CHALLENGING THE "APARTHEIDS" OF KNOWLEDGE

in Higher Education through Social Innovation

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Chapter 7

Challenging mainstream 'psychologies' through community-based service-learning at master's level: Critical reflections at the interface of theory and practice

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1. Introduction

A key aspect of the widespread HE students' protests during 2015 – 2016 in South Africa (SA) was students' dissatisfaction with the limited curricular transformation since the inception of democratic rule (Molefe, 2016), including the predominance of theoretical perspectives that privilege certain academic discourses (Mbembe, 2016). In mainstream psychologies, curricula have remained largely Eurocentric, reinforcing the dominance of knowledge systems in service of neoliberal and technocratic systems of governance that eschew critique (Painter *et al.*, 2013). Here, I purposely use the term 'psychologies' (as in Fryer & Laing, 2008) rather than the singular 'psychology' to indicate that the discipline is neither unified nor adequately globalised, with no universally accepted theoretical frameworks. This raises questions about the perspectives that have dominated what has been taught in university psychology curricula, as well as which have been subjugated because they raise critical questions. Central questions are about

the utility of the dominant theories in the SA context; how various psychologies have been constructed, including particularly whose purpose they have served and continue to serve.

In HE in SA, a patriarchal view of knowledge has continued to predominate, vesting authority in the knowledge of the expert. There has been limited progress in tackling injustice and gross inequalities during the two past decades and into the current transition period (Mbembe, 2016), highlighting the need to transform educational practice. Teaching methodologies are still persistently reliant on the 'transmission' mode (Freire, 1970), where the authority figure appears to know better or have all the 'answers', resulting in the still widespread use of rote learning. Students find it difficult to question educators or to explore other possible ways of understanding. This leads to entrenched power differentials, with students being fearful of expressing themselves and struggling to formulate or ask questions about the relevance of their learning to their experiences. They thus become passive recipients of what is presented, rather than actively constructing their learning; leading to a dependency on authoritative texts and decontextualised 'facts', rather than independent learning (Nyamupangedengu, 2017). Students find it difficult to learn the skills needed to become autonomous practitioners, to construct meaning relevant to their lives and to apply their knowledge and capabilities or interrogate their beliefs and values.

In contrast to the above, in the Community Psychology module of the Master's Degrees in Clinical and Counselling Psychology, which forms the basis of this chapter, I favour an organic approach to knowledge construction. Initially, trainees are provided with examples of the applications of more subjugated theoretical frameworks that I have found to be helpful; then they are encouraged to draw from their own experiences and knowledges in participatory engagement and the central activity of the module, Community-Based Service-Learning (CBSL). In this learning, pairs of students actively build a partnership with a community organisation, aiming to meet the identified needs of their community partners. In the USA 'service-learning' has a well-established literature base, but much of the writing tends to be somewhat acritical (Mitchell, 2008) and not linked to specific postgraduate training in psychology. I prefer to use CBSL as a term, to foreground the importance of the community-based partners who contribute to trainees' learning. Students are encouraged to actively construct their learning – drawing from their engagements in reflective activities and learning collaboratively with their partners and peers – to produce a portfolio that illustrates how they have worked at the theory-practice interface.

In this chapter, I explore the module that has unfolded over the past three years (2015 – 2017), describing the basis of some of the less widespread theoretical frameworks that students have found useful. I outline concepts from Vygotsky (1962) that inform the provision of reflective spaces and describe the influences of Freire (1970) and Martín-Baró (Aron & Corne, 1996) on Critical Community Psychologies (CCP), critiquing a more dominant mode of practice in Community Psychology (the 'Mental Health' model). I then illustrate the application of some of these perspectives in CBSL, drawing from students' writing and reflections. The insights gained from this work then lead to suggestions for curricular amendments in SA, to move towards more relevant psychologies and to promote interdisciplinary working across various settings.

2. Vygotskian challenges to current training models in psychology

Vygotsky's research occurred in a period of momentous political and societal change in Russia a century ago, strongly influencing the resultant theorising. Learning and cognitive development were viewed as embedded in the socio-historical and socio-cultural processes of the learner, "social rather than individual... a communicative process, whereby knowledge is shared and understandings are constructed in culturally-formed settings" (Mercer, 1994:92-93). The resultant socio-cultural frameworks that were developed by Vygotsky and his collaborators (e.g. Luria) conceptualise key aspects of learning contexts; however, this work was suppressed by the authorities after Vygotsky's untimely death in 1934 and was only gradually translated and made accessible decades later, by which time 'western' psychologies had institutionalised other much more individually-focused models of learning. Such models do not adequately emphasise the co-construction of cognitive contents and processes, nor do they foreground the profound influence of the context on this content and processes. Some of the key ideas will be summarised below.

The first of Vygotsky's (1962:125) books to be translated emphasised the "continual movement back and forth from thought to word and from word to thought", highlighting the importance of 'thinking and speaking' in socio-cultural experiences, as tools for development and action. Vygotsky preferred the active terms 'speaking' and 'thinking', rather than the more abstract forms 'language' and 'thought', emphasising the dynamic interconnectedness of thinking and speaking. External speech is crucial in developing thoughts, which are then represented by inner speech. In turn, the interactions that lead to thinking (which tend to be associative, using condensed words and forms) being expanded into

external speaking are very important in enabling thoughts to be verbalised as linear grammatical forms, thus elaborating meaning. So 'talking through our thoughts' can create links from the specifics of one example to more generalised applications and future actions. The 'tools' of words and symbols are used both in talking about actions and translating these actions into mental functions to guide future action. All of this occurs during interactions with others – those who are providing assistance to the learner (being more experienced in the tasks) or those to whom the learner is conveying meaning.

Vygotsky (1962) distinguished between everyday 'spontaneous' concepts, which emerge from processing the actions of self and others, and 'scientific' (or 'scholarly') concepts, derived from the systematic knowledge conveyed in formal educational contexts, beyond the learner's experience. In 1934, Vygotsky noted that theoretical knowledge is abstract, "... mediated through other concepts with their internal, hierarchical system of relationships" (Wertsch, 1985:103). Thus, scientific concepts do not originate in the learner's mental processing of reality, leading to a gap between theory and experiences that needs to be bridged during instruction. Scholarly concepts need to be translated into more concrete terms, with links made to spontaneous concepts which are known by the learner, and the learner's experiences need to be discussed in relation to theory. These ideas point to the importance of reflective discussions to enable students to theorise their practice and internalise these ideas. Vygotsky (1934, in Wertsch, 1985:112) stated "it is in argumentation, in discussion, that the functional moments appear that will give rise to the development of reflection". Vygotsky (1962) also emphasises the need for time to process reflections, to enable new meanings to be formed through others' words becoming "half-ours and half-someone else's" (Bakhtin, in Wertsch, 1991:79). Such internalisation of speaking enhances reflections on one's activities, stimulating the ability to feel greater control and mastery (Moll, 1990).

Two further important functions of speech were acknowledged by Vygotsky (Wertsch, 1985): those of 'emotional release' and 'social contact'. These two functions are also socio-cultural, and spaces for these functions need to be made in HE settings. The iterative and continually interactive nature of speaking and thinking is both social and individual, reflecting embedded historical and contextual influences. The important challenge is to find ways of encouraging students to be far more active in speaking about their thinking and reactions, i.e. speaking about their processing of ideas and reflection on them.

Tharp and Gallimore (1988) suggest that, over time, the above processes move from social regulation of activities to internalised self-regulation. Learners

may need more support or assistance earlier, when ideas and techniques are new, and then develop greater autonomy gradually. The assistance that is provided may take various forms, with 'instructional conversations' that include modelling, feedback, questioning and cognitive structuring. The term 'conversation' points to interactive contexts of equality and responsiveness, including the above four elements (which are less common in formal HE settings). These ideas thus support collaborative learning conversations, where peers verbalise their thoughts and feeling to convey their understandings to each other. Opportunities need to be provided so that peers, who are closer in cognitive development and more at ease to explore with and question each other, can discuss and rehearse the application of ideas.

The ideas explored above challenge the more 'authoritative' models of teaching and supervision that are commonly found in training settings. Wertsch (1991:78) notes the inhibitory effect of the authoritative voice, which is more 'univocal' than other voices, allowing "no interanimation with other voices". A Vygotskian approach thus proposes pedagogies that are as interactive as possible to encourage speaking about thinking – active discussions of the students' applications of scholarly concepts and their theorising of their everyday experiences of work, with each other.

3. Developments in CCP

As in other countries, where community psychologies evolved in response to repressive regimes or inequalities that oppressed groups of people (Fryer & Laing, 2008), forms of community psychology emerged during the 1980s in SA. Groups of psychologists linked to certain universities promoted a psychology that was more socially relevant than the dominant individually-focused approaches (Yen, 2008). They criticised organised psychology for its silence and seeming collusion with the policies and violent actions of the apartheid state and for not protesting strongly against the state-perpetrated violence and its deleterious effects on people's mental health. These groups struggled for services and became involved in providing psycho-emotional support for people who had been detained, tortured and persecuted by the state (Hayes, 2000). Community psychology was thus well positioned to be influential post-1994 (Pillay, 2003), holding great promise as a foundation for SA psychology to develop approaches much more responsive to the needs of the majority (Foster, 2004).

Sadly, however, community psychology has not had as widespread an influence on practice as it promised (Carolissen, 2006). Applications of the sub-discipline have often been theoretical rather than practical (Pillay, 2003) and

there has been a lack of a unitary voice in community psychologies due to the political positioning of some of its proponents, whether conservative, progressive or radical (Yen, 2008). In SA, clinical psychology has been central to influencing the profession, working closely with psychiatry and predominantly associated with individual pathology and treatment, even though there have been regular calls for shifts in focus (e.g. Ahmed & Pillay, 2004; Seedat, 2014). It is important to challenge the pathologising of individuals, typical of much of mainstream psychology (Cromby, Harper & Reavey, 2013), since community psychologists locate much aetiology firmly in the unequal social structures that promote inequalities in access to resources and discrimination against and systemic oppression of certain people (Naidoo, 2000).

Apolitical approaches to community psychology that have emerged from the United States, which have had extensive influences on the field globally (Fryer & Laing, 2008), have led to community psychologies that have not challenged the prevailing political, social and economic conditions, limiting the impact of interventions. In some contexts, as a result, forms of CCP that strive for systemic change have gained ground. The emphasis drawn from critical approaches relates to the impact of power and challenges to societal structures, politically and socio-economically, which promote inequality and a lack of social justice (Painter *et al.*, 2013; Seedat & Lazarus, 2011).

Some of CCP's ideas originate from the Latin American 'popular education' movement as espoused in Brazil by Freire (1970), drawing from theories more likely to be taught in education than in psychology departments. It has also been strongly influenced by Latin American Liberation Psychology, such as that formulated by Martín-Baró in El Salvador, with academic workers standing in solidarity with people experiencing oppression (Aron & Corne, 1996). Freire's (1970) work encourages participatory psycho-educational approaches in which people are provided with material that stimulates discussions of the impacts of societal inequality on their conditions of living and working through such techniques as 'conscientisation'. Another important, though not dominant, approach in the teaching of methodologies of psychology is Action Research, which gained great importance in Liberation Psychology, particularly in its participatory form, working for social justice (Fals Borda, 2001). These influences promote collaborative work with groups of people, valuing the attributes everyone brings and their everyday knowledges, striving to work in solidarity and cooperatively, with a focus that promotes systemic activism and working towards social justice.

The term 'community' also must be considered. In apartheid psychology, it was often used to describe the settlements used to separate people and oppress

the majority (Carolissen, 2006). To move away from ideas of 'community' as a euphemism for an area that is impoverished and disadvantaged by lack of access to resources, Kagan *et al.*, (2011) use the term 'community' rather as a verb and a key element of CCP. In this way the term promotes engagement that is prosocial, drawing individuals together, whether formally or informally (and not necessarily in proximity, since online communities have grown dramatically over recent times). Kagan *et al.*, (2011) also emphasise social justice, mentioned earlier, and then add as a third key element the need for inherent respect of people and the planet, formulated into the concept of 'stewardship'. I give more detail of the overlaps between the principles of CCP and CBSL in Akhurst (2017).

All of the above ideas resonate in the unequal and socially divided context of SA, where the imprints of the oppression and racial discrimination of the apartheid era are still very evident more than twenty years after the dawn of democracy. CCP has the potential to encourage asset-based and more inclusive participatory approaches, and through these approaches conscientise trainees to the very evident social asymmetries in SA, which in turn will impact limited educational opportunities, increased poverty and inadequate healthcare provision (Carolissen *et al.*, 2010). It is important to provide opportunities for critically reflective discussions (as in CBSL) on the impacts of the neoliberal policies of recent years and ways in which psychologists' practice could become more transformative in relation to societal structures and service delivery, rather than reinforcing the *status quo* (Foster, 2004).

3.1 *The mental health model of community psychology*

Although forms of community psychology in the United States evolved from the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, a 'community mental health' approach has predominated in practice there. Naidoo (2000) notes the apolitical form of this approach because it developed within the political system in which structural discrimination is embedded, rather than challenging it. One of the core aspects of an approach that strives to promote improved mental health is to challenge work that is ameliorative, with the emphasis moving to work that is focused on prevention (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010), although this has been focused in particular geographic locations, rather than becoming influential at policy and resource levels. The mental health model thus retains strong interconnections with the medical and social care systems, and so it may unintentionally reinforce existing systems of power because they are not critically analysed.

Naidoo *et al.*, (2007) outline the applications of community psychology in South Africa, with Ahmed and Suffla (2007) discussing the limitations of the mental health approach to community psychology, which still emphasises the 'top-down' expertise of the psychologist, the pathologising of distress and the focus on individual behaviour change. The challenge is to move towards more transformative approaches that might have a wider impact, such as those espoused by the 'social action' or 'psycho-political liberation' models (as described in Arumugam, 2001). The social action model more actively focuses on the self-determination of people through cooperative social support and self-help groups. It encourages groups to claim their rights and to put pressure on those in power to be more responsive, with advocacy being a core role for the psychologists involved (Naidoo *et al.*, 2007). The psycho-political liberation model is more radical in its aims, working towards systemic change through building the social capital of participants and encouraging collective action through intersectional campaigning. The goal of this model is to lead to policy changes and shifts in resource allocation towards greater social justice.

Trainees need to be exposed to the different ways of working as psychologists (as outlined in Naidoo *et al.*, 2007), and a central question of this chapter is whether and how trainees might use such ideas in their CBSL settings.

4. The role of CBSL in linking theory and practice

This article explores an approach to CBSL that is integrated into the curriculum in a module that is a core element of counselling and clinical trainee psychologists' coursework at master's level in one SA university. At an early stage in their module, trainees are informed of the potential projects with which they can become involved via presentations by the previous year's cohort and being given information about any new requests for assistance that have come from community-based organisations (since there is a natural evolution of the work, with some completed during the previous year). Pairs of students then volunteer for the projects with which they would like to work, and once the allocation has been agreed upon, trainees contact their respective community partners to negotiate the nature of the work to be planned. For new projects, this may involve some form of needs analysis (Kagan *et al.*, 2011).

The annual cohort is made up of 12 master's level counselling and clinical psychology trainees who pair up by category. This enables six projects to be worked on during the course of the module (that spans from May to the end of October). The trainees worked in the following community placements during 2017:

- With staff members of a local secondary school, where the principal was concerned about the conflict between two groups;
- In a day centre for people discharged from the local psychiatric hospital, where participants engage in craft-work and psychosocial skills development, with the trainees providing group therapeutic support;
- With Grade 11 learners in a career development programme for the children of employees on campus (the learners attended various previously disadvantaged schools lacking in resources);
- In a school for learners who had been excluded from mainstream schools due to their intellectual and socio-emotional needs, with trainees providing group psychoeducation;
- Providing lifeskills workshops with boys (ages 6 – 18) housed in a local childcare shelter;
- Facilitating regular peer support groups for the volunteer counsellors who provide a peer counselling programme based at a local youth centre.

As the work unfolds, the students plan and work together in their pairs, but also in larger groups of six, to promote regular critical conversations and reflection. Gilbert and Sliep (2009) outline the ways in which critical reflection with peers is essential in enhancing students' learning. The two groups of six meet weekly for structured peer group supervision (see Akhurst & Kelly, 2006), and at points of decision-making the pairs also seek supervision from a tutor (Langa & Graham, 2011). These opportunities for critical reflection encourage trainees to ask deeper questions about both the theoretical frameworks that inform their work, but also about social justice and how their work might promote working in solidarity with their partners to challenge inequalities. CBSL therefore encourages meta-reflections on engagements to promote more active citizenship (Akhurst, Solomon, Mitchell & Van der Riet, 2016). Since CBSL is designed to be mutually beneficial to both trainees and community partners, trainees are encouraged to consider how they position themselves as trainee psychologists. Nguyen (2016:7) proposes five core values for CBSL, namely "rigour, reflection, relationship, reciprocity, and real life", and one of the purposes of this chapter is to consider the evidence of these values in the trainees' accounts of their project work.

5. Methodology

This research has ethical clearance (PSY2016/03) and participants all signed consent forms. The data collection was participatory, with me facilitating the events involving trainees. The data were collected from two focus groups of six

trainees each on completion of their community projects. The prompts for the focus group were open-ended. In addition, I collected the same trainees' contributions to a day-long reflective colloquium where they met with another regional university's trainees. On this occasion, each pair of trainees led the discussions about their projects, focusing on their learnings. Finally, in order not to influence the data collection from some community partners, a research assistant interviewed three representatives of the partner organisations and subsequently transcribed and analysed these data, using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A summary of this phase of data collection is presented first.

Verbatim transcriptions of the two focus group discussions (2 x n = 6) were done by a research assistant, and I summarised the colloquium presentations and key points of the emerging discussions. This summary was circulated to all present for their additional comment/suggestions. The findings that follow draw from these data using template analysis (King, 2012) to identify themes of relevance to this chapter.

6. Findings

A brief summary of the main themes to emerge from community partners' accounts follows (a perspective often neglected in the service-learning literature), with a somewhat more detailed focus on trainees' experiences thereafter. The research to collect data from community partners is continuing and will be reported more fully in a subsequent publication.

6.1 *Benefits to partners*

1. In relation to the establishment and maintenance of the partnership, participants made comments about the ways in which this had been an organic process. They reported that negotiations had been based on 'community' needs and that they were consulted at every step of the unfolding process. They had felt a sense of agency in these processes, constructing their roles as contextual mediators for the students. In order to maintain the contact, they appreciated the regular communication with trainees, as well as trainees' flexibility in adjusting and accommodating plans when the situation changed from week to week.
2. Without the partners being 'led' in the interviews, they gave examples of what they valued about the approaches taken to partnership building. These examples included collaborative decision-making, i.e. their sense of influencing the evolving processes and being co-determinants of the nature of the interventions. They were impressed by the trainees' preparedness

for the work that was done and also appreciated the passion and energy of the trainees, as well as the professionalism shown (which they contrasted to their experiences of other students who had not been trainee psychologists).

3. Partners reported multiple gains for their organisations as a result of collaborating with the trainees. These gains included referrals to appropriate agencies for individuals needing further assistance; building strong and reliable bonds with the trainees who had shown care in their engagements; learning together, where they were key informants assisting trainees to work in culturally sensitive ways; gaining greater insight into psychological work; and an enhancement of their own work as a result of support.
4. Few project difficulties were reported by partners, even though they were encouraged to be open about any they had experienced. Some of the challenges were the shifting needs of the context as the processes unfolded, some sense of dependency on the trainees' input since this could not be substituted by other resources and, related to this, the time limitations of having at most six months together.
5. Their comments about their future needs for cooperative work were that they wished for: more psycho-educational workshops; the development of more interdisciplinary linkages and three-way partnerships which include service providers in the area; and working more on building resources and connections to referral agencies and strengthening these bonds.

6.2. *Benefits to trainees*

In the analysis below, the trainees' identities are anonymised, with their words shown in italics. The participant code after the quotations links to a key: F1 – F4 and M1 – M2 are used for the counselling group; and F7 – F10 and M3 – M4 are used for the clinical trainees (with F and M indicating male or female). The themes to emerge from the data (and noted in bold in what follows) include: learning from the experiences (building on relationships); learning about/applying community psychology and the role of theory; the value of supporting each other and reflecting with peers informally and in a group; and limitations of the work in relation to influencing systems.

Trainees noted the value of *learning from the experiences* that CBSL had provided: "... so you're going into community and we experience it then first-hand, but until we engage with community work and actually do it, ... then, only then I think, I feel that we can really learn." (F10)

Planning was described as important in allaying anxieties, but they often needed to respond to what was unexpected and needed to be flexible to accommodate the situation: "... we actually had to experience the feeling of being uncertain, the anxiety that comes with that... we actually had to sit with this uncertainty ... 'cause it doesn't always turn out the way you hope, or that we expect that things would turn out. ... I think with every community project that's going to be different ... you can't really pre-plan the skills I'm going to need for this community project, because depending on the community, depending on the needs of the community..." (F7)

They noted ways in which learning came from the speaking and thinking embedded in the *relational approach* that informed their engagements. They reported this as being very different from their clinic-based work: here they were "trying to understand our community from a point of not being an expert" (F7). They needed to remain open-minded in their approach and listening: "... feeling like this uncomfortability actually opens me up to experience a bit more ... and to new things, that I wouldn't have, I think experienced." (F8)

This comment highlights the sense that the work is imbued with uncertainties, but if trainees can find ways to cope with them, there is the potential for creative interaction with their partners (both the other trainee and community participants). Trainees thus used their counselling skills to connect with people, recognising that "people wanted to be heard" (M1) and to communicate more clearly with each other. This was "initially very challenging" (M2), but they saw the value of participants being "provided a safe space that you could see where the problems were" (M2). This illustrates the exploratory co-creation and elaboration on thinking that become possible in conversational spaces.

The importance of the relations that were built is also evident in: "feeling that connection with, with them as a group but also with some of them individually" (F2), and their sense that their partners gave them the freedom to make plans but "they gave us the feeling that they also supported us" (F1). At times they felt some relief due to the nature of participatory work: "... like one wasn't under too much pressure to sort of change things, or to come up with solutions" (F7). Thus trainees found that it was best to work in a way that was not "pre-scripted" (F1) and were rather responsive to what they encountered and were "thinking on our feet" (M1).

They gave some examples of the assistance they provided, which was different from the predominance of instruction or advice in didactic settings. In work with youth, one noted that what worked best was "creating activities with things that stimulate them, that are engaging for them" (F1). Another trainee commented on the ways in which they interacted with each other, "modelling the open and

honest struggles" (M1) in exchanging ideas, and a further trainee commented on the usefulness of *"role play"* (M2) for participants to experiment with different possible responses to events. Trainees emphasised how they encouraged participants to express their needs, thoughts and opinions in order to enhance mutual understanding.

They discussed *learning about and applying principles and ideas from community psychology*. Some described their lack of knowledge at the beginning of the projects and that their learning progressed through engagement. Examples are:

"Starting with community psychology, I felt very unsure, as if I didn't know anything ... there's this initial sense of anxiety and not knowing and being unsure, going into the unknown ..." (F8) *"Initially ... I'm not known and how are they going to receive me as a psychology student ... So it was very important I think, ... for us to create rapport and ... collaborate ... so it shifted from just being unknown people to becoming part of the community."* (F10)

As noted earlier, a number of trainees felt unsure or anxious early on, but once they had initially engaged, they realised that their people skills could be usefully applied and that taking a non-expert position was helpful. Further examples are:

"We formed connections with people, real authentic meaningful connections ... bringing our own personhood to the work." (F8)

"The community that we went into was sort of receptive of us, so that helped. I was less anxious going there rather than if they were not accommodating ... so if I think if the community wants people to come from the outside, ... it helped with whatever anxieties ... and the fears I might have had." (M3)

The trainees saw the value of doing a needs and assets evaluation in a collaborative way that enhanced participation:

"... we can only work out what people need when one builds the relationship ..." (M4) *"... we focused more on strengths and what was positive ..."* (F9)

A key aspect they noted was the role of theory at the intersection between 'everyday' and 'scholarly' concepts. Trainees reflected upon theoretical ideas they had used in a practical way to inform their workshop planning as one pair noted *"giving psychology away"* (F10) and using *"different resources and participatory approaches"* (M3) that were distinct from teachers' didactic positions. They also saw the *"value of coming from the outside to address some of the tricky issues"* (F10) that teachers struggled to manage with learners and being able to initiate more conversational spaces with learners. Theory was used to provide

"very loose scaffolding" (M1) for the interventions and one trainee noted that *"theory helped keep us grounded when things chopped and changed"* (F3).

Drawing from a number of different sources provided a framework or principles for the work, *"giving direction"* (F3), with models being *"protective factors for facilitators"* (F4). It thus appeared that the theoretical lenses that they used gave them some security as they worked in evolving processes. Theory thus played a formative role and also seemed to be a resource to draw from in practice. The trainees also used theory to inform their evaluations after the interventions.

A number of trainees contrasted CBSL to both their clinic-based work and to having previously only read about community psychology in practice.

"... it's different to therapeutic work, it can be administrative ... organisational management, like managing people and meeting times and paper work" (M4). They mentioned some community psychology-specific resources such as ecological systems theory, as well as drawing ideas from psychology more broadly. For example:

"We used the CBT [Cognitive Behaviour Therapy] model of substance abuse as a basis for psychoeducation, role plays, making resources available, ... pictures ... cards ..." (F10)

"... the use of breathing exercises, mindfulness techniques, playing with clay, group members interviewing each other ..." (F8)

Trainees noted *the value of supporting each other and reflecting with peers*. A number agreed that working in pairs was beneficial because *"you have that person to bounce ideas off"* (F4) and with whom to discuss the links between theory and practice. In addition, they could take turns in facilitating, debrief immediately with a peer and give each other feedback. This promoted greater autonomy. Having peers as partners was furthermore valuable because the discussion could be *"more relaxed"* (F10) and they could *"practice"* (F10) voicing ideas.

Commenting on the *peer supervision group* in which they participated, they said *"humour is an aspect that features outside of authoritative supervision"* (F3) and that there was a *"degree of openness and authenticity"* (F2) that they appreciated. The group furthermore provided opportunities for *"venting ... whereas with individual supervision you need to be more contained"* (all laugh) (F4).

The peer group discussions led to *"group generation of ideas"* (M4) and *"peers could also provide critique"* (F2). One noted *"I think it was very helpful ... for all of us"* because *"people came with different previous experiences"* (M2), for example those who had been teachers could reflect on their work experiences. The group could assist weekly with *"processing frustrations"* (F10) when a project was not

progressing according to plan. They appreciated being “accountable” to each other and working collaboratively enabled “shared responsibility” and helped them to “take decisions” (M2).

Trainees also experienced first-hand *the limitations in relation to influencing systems*. They became far more sensitised to people’s struggles, enabling them to feel compassion for and an appreciation of what their community partners encountered. For example, trainees described their experiences of the struggles of a group of school teachers who had a “*lack of funds, the school kids coming from, you know ... disadvantaged homes, they brought their own problems in which then affect the teachers ... with these various pressures ... really brought home how all these different levels impact on these teachers and how difficult it makes their lives.*” (M1)

The above excerpt illustrates the structural and systemic challenges faced by people. A further example is:

“The environment around the school is not conducive for learners and gives a message to them about being placed on the margins.” (F10)

They showed greater awareness of their positioning and lack of power, mentioning their frustrations at not being able to influence the system:

“Even us as trainee psychologists, there are very limited things that we could do ... especially getting to be advocate and things like that.” (F8)

This was summarised by one trainee in relation to their aspirations to move beyond a mental health model, but feeling unable to shift their practice:

“While we worked from a mental health model, coming from a preventative approach, we would have liked to take a social action model approach that would lead us to mobilising and activism with the Department of Education to make a broader impact ... but with only two of us, we’re not sure what our contributions could assist in making a difference.” (M3)

7. Discussion

The findings reported above are not an exhaustive account, but illustrate a number of features of the CBSL. Firstly, it is useful to consider the overlaps between the community-based partners’ experiences and those of the trainees. Then, while the explicit references to theory were not extensive, the influences of the theoretical frameworks they applied may be seen implicitly in the evidence. Finally, I make some suggestions for curricular amendments and note the limitations of this research.

Considering the summary of the partners’ experiences alongside those of the trainees highlights the foundations that are built relationally, and it is these

relational foundations upon which the work is then based. Both parties reported on their respective learnings from working together while building a sense of agency and being flexible. Also important were mutual respect and an acknowledgement of strengths. Partners appreciated that they influenced decision-making and also noted trainees' preparedness, commitment and professionalism (contrasting this to their experiences of less experienced students). The trainees in turn felt supported by their partners. The partners reported on organisational gains from the trainees' inputs, while the trainees valued their experiential learning. Trainees also reported gaining support and direction from their peers; however, this was a forum that did not include community partners, which might be viewed as inhibiting fully participatory collaboration.

Researchers have found that participation in service-learning could have a transformational impact on trainees (e.g. Deeley, 2015; Eyler & Giles, 1999). In adjusting to their CBSL, the trainees demonstrated some aspects of Mezirow's (2000) model of transformational learning. They reported initial disorienting dilemmas (in their noting of uncertainties and anxiety), where they realised that the work would be different from the therapeutic mode that their training has prepared them for. The resulting dissonance, resulting from the realisation that they need to work differently, motivated them to learn more through grappling with ideas with their peers. This disorienting experience then lead to some re-evaluation of their ways of working, resulting in new learning and potential changes in practice. However, trainees may also resist the process of critically assessing their worldviews, highlighting the importance of a dialogical reflective processes.

With regard to the specific theoretical frameworks described earlier in the chapter, it is clear that the findings show the utility of Vygotskian ideas, where learning is embedded in the relational and interactive conversations. The trainees highlighted the importance of opportunities for reflections on their work to assist in their learning. Theoretical frameworks need to be flexible rather than overly determinative in order to be useful. Then, the CCP concept of the building of 'community' (as in Kagan *et al.*, 2011) in various ways was central to much of the data. When they moved beyond community psychology ideas, the trainees did not make any reference to theories they had learned in undergraduate curricula but rather referred to those theories derived from therapeutic practice.

This research has provided rich evidence of the value of CBSL to trainees, with clear support for four of Nguyen's (2016) core values: reflection, relationship, reciprocity and real life. The fifth value, rigour, evolves from a developmental learning process – I would have liked to see trainees being more adept at talking

about theory than was evident in the focus groups. However, future analysis of trainees' written portfolios might provide such evidence. In terms of curriculum transformation, seeing the benefits of CBSL raises questions of ways in which such material and experiences might be integrated and expanded upon earlier in psychology curricula, along with the associated theoretical frameworks (to take the place of some of the current dominant theories). The trainees' comments and disappointment about their limited impact systemically need further interrogation, and ways in which they might be able to work for more advocacy and support partners' activism (where appropriate) in order to promote greater social justice, should be considered. Ways to promote more interdisciplinarity (as noted by partners) and to enhance the sustainability of the CBSL also need consideration.

8. Concluding remarks

CBSL provides the possibility of developing (community) psychologies that are more relevant and responsive to the realities of life in SA. This chapter has illustrated in a small way how taking an alternative approach to trainees' learning through CBSL has such potential. However, to expand on this work will require systemic investment that is currently not in evidence, either in many HE institutions (where there is increasing pressure of student numbers) or in the policies that the professional body influences. The development of psychologies that are more appropriate to and evolve organically from the SA context depends on shifts in theory and practice to enable greater integration of CBSL as a social innovation and to work towards social justice.

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