resident consultants (21), or key informants (7, 14). Here, articles refer to the community as active collaborators throughout and beyond the course activities and often cocreate the design of the course or courses. This formulation is thus linked with higher education actors' perception of community actors' capability and their level of involvement in these activities.

Seven Guiding Principles for Community Involvement

Seven guiding principles are extracted from the articles and give current insight as well as future guidance to community involvement in course-based higher education activities: (1) alignment, (2) shared ownership, (3) balancing power relations, (4) joint learning and knowledge creation, (5) representation, (6) immersion, and (7) relationship building. These principles can be used both to guide decision-making and action and to evaluate the success of community involvement. These are not stand-alone principles: They are interdependent and influence each other. They often serve as both a goal and a means. As a goal, a guiding principle is what you would aim to achieve for or with community involvement, such as alignment or balancing power relations. As a means, that same guiding principle can serve as a way to achieve another guiding principle. For example, balancing power relations can achieve the alignment of needs and expectations of a community-based course activity (or alignment) and vice versa.

Alignment

This guiding principle refers to the shared understanding of the purpose and trajectory of the community-based course activities for all parties. Alignment entails cocreating a shared understanding of the most important elements of the activities among students, faculty, and the community actors involved (community members, community leaders, and/or organization representatives). Twenty articles (2–21) emphasize the need to align the purposes, goals, needs, values, and expectations of all parties involved. Challenges in aligning these elements can arise from curricular time constraints and the capacity of those involved. Therefore, the possibilities of

Table 4. A Typology of Community Actors, Its Definition and Description in Text

Type of community actor	Definition
Community members (1, 3–11, 13–16,18–21)	Grassroot community members that live in a specific geographical area (4, 11, 13, 14, 20), share similar characteristics (3, 8), relate to a vulnerable group of people (1, 3, 7, 20).
Community leaders (2, 4–5, 7–9, 11–15, 21)	Key figures in the community that speak for or represent a group of people, such as a spiritual leader (2) or a school principal (12).
Organization representatives (2, 4–7, 9-10, 12, 15–17, 19, 20)	People that work for and represent public agencies and nonprofit organizations.

educational programs (What can be done in a course?), community capacity (What is feasible for the community actors?), and common goals (What do we want to achieve together?) should be carefully considered. Such consideration allows for more realistic expectations and better outcomes both for students (13, 16) and for community actors (2, 6, 12, 17, 20). Without alignment, a community-based course activity can easily result in a mismatch between higher education and community goals:

> The failure of the planned [community-based course activity] was attributed to the hasty attitude of the [activity]. [Students] should have held more interviews and meetings to better understand the local community's interest . . . and to learn the local community's interest is indispensable to the successful setting of project outcomes. (13 [Kawabe et al., 2013], p. 129)

Shared Ownership

Shared ownership entails everyone involved having shared accountability and agency in a community-based course activity. With shared ownership, each party can guide the activity toward fulfilling their needs, interests, and desired outcomes. Fourteen articles (1–3, 5–6, 8–12, 14–16, 21) emphasize the significance of community ownership. To create such ownership, opportunity (Does everyone have a place and time?) and capacity (Does everyone have the necessary skills and resources?) for all involved actors is necessary. Community-driven activities were mentioned as a good practice for shared ownership by starting with a codefined issue existing in the involved community (13). Moreover, Jones et al. (2018; 12) and Valaitis et al. (2016; 21) argued that "true partnership" and "true reciprocity" can be hampered if there is a lack of shared ownership. Lack of shared ownership can result in community actors' reluctance to use the outcomes and a dissatisfaction with the partnership. The quote below emphasizes both an urgency for and frustration with community actors' ownership over community-based course activities:

> "[Students] come in, deliver what they want and it meets their needs. Why would you want to work with them?"—community actor about students (12 [Jones et al., 2018], p. 83)

Balancing Power Relations

Balancing power relations refers to the awareness and redistribution of existing power differentials in community-based course activities. The power relations between higher education and community, owing to differences in background, education, values, and knowledge, need to be recognized, redistributed, and deployed. Nine articles (1–6, 11, 18, 21) discuss the power relations faced when actors from higher education and communities collaborate. The goals of students or HEIs are often prioritized over community actors' goals (2–3, 5, 11, 20) by higher education and even community actors (2, 20). The balance of power influences the way community actors are involved in community-based course activities; for example, community actors try to benefit students or do not dare to speak their own mind (2, 20). Seven articles mention the challenges and urgency of actively balancing out these power differentials (1–6, 11). Having a comfortable environment (Can all involved actors speak their mind?) in which the knowledge and priorities are considered of value (Are all knowledge and priorities taken seriously or weighted equally?) can help (2). These factors are important not only so that community actors can express their needs and interests but also for reciprocity, which influences both experiences (process) and outcomes (product). For example, the outcomes cannot be aligned (alignment) to community actors' needs if they are not valued or if community actors do not dare to speak their mind (11, 20). In particular, community involvement can be used for empowerment and emancipation for community actors if all involved actors are aware of and guided through the power relations (11, 15, 20).

Joint Learning and Knowledge Creation

This guiding principle refers to learning and creating knowledge jointly with all involved actors. Students, teachers, and community actors should all be a part of a learning and knowledge-creating process. Thirteen articles illustrated how a joint experience motivates students and community actors to digest knowledge, learn, and create something new together (1, 3, 5–6, 8, 11–14, 17–18, 20–21):

> Community partners [who] felt a

> relationship with [higher education institution] had reciprocity when they also made a valuable contribution, such as when there was joint creation of knowledge. (17 [Petri, 2015], p. 103)

Valaitis et al. (2016) argued that the integration of knowledge from higher education and community is necessary for good implementation of a community-based course activity and the dissemination of the outcomes (21). In line with this observation, three articles (1, 3, 17) describe this guiding principle as reciprocity in both the outcomes and the process toward achieving them. In other words, the way the involved actors learn and create knowledge as part of the process—or their involvement—can also be considered as an outcome. Two articles (1, 6) argued that all involved actors should have humility (Are you truly open to ideas other than your own?) and deference (Are you respectful of ideas you do not share?) toward each other. This process of involvement and integration of knowledge was described as challenging, awkward, and difficult due to confrontation with differences in values and beliefs among students and community actors (balancing power relations; 1, 11).

Representation

This guiding principle refers to having representative community actors involved in the community-based course activity, so that they can represent perspectives of different community members. Seven articles (1, 4, 6, 13–14, 16, 21) clearly state representation as an important element of community involvement in course-based higher education activities, but do not elaborate why it is important. Donaldson and Daughtery (2011) posed the question "Who represents the community?" and pointed out the fragility of a collaboration between higher education and community when only one community actor is involved. In both Donaldson and Daughtery (2011) and Kawabe et al. (2013), a single community actor is the only access point for community members and community organizations. For a single isolated activity this might suffice, but for long-term collaboration, a network of involved community actors is more sustainable (6, 13). Valaitis et al. (2016; 21) argued that community actors have decision-making power over certain community priorities, and thus power over who is involved (and who is not) to decide what is needed, is a priority, or is important in the community. These two examples point out ethical and power challenges if just one or a selected group of community perspectives is considered. Therefore, the question "Who represents the community?" could be used as a starting point to determine the involvement of (more) community actors.

Immersion

Immersion refers to a deep involvement in the cultural or social circumstances of all involved actors. Thirteen (1–2, 4, 6–8, 10, 13–16, 20–21) articles emphasize the need for awareness, familiarity, and sensitizing to cultural and social differences among the involved actors. Especially, immersion was seen as a responsibility of students and faculty: to get acquainted with the community culture (1–2, 7–8, 10, 14–15, 20). Two approaches for this guiding principle are described: (1) to let students critically think about these differences to raise their own awareness and sensitivity (2, 6–8, 10, 15–16) and (2) to adopt relevant interventions, strategies, or any type of outcome in the community (4, 6–7, 10, 14, 20–21). According to Valaitis et al. (2016), and supported by Gates et al. (2014), immersion can enhance relationships beyond the walls of higher education, prepare students to understand a community's contextual factors, and integrate community actors into the higher education setting. Immersion thus requires a two-way effort: sensitizing community actors to the university environment and sensitizing students and teachers to the community environment. This mutual sensitization can promote a better understanding of each other's worlds to improve social interaction and trust (relationship building; 10) and alignment (21).

Relationship Building

Building a relationship refers to developing sustained interactions between higher education and community actors that are characterized by social bonds and trust. Sixteen of the included articles (1–2, 4–7, 10–14, 16–17, 19–21) placed emphasis on a relationship (characterized by human connection and social bonds) rather than a partnership (characterized by merely the exchange of labor and resources; 1, 6–7, 10, 13, 21). According to Gadhoke et al. (2019) and Petri (2015), such a relationship is central to "true reciprocity." To build a relationship, prior contact or prior collaboration

with community actors was mentioned as a prerequisite. Accordingly, mutual trust and time to build this trust was considered a key value for relationship building (1, 5–7, 12, 14, 17, 21). On the one hand, trust was described as a goal in relationship building, such that through in-person interaction trust is built (17, 21). On the other hand, trust was described as a means for a relationship: With trust among higher education and community actors, a relationship can exist (5, 12, 14). The following quote illustrates the connection between reciprocity and trust in building a relationship with community actors:

> The [community actors] reflected that hosting students . . . and providing them with their time, resources and interviews, frequently without any tangible benefits, was troubling and discouraged willingness to participate. (14 [Mbalinda et al., 2011], p. 8)

Moreover, this quote emphasizes how "community fatigue" can hamper a relationship between higher education and a community. *Community fatigue* refers to the exhaustion of community actors when they are "used" with no tangible benefits for the community. As community-based course activities in higher education are dependent on commitment of both higher education actors and community actors, community actors' willingness to participate has a direct impact on the continuity and sustainability of community-based course activities. A relationship based on trust and reciprocity (outcomes for all involved) can create a safe environment that allows for working and learning together in a sustainable way (5). Curwood et al. (2011; 5) described how such a relationship can make for resilient collaboration, and in this way "can remain on-track without the extensive levels of personal contact characterizing the early stages of teamwork" (p. 21).

Strategies for Community Involvement in Higher Education

Eight strategies were extracted from the reviewed articles (1–21) to make community involvement in higher education more tangible and encourage its implementation. The previous sections implied some guiding principles in relation to some of the strategies. Table 5 presents the following strategies: (1) Shaping the course activity together (1–6, 10–14, 16, 18–21); (2) Having a dialogue (1, 4–6, 10–11, 13–14, 18, 21); (3) Providing feedback on and evaluation of the community-based course activity (10–13, 17, 21); (4) Offering capacity and competency training (2, 5–8, 10); (5) Facilitating accountability opportunities (1, 3, 6–7, 10–12, 14, 16, 21); (6) Familiarization with community and community actors (1, 3, 5–6, 10–14, 16–17); (7) Facilitating participation opportunities (13–14, 21); and (8) Building trust among involved actors (1, 4–7, 12, 14, 17, 21). These strategies appear to be applicable to multiple guiding principles, so one strategy serves multiple principles.

Table 5 provides an overview of all eight strategies, including an explanation, tangible examples, and related principles. Not all examples are explained in the same depth, owing to a lack of explanation in the relevant articles. The strategies are also influenced by the level of involvement of community actors and can be implemented for the desired intensity of the collaboration. For example, shaping the course activity together can be as simple as having one period of extensive contact with community actors before the course activity in order to align goals and expectations. More intensive involvement could look like codesigning the entire course (activity) based on coidentified community priorities. Moreover, these strategies can be implemented for collaboration between higher education actors (teachers and supporting faculty members) and community actors as well as between students and community actors.

Discussion

To our knowledge, this is the first narrative literature review studying community involvement in course-based higher education activities. This analysis supports deepening the understanding and development of community involvement in the specific context of higher education course-based activities. In this section we reflect on community involvement: its relation to community impact, methods for its optimization, its recognition in existing literature, and the practical implications of this review for course-based higher education activities. In this way, this review seeks to encourage critical thinking about community involvement processes and how community involvement should be carefully positioned within the higher education context.

The underlying rationale of community

Table 5. Strategies and Related Guiding Principles for Community Involvement in Higher Education

Strategy	Explanation	Examples	Guiding principles
Shaping the course together (1–6, 10–14, 16, 18–21)	The design, implementation, execution, and evaluation is shaped together with multiple community actors and students through shared decision-making for the most important elements of the community-based course activities	• Inform about, discuss, and cocreate the purpose and trajectory of the community-based course activity, e.g., by Q&A meetings, briefings, discussion sessions, or workshops prior to or at start of the course (3, 10, 12–13, 16, 20–21). • Determine mutually beneficial common goals and outcomes, such as drafting a set of principles, values, or course objectives (6, 11, 13, 16, 21). • Integrate community input during the course, by means of a needs- or asset-based assessment or coproducing the outcome (6, 11, 13, 16, 21).	• Alignment • Shared ownership • Power relations • Joint learning and knowledge creation • Relationship building
Having a dialogue (1, 2, 4–6, 10–11, 13–14, 18, 21)	A dialogue between involved actors focuses on the interaction of the actors with the aim of better understanding each other's world.	• Be democratic (taking turns), with time to listen, talk, empathize, and digest (1, 2, 11). • Express and discuss expectations and concerns, such as transparency about the experiential nature of the activity or the newness of the relationship (5–6, 11, 18). • Reflect together on differences between community and students with respect for diversity of views, e.g., by discussing experiences, sharing key messages, and giving verbal and written comments (1, 4, 10–11, 18).	• Alignment • Shared ownership • Power relations • Joint learning and knowledge creation • Immersion • Relationship building • Representation
Providing feedback and evaluation (10–13, 17, 21)	An evaluation of the community-based course activity with community actors through feedback loops.	• Provide feedback to community on student outcomes and experiences, e.g., how did students benefit from the course activity? (17). • Evaluate and reflect on course and outcomes with community actors, e.g., by quarterly meetings, discussions, participatory workshops (10–13). • Dissemination of and feedback on outcomes, such as writing together in open documents so community actors can see their insights in the outcomes (21).	• Relationship building • Shared ownership • Alignment • Joint learning and knowledge creation
Offering capacity and competency training (2, 5–8, 10)	Training both students and community actors to prepare them better with necessary skills for the social and cultural differences in the science–society interface.	• Introduce critical concepts and train cultural competences, e.g., trained by community actors or students from previous cohorts (2, 6–8, 10). • Provide community actors with information about higher education frameworks (5). • Hold workshops for community actors to recognize their own skills (10).	• Shared ownership • Immersion

Table continued on next page

Table 5. Continued

Strategy	Explanation	Examples	Guiding principles
Facilitating accountability opportunities (1, 3, 6–7, 10–12, 14, 16, 21)	Accountability, in particular to community actors, by placing emphasis on the responsibilities of the individual expert roles in the collaboration.	• Set up community driven–activities led by community actors, through community-identified topics and needs (7, 10–11, 14). • Give community actors a role as expert (not as an equal), so an emphasis lies on the value of community actors' experiential knowledge (1, 6). • Put time and effort into understanding the community expert role through discussion among community actors, students, and teachers (6).	• Shared ownership • Power relations • Relationship building • Alignment
Familiarization with the community (1, 2, 3, 5–6, 10–14, 16–17)	Familiarizing with the community context and its actors through direct contact with community actors and the physical places related to the community-based course activity.	• Community actors in the classroom, as an informant, advisor, commissioner, teacher, or colearner (1, 3, 5, 21,16). • Site visits to community locations, such as a community tour, an introduction to key community figures, and interaction with grassroots community members (4, 6, 11, 14, 16, 12). • Discussion sessions between students and community actors, such as brainstorming sessions, needs or asset mapping, a debate, or a game (1, 3, 6, 16, 21, 13,).	• Power relations • Immersion • Shared ownership • Alignment • Relationship building
Facilitating participation opportunities (2, 13–14, 21)	Creating an environment in which community actors can participate in the entire process of the course.	• Put effort into reaching out, using different access points into the community (2, 13–14). • Set up off-campus meet-ups at locations in the local community to encourage participation (21, 14). • Use language that is understandable for everyone and avoid jargon (14, 21).	• Power relations • Representation • Joint learning and knowledge creation
Building trust (1, 2, 4–7, 12, 14, 17, 21)	Trust is built in an environment in which higher education actors (including students) and community actors feel safe and can speak their minds.	• Take time to get to know each other, have fun together, and overcome potential issues of territoriality (1, 2, 5, 6, 17, 21). • Behave respectfully and inclusively, through active listening; being polite, helpful, interested; and showing deference and consideration (1, 5, 14). • Have frequent formal and informal interactions, such as face-to-face meetings, coffee breaks, telephone calls, emails, community meetings, events (12, 21, 4).	• Joint learning and knowledge creation • Immersion • Shared ownership • Relationship building

involvement is that involvement leads toward greater impact in the community (Clifford, 2017; Sweatman & Warner, 2020). Community impact can be achieved by a process of long-term positive community change and development (Meringolo et al., 2019). The community-based course activities in higher education, however, are often short-term and time-constrained, making it hard to achieve any community impact, even if the outcomes occur in an appropriate and responsive way (James & Logan, 2016). It is therefore argued that to achieve the community-centered values of community involvement (reciprocity, social justice, empowerment, and solidarity), we need to move beyond the exchange of products and toward transformation (Clifford, 2017; Davis et al., 2017). By placing more emphasis on the experience of the involvement (e.g., through participation, cocreation, and shared decision-making processes in course-based higher education activities), greater impact could be achieved (Clifford, 2017; Sweatman & Warner, 2020). The findings of this review give multiple examples of the importance of shaping this experience, in particular with the guiding principle *relationship building*. Other elements, such as trust, two-way efforts, and a comfortable environment, are interwoven in the other guiding principles and related strategies. Therefore, we believe that the current definitions, guiding principles, and strategies can help shape meaningful experiences of involvement.

Thus, this review sheds light on how community actors and community involvement processes are approached in course-based higher education activities. The articles included in this review often have a profound and critical conceptualization of community involvement processes in course-based activities (1, 3, 5, 20, 21) that are in line with community-centered values that emphasize an active and participatory role for community actors (Clifford, 2017; Dostilio et al., 2012; Stanlick & Sell, 2016). Although this review has provided detailed new insights on the how-to of community involvement in course-based activities, the results also show that difficulty remains for incorporating these conceptualizations (e.g., transparency of intended outcomes, community representation, or alignment of goals) into practice. This difficulty is also echoed in our findings on how *community* is generally conceptualized as a "place where students and teachers go to help or learn from a group of people," and the choice of words in eight of the total 21 articles that portray community actors with language such as "providing aid for" or "learning from" (recipients) instead of "active collaborators" or "mutual learning" (collaborators). These findings point toward a discrepancy between the written conceptualization and reflection on community involvement processes and actually incorporating and acting on community-centered values, a conclusion in line with other literature on community involvement in the higher education context (Bortolin, 2011; Butin, 2015; Dempsey, 2010).

This article is not the first to describe guiding principles and/or strategies for community involvement, and therefore adds to the larger literature seeking a deeper understanding of community involvement processes in higher education. Guiding principles, lessons learned, and best practices regarding the broader field of involving actors with experiential knowledge in research and higher education, such as transdisciplinary research, community-based participatory research (CBPR), and participatory (action) research, provide a similar framework to equitably involve community actors in research (Cashman et al., 2008; Collins et al., 2018; Crosby et al., 2013; Davis et al., 2017; Roberts, 2013; Von Peter & Bos, 2022). Similar to our findings, Collins et al. (2018) and Roberts (2013) argued for sharing decision-making responsibilities and mitigating power differentials in CBPR for establishing equitable partnerships between higher education and community actors built on trust, mutual respect, and community empowerment. Moreover, Collins et al. also reflected on how community involvement requires a different mindset, one that includes humility and reflexivity on one's own knowledge, privilege, power, and beliefs. Several studies emphasize how higher education actors should invest more in connecting with community actors personally as opposed to professionally, as a means for mutual learning and community involvement (Davis et al., 2017; Stewart & Alrutz, 2012; Von Peter & Bos, 2022). In line with our findings, one of the main challenges indicated by Cashman et al. (2008) and Collins et al. (2018) is the amount of extra time, effort, and flexibility needed to understand each other's perspectives and build common ground.

This review adds to this literature, as the challenging higher education context in-

troduces an extra dimension to community involvement processes in comparison to other research approaches. Achieving successful community involvement is already messy, complex, and time-consuming in research (Cashman, 2008; Collins et al., 2018), but community involvement processes in course-based higher education activities also deal with (1) rigid higher education structures (Tryon et al., 2008) and (2) the involvement of students and teachers (Burton et al., 2019). These factors merit separate discussion.

First, the organizational structure of higher education curricula limits opportunities to achieve successful community involvement in course-based higher education activities. For example, students and teachers are involved only for the short duration of a course, whereas community actors could be involved in multiple courses (Almjeld et al., 2022; Tryon et al., 2008). Guiding principles, such as relationship building, seem difficult to realize within the time frame of a course and possibly with multiple student groups and teachers (Tryon et al., 2008). Tijsma et al. (2021) have described how a thematic approach for community-based course activities, in which multiple courses (consecutively and concurrently) are coupled to increase the time frame in which community involvement can take place, introduces the commitment of higher education actors to community actors beyond course-based activities. However, for achieving successful community involvement in course-based higher education activities, future research is necessary for finding appropriate ways to prepare students in particular, but also teachers and community actors, for community involvement practices in course-based activities.

Second, students and teachers are often entirely new to community involvement processes (Bringle & Steinberg, 2010). Without prior experience, students and teachers may be unaware of the sensitivity of power relations, social structures, and underlying cultural differences in the community and the collaboration. They can influence these social dynamics with their own (still developing) understanding of power and their potential impact on these dynamics (Clark & Nugent, 2011; Sutton, 2011). For example, students' manner of interaction, knowledge exchange, and translation into knowledge can factor heavily in the outcomes and experiences of community actors, as can the facilitation and communication of teachers toward students and the community. The potential for harm resulting from lack of appreciation for these factors can make community involvement in course-based higher education activities particularly fragile. If students or teachers are unprepared, lack communication skills, or are insensitive to cultural differences, it influences not only the experiences of community actors, but also their own experiences, the outcomes of the course, and the relationship between higher education and community actors (Butin, 2015; Marullo & Edwards, 2000). At the same time, understanding such factors can make community involvement in higher education a powerful means to create professionals who are committed to social justice, who are humble and reflexive toward their own expert role and knowledge and sensitive to power differentials, and who thus can develop capabilities for collaborating with community actors in order to address complex social problems (Jakubowski & McIntosh, 2018). Hence, preparing students and faculty for community involvement seems imperative and can potentially enable them to broker the interaction between science and society (McMillan et al., 2016). These definitions, guiding principles, and strategies can serve as a framework for preparing future professionals for community involvement in this science–society interface.

Methodological Considerations and Future Research

This narrative review aimed to give insights into the current processes of community involvement in course-based higher education activities. Significant effort was required to find case studies describing the way community actors are involved in course-based higher education activities. Although some articles focused on the outcomes of community involvement—such as agency, empowerment, and reciprocity—the main focus was never specifically on process descriptions, such as community actors' own experiences of their involvement or detailed descriptions of the way community actors were involved in and beyond the course. Through careful reading, we identified the articles that did contain a description of the process of establishing community involvement. This interpretive approach (Greenhalgh et al., 2019) gave an in-depth understanding of the current definitions, guiding principles, and strategies. More re-

search is needed to validate these principles and strategies and determine their impact. Moreover, the significance of the principles and strategies in the process of community involvement was not determined in this review.

The depth and implementation of the process of community involvement is likely to be more nuanced, versatile, and complex than is presented here (Nelson & Stroink, 2020). Specifically, there is a need for more insight into the influence of personal, cultural, and organizational values of all involved actors. The power relations and relationships in a collaboration seem highly context-dependent, due to infinite possible combinations of involved actors (disciplines, organizations, and communities). Future research should therefore focus on how these different contexts, as well as personal and interpersonal values, influence the process of community involvement. In other words, the framework of definitions, principles, and strategies calls for deeper understanding and validation, preferably including community actors in this process.

Conclusions

This narrative review can serve as a first stepping stone toward more successful community involvement in course-based higher education activities and higher education in general. To this end, it offers a framework of definitions, guiding principles, and related strategies that have both theoretical and practical implications. This framework can guide the design, implementation, facilitation, and evaluation of community involvement in higher education and encourage rethinking the current approaches and also deepen our understanding. In presenting these first steps, we hope to inspire both academics and community actors to act on the existing conceptualizations and rethink their respective roles in these collaborations. All have a part to play in improving the way these collaborations are shaped. Paying attention to the current discrepancies, rethinking our definition of community, and aiming for successful community involvement could be the next step toward genuinely reciprocal or even transformative collaborations among students, teachers, and community actors.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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The search string was developed by MV and CP and the experienced librarian RV. Abstract screening was performed by MV, RS and CP. Full-text screening was performed by MV and CP. Data extraction was performed by MV. MV and CP rated the quality of the included studies. MV was responsible for writing the manuscript. CP and MZ read several versions of the manuscript and provided their feedback and suggestions regularly. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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