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ENABLEMENT – A FOUNDATION FOR COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT THROUGH SERVICE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Service learning as a form of scholarly community engagement should be aimed at mutual enablement between higher education institutions and communities. Yet service learning has been criticised for perpetuating power imbalances and for not advancing true enablement in communities. This study sought to describe perceptions of community representatives regarding enablement in occupational therapy service learning engagements, and to identify factors that facilitated or acted as barriers to enablement. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants from service learning partnerships at a South African university. Participants' perceptions reported on were based on six enablement foundations from literature, namely 1) choice, risk and responsibility, 2) client participation, 3) vision of possibilities, 4) change, 5) justice and 6) power sharing. Factors perceived either as barriers or as facilitators to enablement were identified. Based on the results, principles of enablement were formulated for each of the enablement foundations. The identified principles presented in this chapter serve as guidelines for enablement in communities, and the power of reciprocal knowledge sharing is emphasised as a mutually enabling endeavour.

CHAPTER 1 • JANSE VAN RENSBURG**1. INTRODUCTION**

I see this project as not successful ... I think it was impulsive ... Chased in, chased out. Here is this, here is that ... I think the tension that existed and the negativity was mutual ...

Experiences such as the one quoted above necessitates critical, collaborative investigation into what is truly happening at community level when higher education partners with the third sector, including non-profit organisations (NPOs) and the communities that they serve. Higher education institutions (HEIs) were given the formal mandate to engage with communities more than a decade ago in the National Plan on Higher Education, where community engagement was identified as one of the three core functions of higher education (RSA DHET 2013:39). Service learning (SL) has become one of the preferred forms of scholarly community engagement in South African HEIs (Hatcher & Erasmus 2008:57). Projects such as the Community – Higher Education – Service Partnerships (CHESP) initiative were aimed at supporting and equipping institutions and staff with knowledge on best practices when partnering with communities (specifically through SL), presumably to ensure, among other things, that engagements with communities are enabling in nature (Petersen & Osman 2013:5). Yet, despite these efforts and numerous papers written on the issue, some communities still experience SL engagements with HEIs as ‘unsuccessful’, ‘impulsive’ and ‘negative’ – all but enabling. This state of affairs emphasises the importance of critical investigation into SL engagements in order to learn from mistakes and to work toward mutually enabling engagements.

In this chapter the concept of enablement is first explored, whereafter I report on the findings of a study on enablement in occupational therapy service learning engagements. The chapter is concluded with principles for enablement that were derived from the results of the study.

2. THE CONCEPT OF ENABLEMENT

In this review of the literature related to enablement I attempt to define and argue the importance of enablement in the context of community engagement. Enablement foundations are presented from the literature and discussed as a framework for presenting the results later in this chapter.

2.1 Enablement at the heart of service learning as community engagement

Community engagement, and particularly SL as a preferred form of scholarly community engagement, as stated above, was mandated primarily for its potential

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to effect social transformation through emphasis on social justice and community development in a South African society characterised by inequality and division (RSA DHET 2013:39; Mitchell & Rautenbach 2005:101). Addressing pressing societal difficulties such as poverty, ill health and violence requires the promotion of agency – “the capacity of people to order their world, the capacity to create, reproduce, change, and live according to their own meaning systems, to have powers to define themselves as opposed to being defined by others” (Bhattacharyya 2004:12). I will subsequently argue that the promotion of agency occurs through a process of enablement.

The verb ‘to enable’ is defined as follows: “to give (someone) the authority or means to do something; make it possible for” (Oxford Dictionary). Enablement encompasses “facilitating, guiding, coaching, educating, prompting, listening, reflecting, encouraging, or otherwise collaborating with people so that individuals, groups, agencies or organizations have the means and opportunity to participate in shaping their own lives” (Townsend *et al* 2013:99). Enablement is collaborative, reciprocal and focused on mutual transformation – making positive change possible and promoting agency for all stakeholders. The reference to *all stakeholders* is important, especially in the context of SL; agency should be promoted in communities as well as in students when striving toward cultivating a sense of civic responsibility and sensitivity for social justice.

Perhaps the significance of the use of the word ‘enablement’ is best illustrated in contrast with another term frequently used in the context of community development, engagement and SL. ‘Empowerment’ refers to the “devolution of power” from one entity to the other (Urbanowski 2005:303); implicitly communicating a sense that power is transferred from the more powerful (HEI) to the less powerful (community). Discourse reinforcing any notion of imbalance in power is discouraged in the dialogue on community engagement (Butin 2003:1678, Hall 2010:26), possibly because experience has taught that power is not situated only with one entity. Rather, mutual appreciation of the assets of all stakeholders has proven to contribute to more sustainable, more transformative endeavours (Van der Merwe & Albertyn 2010:151-152). Therefore, enablement as a participatory process toward the promotion of agency and social transformation (for all stakeholders) should be at the heart of truly reciprocal SL engagements (Townsend & Wilcock 2004:77).

2.2 Enablement foundations

Emanating from the field of occupational therapy (OT), Townsend *et al* (2013) identify six ‘enablement foundations’ – these are core features of mutually enabling

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endeavours. While discussed in the disciplinary context of enabling occupation in occupational therapy, these enablement foundations arguably have a wider application value, also in the context of SL. The six enablement foundations are illustrated in Figure 1.1. A discussion on each of the foundations will follow, with an attempt to apply these foundations to the wider context of SL.

FIGURE 1.1 Enablement foundations [Reproduced with permission from the publisher. Source: Townsend *et al* 2013:101]

2.2.1 *Choice, risk, responsibility*

Careful negotiation of choice, risk and responsibility in an SL partnership is the first step to ensuring a mutually enabling endeavour for all stakeholders. The importance of community choice when negotiating the nature of collaborative activities is reiterated by authors such as Hall (2010:25) and Bender, Daniels, Lazarus, Naudé and Sattar (2006:96). Also, careful consideration of risks and clarification of responsibilities of stakeholders in advance mitigates potential misunderstandings and negative outcomes from the onset (Bender *et al* 2006:114). While this ‘enablement foundation’ does not constitute enablement in and of itself, it is a prerequisite for a mutually enabling partnership.

2.2.2 *Client participation*

Closely related to the notion of choice, client participation (which in the SL context is probably more aptly named ‘community participation’) is of utmost importance for enablement. Hall (2010:24) criticises the lack of community participation still present in some instances when quoting Kaniki’s criticism of universities entering into communities without invitation, and ‘helping’ with what the universities believe is needed. An enabling engagement with the community requires active participation from all stakeholders (Du Plessis & Van Dyk 2013:82). Not only does active participation in decision making and problem solving enhance stakeholders’ sense of ownership in the partnership, but it also “exerts individual human agency” (Townsend *et al* 2013:101).

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Facilitating the necessary knowledge and skills for participation in decision making and problem solving should therefore be a priority in mutually enabling engagements. Collaboration based on mutual respect and open, honest communication ensures the best possible environment for community participation.

2.2.3 Vision of possibilities

A vision of possibilities as a foundation for enablement refers broadly to the mutual cultivation of hope, readiness and confidence through the nature of the SL partnership. In such partnerships, a vision of possibilities may spark ideas and dreams of things previously unimagined, especially as the partnership grows and contributes to the attainment of goals. It requires of partners to approach one another with optimism and positive regard, believing in the potential of the other to transform and grow. A vision of possibilities fuels the momentum for mutual enablement and often provides the impetus for renewed choices (for things not previously thought possible), a willingness to take risks or greater responsibility and enhanced participation (Townsend *et al* 2013:102-103).

2.2.4 Change

Service learning partnerships are built on the assumption that change, or transformation, is necessary and mutually desirable. Moreover, mutual commitment to change is stated as a 'key indicator' for the formation of successful – that is, enabling – SL partnerships (Bender *et al* 2006:95). What is important as far as enablement is concerned, is that change should be negotiated mutually based on a vision of possibility (Townsend *et al* 2013:104). Sincere belief in people's ability to be active agents of change is necessary to promote agency.

2.2.5 Justice

For SL endeavours to be enabling there needs to be sincere concern for issues of social (and individual) justice. Critical engagement with encountered injustices, and proactive questioning of assumptions that may limit agency, promote justice and enablement (Townsend *et al* 2013:10). Opportunities for critical engagement with issues of justice arise when working with people and communities who are, or have been, marginalised or otherwise 'disabled', whether by official structures or personal prejudice. Additionally, beyond engaging with these issues, active promotion of a more just society will not only be enabling but will also contribute to the intended purpose of community engagement to advance responsible citizenship and social justice (Petersen & Osman 2013:2).

CHAPTER 1 • JANSE VAN RENSBURG**2.2.6 Power sharing**

Finally, power sharing as an enablement foundation has been one of the key characteristics of enablement that prompted the choice of the concept as a central theme in this publication. Much of the criticism against SL and community engagement, and frequently the reason for experiences of failure in such engagements, has related to the situation of power with one of the parties, instead of shared power (Butin 2010:7). As mentioned earlier, for engagement to be mutually enabling, inequality in power needs to be critically appraised and, as Mitchell (2008:56) argues, redistributed through the SL engagement. Appreciation of the different forms and application of knowledge assets offered by all stakeholders is vital in catalysing power sharing towards enablement (Du Plessis & Van Dyk 2013:82).

3. COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES' PERCEPTIONS REGARDING ENABLEMENT IN OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY SERVICE LEARNING ENGAGEMENTS

SL has been used as an educational approach to allow OT students to integrate theory and practice in various fields. Teaching community-based practice (knowledge, skills and attitudes), and preparation for the community service year, appear to be some of the most prevalent student outcomes aimed for with OT SL in South African higher education institutions (Duncan & Alsop 2006:9, 16; Pretorius & Bester 2009:260-261). Service goals are developed in collaboration with communities, and are consequently unique to each community. While a balance is sought between benefit to the student and benefit to the community, literature still yields apparently less evidence for community experiences and outcomes than for that of students (Butin 2010:7). Consequently, the aim of this study was to describe the perceptions of community representatives regarding enablement in OT SL engagements, with a secondary aim of identifying factors that either facilitated or acted as barriers to enablement.

An interpretive, constructivist paradigm was chosen to frame the study (Denzin & Lincoln 2008:31; Creswell 2009:8). The constructivist paradigm emphasises the socially constructed, transactional nature of knowledge generation, resulting in findings which are a construction of interactions between the researcher and participant as interpreted by the researcher. A descriptive qualitative study design was employed. Semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with seven community representatives from SL partnerships between an OT department and five community partners (one school and four NPOs). All of these partnerships had been established for at least two years at the time of the research. Community

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representatives had to be members of the community and had to be involved with SL for at least two years in a supervisory capacity. Voluntary informed consent was given by participants prior to the study. Community visits were carried out before conducting the interviews to establish some trust between the researcher and the participants, thus contributing to validity of the data. Interviews took place on site in the community and were recorded using digital voice recorders. Interviews were transcribed, and the researcher and an independent coder did content analysis using a combination of *a priori* (deductive) coding based on the enablement foundations identified by Townsend *et al* (2013) and interpretive (inductive) coding as the data was further explored (Waring & Wainwright 2008:86).

Findings regarding community representatives' perceptions about enablement in OT SL engagements are organised according to the *a priori* codes based on the enablement foundations, and facilitators and barriers to enablement are mentioned throughout the discussion of these foundations. In order to protect the identity of students, other persons, institutions and communities involved in this study, reference to specific persons or places in verbatim quotes were replaced with [STUDENT], [PERSON] or [INSTITUTION] (or other relevant descriptions) throughout the presentation of the findings.

3.1 Choice, risk, responsibility

Findings related to the first enablement foundation are discussed under three separate headings, namely Choice: Collaborative decision making versus imposing decisions; Risk: Perceived risks versus reward; and Responsibility: Role clarification and relationships of trust.

3.1.1 Choice: Collaborative decision making versus imposing decisions

Issues of choice were voiced in the context of decision making and goal setting. Participants (indicated with a *P*) perceived collaborative decision making as a key facilitator of choice as an enablement foundation. Attention was drawn to the importance of processes of collaboration between students, supervisors and community representatives as noted in the following comment:

And then [STUDENT] and I and the principal ... discussed and worked out a programme together. I said what the needs of the school were, [PERSON] discussed it and the occupational therapists said what they can do ... and I think that was the success of the whole thing. Because there was cooperation and everybody was enthusiastic and had input (P2).

The value of collaborative decision making throughout all phases of the SL process is reiterated by Du Plessis and Van Dyk (2013:70). Collaborative decision making

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enables SL partners to integrate goals which, according to Bringle, Clayton and Price (2009:4) denotes closeness, equity and integrity toward a transformational relationship within the partnership.

In contrast, where decision making was perceived as being imposed on the community rather than done in a collaborative way, the SL engagement was experienced as negative – perhaps even disabling:

So I think the tension that existed and the negativity was mutual. As a result of not having a proper structure and sitting down to talk like [PERSON] planned it this time (P6).

Imposing decisions has the potential to limit agency in partners. One participant emphasised that she needs to be aware of what goes on, but accepted just being informed and not contributing to decision making – even defending such a state of affairs:

I don't interfere. I will just give some advice ... (P7).

In this partnership it appears that on the part of the students and staff from the HEI, there was a lack of appreciation of the value of the knowledge the community representative has to share. This attitude, coupled with imposing rather than collaborative decision making, served as a barrier to enablement.

3.1.2 Risk: Perceived risks versus reward

Participants in the study perceived risks in SL engagements to relate to two primary issues, namely student preparedness and personal exposure (of the self, the institution or the community). For example, one participant expressed concern over students' preparedness to work with residents in a residential care facility, and expressed her concern that students experienced the interaction with her negatively (P6).

Mitigation of these risks could be sought through the application of other enablement foundations discussed in this chapter. For example, community participation through open, clear communication would lessen the perception of risk in terms of student competence if community partners are aware of exactly how students are prepared and supported to ensure that the service they deliver is of an acceptable standard. Continuous communication would also curb negativity if this develops, if it is addressed immediately and not left unresolved. However, no SL partnership is ever without risks – for all stakeholders involved. What seemed to facilitate enablement, however, was when the 'reward' gained through the partnership was perceived to outweigh the risk:

Because we realised that the risks we carry are minimal because it will deliver positive contributions to the community (P3).

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Townsend *et al* (2013:101) urge that, in the context of occupational therapy, the objective is to enable “safe engagement in just-right risk-taking” which resonates with the perceived ‘just-right risk-reward ratio’ expressed by the participant quoted above.

3.1.3 Responsibility: Role clarification and relationships of trust

“Clear roles and specific responsibilities are among the hallmarks of a successful SL experience for the different partners involved” (Bender *et al* 2006:100). The importance of this principle of successful SL engagements was confirmed by participants, who voiced their frustration and perceptions of failure within SL engagements where roles and responsibilities were not clarified:

I just wondered ... the seeds are planted but what now? Will they take out the weeds – the students? Or is it expected of [PERSON]? For me there was a bit of a grey area. Was it done for [INSTITUTION] and now it is our project ... or should they follow up? (P6).

In a study conducted at another HEI in South Africa, Alperstein (2007:65) similarly found that there was a need for more clearly defined roles and expectations, since uncertainty regarding these aspects could act as a barrier to enablement. Indeed, where clarification of roles and responsibilities did occur in this study, it was perceived to facilitate success within the SL engagement:

So I think we were all informed about how it would work. And I think the students knew exactly what they came to do ... I don't think there was any confusion (P1).

Moreover, where responsibilities were clarified and borne reciprocally within a relationship of trust, community representatives felt confident to carry their responsibilities within the partnership:

So I really carried the responsibility with confidence because I knew the supervisors of the students, the trust with which we started when we established the relationship ... I knew that the supervisors would not drop me ... So the two-way trust relationship that was built between the students, myself, the supervisors, myself, the teachers and myself, the Governing Body and myself, it was one that I always carried with great confidence. I knew we worked in a team (P3).

The enablement foundation of choice, risk and responsibility rests heavily on the SL principles of reciprocity and mutuality, which necessitate collaboration and clear communication between all stakeholders in the partnership. Participants’ perceptions regarding communication, and facilitators and barriers to communication are explored in more detail below.

CHAPTER 1 • JANSE VAN RENSBURG**3.2 Community participation**

Results pertaining to community participation yielded two distinct categories, namely Participation: Inclusion versus exclusion, and Communication.

3.2.1 Participation: Inclusion versus exclusion

Throughout the process of data collection, participants either voiced the value of inclusion in all the different phases of the SL engagement, or expressed dissatisfaction with being excluded from participation in certain aspects or activities as shown in the following quotations:

And I was not involved. I just heard coincidentally that one of the residents would be at the tea. I asked that day, you know, where does who fit in? I did not expect ... to an extent I did expect to be invited to the tea, but on the other hand I just wanted to be informed (P6).

Because the staff ... you have to talk to them. You have to sell this thing to them. You have to say why you want to do it, what the outcome will be ... unfortunately I was not involved there. I could not inform my staff (P7).

Exclusion as it was experienced by these two participants raises serious questions on issues of *justice* within these partnerships, which will be addressed later in this chapter. Marginalisation of community representatives (literally being moved aside or to the margins of the partnership) by HEI staff and/or students stands in direct opposition to enablement foundations of participation and justice, as well as to principles of partnership formation such as recognition and validation of partners, ensuring equity and reciprocity and ensuring diversity (Bender *et al* 2006:100-103).

However, the desire to be involved and the value of inclusion of various stakeholders, including community representatives themselves and other staff within the organisations, was also expressed:

Yes, we want to contribute to the success of the project ... we must cooperate. I am more than willing to cooperate (P6).

... if the students present the chair exercises alone, there are four or five people. And if we include one of the nurses there are twenty-five, thirty people ... It makes a difference (P7).

Inclusion of all stakeholders in a just and reciprocal way necessitates open, honest communication. Hence communication was identified as a distinct category related to community participation as an enablement foundation.

3.2.2 Communication

The polarities noted in most of the categories already discussed also marked the category of communication. While some participants experienced the value of

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clear communication and reiterated the importance thereof, others experienced a lack of open, honest communication as a significant barrier in the SL engagement, particularly as it pertains to community participation in the partnership. The following quotations highlight this polarity as perceived by two different participants, while both reiterate the importance of communication:

... the university ... has always come to us and asked: how can we help you? ... So for future partnerships, the continuation of the partnership; if we take hands, communicate clearly with one another, are honest with each other and know what and how long and toward what we are working (P3).

So, I think more frequent feedback ... there is just uncertainty about who must do what ... There was a bit of a communication gap for me (P6).

Participants emphasised three characteristics of communication which they experienced as crucial to enablement, either through the presence or the absence thereof. These were frequent, formalised and face-to-face communication.

- **Frequent communication**

Frequent communication allows for multiple opportunities to share information, clarify roles and tasks, and raise issues of concern. When communication is continuous, open and honest, risks such as those related to personal and institutional exposure are minimised, and relationships can be strengthened. Frequent communication was identified as a key facilitator of enablement (P2), while the absence thereof poses a threat to the process of enablement.

- **Formalised communication structure**

Communication between SL stakeholders can be either informal or formal (Bender et al 2006:98). However, participants in this study specifically emphasised the necessity of formalised communication structures as a facilitator for enablement. For example:

I think we should meet on a structured basis, say on a Monday at eight ... I think the more communication there is, the more successful you will be. The fewer frustrations you will cause (P7).

The advantage of a formalised communication structure is that all stakeholders, regardless of their perceived power, are (or at least should be) included in the communication process. This facilitates better transparency in the relationship, which in turn is beneficial to the development and maintenance of the partnership.

- **Face-to-face communication**

Finally, communication should happen face-to-face, preferably in the community, as expressed by this participant:

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... good communication between the two partners is very important. Physical contact. Meaning that it should not only take place over the phone but that the parties should get to know one another and understand what the intent is with the other (P2).

Face-to-face communication shows commitment to the partnership (Bender *et al* 2006:99) and as such contributes to building a relationship of trust (Du Plessis & Van Dyk 2013:76). This is especially relevant to the person or persons who take primary responsibility for the maintenance of the partnership, although face-to-face communication will benefit all stakeholders.

Communication which is frequent, formal and face-to-face facilitates enablement not only through enhancing client participation, but also through catalysing all of the other enablement foundations.

3.3 Vision of possibilities

Findings in this study yielded two categories related to a vision of possibilities, namely enhanced awareness and inspiring confidence.

3.3.1 Enhanced awareness

Participants perceived that it was helpful if students became aware of things they as community representatives had previously been unaware of. This enhanced awareness allowed for goals not previously thought of to be incorporated into the partnership (P1), sparking a vision of possibility:

I think the very important thing working with the university, it was a light to us. We were not aware. But it was really a light for us (P4).

Alperstein (2007:62) similarly found that students “added fresh views and identified shortcomings” in the community through SL engagements by virtue of being ‘outsiders’. She reiterated, however, that it was the community’s prerogative to implement students’ recommendations. This principle may curtail Kaniki’s concern (Hall 2010:24) referred to earlier in the chapter that universities offer “help on issues that the universities believe they need, but of which they may not be aware”, while leaving room for enhanced awareness as a mechanism toward a vision of possibilities.

3.3.2 Inspiring confidence

While using different words to describe their perceptions, participants voiced an intangible ‘something’ that resulted from the SL partnership. One participant described it as something that is missed when it is not there, a form of reassurance

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to staff of the organisation (P3). Another perception of inspiring confidence involved community members (learners of the school) themselves:

... when you came here – it gave those children so much confidence. The children believed that they can do anything. So with our performance at the eisteddfod in [PLACE], many of our children received very good symbols (P3).

It appears that the presence of students in the community fulfilled a supportive and inspirational role that resulted in enhanced confidence among community members. However, this appears to be an unintended outcome that would require further investigation in order to understand the facilitating or inhibiting role that it could play in enablement.

3.4 Change

When participants were prompted to voice perceptions of change within the SL engagement, two primary categories arose, namely factors that had an impact (positive or adverse) on change, and tangible change experienced.

3.4.1 Factors that influence change

The data analysis revealed that frequency of student presence, continuity of services and repetition in order to contribute to sustainability are three related factors that have an impact on change, while tangible products, role-players' attitudes and an appointed occupational therapist were also identified as factors that influence change. In view of their similarity in nature, the first three factors are discussed together while the other three factors are discussed separately in the sections below.

- Frequency, continuity and repetition for sustainability

Bringle *et al* (2009:4) state frequency of interaction as one of three prerequisites for 'closeness' of a partnership. According to these authors, closeness in a partnership can range from unaware to transformative, based on the frequency of interaction, among other things. Participants in this study perceived their SL engagements to be lacking in frequency, and they expressed the desire for more frequent interaction (regardless of whether the engagement was perceived to be successful or unsuccessful) (P2, P6). Alperstein's study (2007:62) yielded similar results in that the time allocated to SL was experienced as a challenge, specifically pertaining to time for establishing trust relationships between staff and students.

In addition to a need for increased frequency of interaction, participants in this study perceived a lack of continuity and follow-up of student involvement as a barrier to enablement. It was said that things "came to a standstill" (P7), that there was "no

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time for follow-up" (P1) and that the work done by the students "goes to waste" (P2) if they are not frequently present in the community.

The perception that work that was done goes to waste begs the questions "Is it worth it?" and "Is it just?". If communities do not benefit from intermittent engagements, it would require HEIs to revisit the design of the SL programme in order to ensure that resources invested in SL engagements yield positive returns for all stakeholders, and to ensure that communities are not exploited for the sake of student education.

Finally, repetition for sustainability was identified as a prominent facilitator for enablement. While communities generally want to take ownership of the 'products' of SL engagements, the importance of proper enablement of communities before withdrawing was stressed:

... you can't just come for a week and put something down and walk away. You must repeatedly ... until it is consolidated in the community itself (P2).

Ownership and sustainability do not happen overnight. HEIs should be prepared to commit to long-term relationships that provide opportunities for frequent interaction, continuity and repetition. With due acknowledgement of logistical challenges of student academic programmes, the results emphasise that it is imperative to consider frequency, continuity and repetition *before* partnering with communities.

- **Tangible products**

And you left something behind ... like the pictures – each teacher received a healthy balanced lifestyle poster – and we can ... because I give LO [Life Orientation] I refer back to it. And then we remember (P2).

Especially in the absence of frequency of interaction, continuity and repetition, tangible products left in the community that relate to the service performed by students appeared to be a facilitator for more sustained change, specifically if community members were enabled to utilise these products. It therefore appears to be essential to enablement to leave some tangible, useful products in the community that support the change that was aimed for in the partnership.

- **Role-players' attitudes**

Participants discussed how they perceived the influence of the attitudes of different role-players on change within the community:

... positive attitudes to make a positive contribution and a difference in the community. You know, you can't be fooled by what happens. Because you see there is improvement and upliftment (P2).

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The attitudes of students and lecturers in particular were indicated as influences on change. Positive attitudes, dedication and enthusiasm seemed to have a positive impact on change as an enablement foundation.

- Appointed occupational therapist

Only two of the sites where the research was performed had access to an occupational therapist appointed by the community (NPO) who coordinated student activities (among other duties). These sites viewed the involvement of the appointed occupational therapist as essential to change:

Yes. [PERSON] definitely plays an important role. Because I think she knows the setup and what should happen ... so the fact that [PERSON] is here this year made a difference ... I think a full-time occupational therapist is almost the centre around which everything revolves (P6).

The relevance of the involvement of an appointed professional in SL engagements will probably depend on the nature of student involvement and service activities. In a discipline such as OT it seems to enhance student service and community benefit. However, rather than recommending that community organisations should attempt to acquire the services of a discipline-specific professional to enhance change toward enablement, it seems more apt to recommend that where discipline-specific professionals are already involved in or employed by the community, these may be well suited sites for the development of SL partnerships.

3.4.2 Observable change

Participants generally found it hard to express specific, observable change stemming from student involvement. Those that experienced the whole partnership negatively also perceived little or no change (P6), but among those who generally expressed satisfaction with the SL partnership there were some diverse expressions of perceived change, owing to the diverse nature of service activities in the different SL engagements. As was the case with findings related to vision of possibilities, however, participants found it hard to pinpoint the change and the mechanisms by which the change was facilitated as a result of the SL partnership. Change was noted in relation to community members' engagement in activity, behaviour, emotions and spirituality. There were also changes in management procedures and in institutions' connections with other community resources such as volunteers, as shown in the following excerpt:

... a total difference to the being of the elderly person. I mean, they sat in their rooms and they did not participate in activities. So it made a total difference in the setup of how we handled the elderly from day to day. Because we could

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continue with the programme that the students laid down for us. Yes. And they also helped a lot with the volunteers. The students came and empowered the volunteers and the volunteers can now carry on with what the students did (P1).

A comprehensive discussion of the occupational changes (from an OT perspective) identified through the research is beyond the scope of this chapter and will consequently not be discussed in depth. Rather, specific findings pertaining to justice and power sharing as an enablement foundation follow.

3.5 Justice

Townsend *et al* (2013:105-106) suggest that justice from an enablement perspective entails four major characteristics, namely recognition of injustices encountered; showing positive regard for all people regardless of differences in ability, race or other diversity factors; questioning the self and others regarding assumptions about what is 'wrong' or should be done 'better'; and showing and acting on the belief that all people have a place in society. When participants in the study were prompted on issues of justice, few were able to articulate specific perceptions or experiences in this regard. Only one of the characteristics mentioned by Townsend *et al*, namely positive regard for diversity, could be identified during data analysis. The following excerpt is an example of how students' positive regard for diversity was expressed:

I think the students did not make distinctions about who they cared for. They really treated every elderly or disabled person in their own way (P1).

The findings of this study suggest the need for deeper investigation into issues of justice – both on the part of the HEI (staff and students) and within the community itself – especially in light of the fact that promotion of social justice and social responsiveness are fundamental aims of community engagement.

3.6 Power sharing

[U]ndergirding almost all conceptualisations of service-learning are modernist, liberal and radical individualistic notions of self, progress, knowledge, and power. Specifically, such a worldview is grounded in the notion that individuals are autonomous change agents who can effect positive and sustained transformations. It is the belief that we can consciously bring about betterment (by the more powerful for the less powerful) through a downward benevolence whereby all benefit (Butin 2010:7).

Butin's criticism of unequal power relations that seem to be so pervasive in the history of SL sensitises one to reflect critically on how power is perceived and practised in SL

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engagements. In this study, findings pertaining to power were categorised into two categories, namely ‘sharing power’ and ‘the power of sharing knowledge’.

3.6.1. Sharing power

Participants in this study appeared to perceive sharing of power between HEI staff and students and themselves as community representatives as a facilitator to enablement. Equality and mutual respect were singled out as key indicators of this shared power – one participant voiced it as *“there is no big brother in this relationship”* (P3). Another participant emphasised the importance of sharing power in the SL partnership as follows:

You know, if you are sharing, it’s better than you telling me what to do. Because I’ve got a little input in that and then that makes me comfortable ... Because I’ve got something that I’ve put down on the table. It’s not only for you to tell me what to do (P4).

It was apparent that sharing power contributes to feelings of comfort and inclusion in the partnership, enhancing opportunities for mutual enablement.

However, despite perceptions of shared or equal power, notions of ‘being helped’ – which alludes to Butin’s (2010:7) downward benevolence – were still present in participants’ descriptions of their SL partnerships:

So they look at the students with that expectation: you are here to help us (P3).

Perhaps an answer to this dichotomy of power sharing versus ‘helping’ is hinted at in the following comment:

I think our first aim was to help them [the students] to really work on ground level in poorer communities, and secondly to help the elderly in the old age home with some of their dysfunctions (P1).

Reciprocal helping, where the community also genuinely experience that they are helping and not just being helped, may assist in balancing power between stakeholders and contributing to mutual enablement. I expand on this idea in the following section on the power of sharing knowledge.

3.6.2 The power of sharing knowledge

In their conversations about their SL engagements, participants in the study referred to valuable knowledge situated both with the HEI (students) and in the community, as well as referring to things that the students may learn from the community, while the community also wants to learn certain things from the students. Table 1.1 illustrates these knowledge assets and desires with examples from participant verbalisations.

CHAPTER 1 • JANSE VAN RENSBURG**TABLE 1.1** Knowledge to share and knowledge to gain in SL partnerships

	Students	Community
Knowledge to share	Students bring current knowledge: <i>Remember, we are old people that work here. The children have new ideas. Other ways of doing. New research that is done, and then they bring it to us (P7).</i>	Community possesses valuable knowledge: <i>The students come in and want to finish this thing quickly. But we who work here, whose place it is, you know more or less what will work and what not (P7).</i>
Knowledge to gain	Students have a lot to learn from community: <i>And then if they ... want to reach out further to the elderly. And experience the life of the elderly person. And then if they want to go further, to get to know the life of the person with Alzheimer's ... I think there is a lot for them to learn (P6).</i>	Community expresses benefit from training: <i>And the students also gave training to Management. And it also helped them to see how the Eden project is incorporated in the [INSTITUTION]. Because they don't always understand. And now Management also has insight into it (P1).</i>

This perspective on knowledge, namely that both the students and the community have knowledge to contribute and knowledge to gain from the partnership, sparked the category of the power of sharing knowledge. Participants articulated how reciprocal knowledge sharing became an enabling force for students and community members alike. However, the most powerful anecdote illustrates not only the enabling power of reciprocal knowledge sharing, but also how sharing knowledge can influence a person's entire being:

There was a student that traded knitting patterns with a lady here ... She sat with the lady and said she couldn't knit and the lady must help her. So the elderly could share some of their knowledge with the young people, which was wonderful ... So they could share knowledge with one another and I think the elderly enjoyed the young people more ... Because they feel useless and here this lady could give her knitting pattern to a student. And share her knowledge with the student ... I think they feel more of worth. They mean something to society again. Otherwise they just sit here. They feel their children rejected them ... society rejected them. They are too old to do anything. And then the student comes and learns something from the elderly person. I think it means a lot to the elderly ... upliftment, being human again ... feeling that they belong (P1).

Sharing power in an SL partnership through reciprocity and mutual respect, and sharing knowledge appear to be powerful forces toward enablement.

4. CONCLUSION

In this chapter I discussed the concept of enablement and the six enablement foundations. I then presented the community representatives' perceptions regarding enablement (in relation to the enablement foundations) as experienced in service learning engagements with an occupational therapy department at a higher

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education institution in South Africa. I conclude this chapter by highlighting prominent principles of enablement communicated in the findings, as well as questions raised, in order to promote dialogue on the issue.

The following principles of enablement for service learning engagements in higher education are concluded from the findings presented:

- Enablement requires choice based on collaborative decision making.
- Enablement requires just-right risk-taking which is outweighed by the potential benefit.
- Enablement requires specific clarification of roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders negotiated within the framework of a relationship of trust.
- Enablement requires active inclusion of community participation throughout the partnership.
- Enablement occurs in the presence of frequent, formalised, face-to-face, open and honest communication.
- Enablement is promoted when a vision of possibilities is sparked by an increased awareness of possible outcomes, and confidence is inspired through involvement in the partnership.
- Enablement based on positive, transformational change requires frequent, continuous interaction of sufficient duration to ensure sustainable outcomes.
- Enablement depends on the attitudes of stakeholders and requires positivity, dedication and enthusiasm.
- Tangible products and appointed discipline-specific professionals in the community contribute positively to change toward enablement.
- Enablement requires active and explicit attention to issues of justice.
- Enablement requires power sharing based on reciprocity, equality and mutual respect.
- Reciprocal knowledge sharing is a powerful force toward enablement.

The findings in the study also raised the following questions:

- Why did participants find it difficult to specifically articulate the change that they experienced as a result of the service learning partnership? What are the implications thereof for enablement and transformation?
- What are the mechanisms through which student presence in communities inspires confidence that seems to facilitate enablement through sparking a vision of possibilities? Could a deeper understanding of these mechanisms enhance partnerships and sustainability?
- How can issues of justice be included more explicitly in SL engagements and would this enhance enablement as theoretically suggested?

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- How can we utilise the power of reciprocal knowledge sharing for enablement across SL engagements more effectively?

Finally the compelling words of a participant from the study capture the most prominent, overarching principle of enablement – the power of sharing and working together:

... we are in shackles, but let's say, education-wise, information-wise we are so rich. It's because of the partnership. We wouldn't reach that if we were alone (P4).

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