



Learning in the context of partnership: Trainee and intern psychologists' reflections on community-based service learning

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Abstract

For a number of years, community-based service learning (CBSL) has been a key element of the Community Psychology module in the Master's programme for training psychologists at Rhodes University. In 2022, CBSL was consolidated to become central to the whole programme, with a focus on providing services in a partnership with the Assumption Development Centre (ADC). After introducing a model showing how students gradually move from sensitisation to social justice issues at undergraduate levels towards conscientisation as postgraduates, this paper will reflect on the interface between the professional training programmes and the community-based partnership with the ADC. Following a brief background about the partnership's development, we describe the structure of the CBSL and its integration into the curricula. We provide evidence of its impact on both the first-year master's students, and the second year Counselling Psychology Interns. These data draw from the trainee psychologists' reflections, as reported in the Rhodes Psychology Clinic 2022 Annual Report; and the Intern Psychologists' reflections, integrated into the 2022 ADC Counselling Hub Annual Report. A thematic analysis of the reflections illustrates the commonalities in the accounts of learning, as well as the deepened insights and shifts evident in the accounts. The reported reflective learning is then considered both practically and theoretically, with recommendations for further development.

Keywords: *Community-based service learning (CBSL); training psychologists; building partnerships; psychology internships; postgraduate learning*

Introduction

The term community-based service learning (CBSL) seems to have first emerged in the literature when used by Hammersley (2012). It was coined as an adapted term from critiques of forms of service learning (SL) as applied in the United States (USA) (e.g., Mitchell, 2008; Sandy & Holland, 2006), where the focus appeared to be more uni-dimensional: on the benefits for students rather than for the target community groups; and highlighting the likelihood of uneven power relations between academic stakeholders and their partners. Blouin and Perry (2009) identified three of the main obstacles in SL as “issues related to student conduct, poor fit between course and organizational objectives, and lack of communication between instructors and organizations” (p.120). They conclude that it is important that SL both leads to effective student learning as well as providing “valuable service to community-based organizations” (p.120).

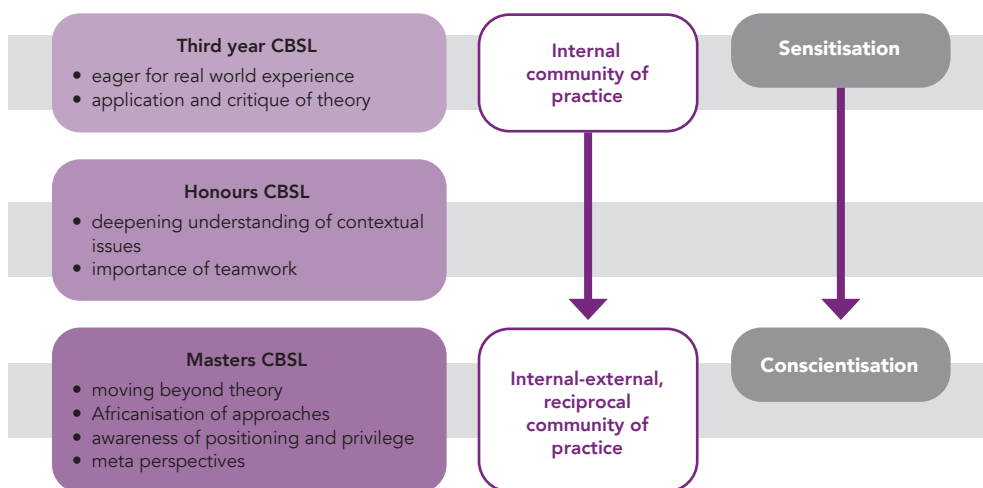
Drawing from the fields of community-based learning (CBL, as synthesised by Owens and Wang, 1996) and the parallel literature developing in community-based research (e.g., Stoecker, 2009), CBSL foregrounds the partners' perspectives and challenges, building upon the principles of reciprocity and collaboration, to guard against neo-colonialist ideologies (Hammersley, 2012). Chika-James et al. (2022) however still note that when “assessing the impact of service-learning, most studies focus on its effects on students' learning than community partners and the communities served; leaving largely unanswered the question of whether service-learning ... contributes value to community organizations and the wider society” (p.1). CBSL thus strives to remedy the skewed focus by foregrounding the community partnership that forms the basis of the work and previous research by the authors (Akhurst & Msomi, 2022) focused on three case studies of partnerships, to be described further on.

Whilst there is an extensive international literature base related to service learning for undergraduate students, its applications at postgraduate (or “graduate”) levels has been less widely reported (Roe, 2023) until more recently. A brief review of a cross-section of recent studies illustrates the growing diversity of its applications for postgraduates: Gunaratna et al. (2007) report on graduate-led statistical consulting for community organisations in the USA; Salleh et al. (2018) compare the experiences of undergraduate and postgraduate students in Malaysia; Levkoe et al. (2020) write of CBSL in the graduate field of planning studies in Canada; and Torrecilla et al. (2020) discuss its integration into technological doctoral education in Spain. As applied more specifically to professional programmes, where trainees strive to develop practice skills (as in the medical disciplines or education), links are increasingly being made to CBSL. For example, De Bonis (2015) researched the impact on graduate nursing students in the USA; Roe (2021) reports on students' experiences in a media advocacy programme, also in the USA; and Puntil et al. (2022) write of the implementation of CBSL for Master's students based in the United Kingdom to promote mental health during COVID-19. However, the articles cited here tend towards being descriptive, with little evidence of more critical and social justice-led approaches to CBSL.

In the past two decades in South Africa (SA), practice in and research reports of CBSL have gradually increased, following the directive in the White Paper on Transformation of Higher Education (DoE, 1997) that universities should promote community engagement as part of their social responsibilities. The innovative Community-Higher Education-Service Partnerships (CHESP) initiatives in 12 universities in the early 2000s (Lazarus, 2007) prompted a number of models that could be followed. The CHESP programme ended in 2007 and one of its products was a comprehensive guide for academics, produced by the Council for Higher Education (Bender et al., 2006). Having been involved in one of these earlier projects, the first author has researched forms of CBSL at various levels of study and in different contexts (e.g. Akhurst & Mitchell, 2012; and Akhurst, 2016). Theoretically, the CHESP initiatives often drew from experiential learning. Stanton and Erasmus (2013) illustrate some resonances between the USA-based and African philosophical ideas, providing a rationale for the work: “Dewey and Nyerere expected education to enable individuals to understand and relate to the world in which they live in ways that would ultimately contribute to its transformation for the better” (p.82).

A team investigating a cross-section of students' CBSL learning experiences at UKZN across cohorts (Akhurst et al., 2016), gathered data from focus groups of students at three levels of study (third year undergraduate, Honours and Master's by research). The findings highlighted students' experiences of applying psychological theory to real life situations, as well as 'giving something back' to the community groups with whom they worked. They also reported learning to work in respectful and participatory ways, and being challenged to problem-solve. This research led to the development of the following model, which illustrates the incremental changes apparent in students' accounts of their learning as they progressed from one level of study to the next.

Figure 1: Experiences of CBSL across three programme levels (Akhurst et al., 2016)



On the left, the three blocks reflect the key themes that were identified in the students' accounts at each level, illustrating progress in deepening conceptualisations and insights, represented on the right as shifts from 'sensitization' to 'conscientization' (Friere, 1970). Here sensitization refers to the undergraduate students displaying increased awareness of and insights into the conditions and difficulties encountered by people in disadvantaged situations. Conscientization takes this process of insights further, by leading to a more critical understanding of one's positioning and social injustices, with changes reported in cognitive constructs and commitment to actions in response. This indicates a gradual development of ideas about social justice, starting from sensitisation towards conscientisation, with evidence at Master's level of a greater sense of working towards social justice, whereas at third year the focus was on the support and learning from each other as peers (in an 'internal community of practice'). By Master's level the relationships with external partners had increased in importance and there was a greater sense of exchange and reciprocity.

In the international CBSL literature, such changes in awareness, understanding and motivation have been reported by for example: Bahammam and Bahammam (2023) based in Saudi Arabia, used Schwartz's (2002) model in their study of the impact of CBSL on senior dental students' experiences; and Ricke (2021) who applied Perry's (1998) four-stage scheme of students' intellectual and ethical development. Perry's four stages were identified as students' learning being on a continuum that moves from "dualism", through "multiplicity" and then "relativism", to "commitment" in more advanced students who have engaged in reflection on their own positioning. Ricke (2021) writes that for undergraduate students, CBSL can "stretch comfort zones [and] can help lead to a transformative ... experience for students in terms of cognitive and civic growth if other course design factors are in place" (p. 22). She notes that the course design needs to carefully balance the potentially "disorienting" experiences of working in community settings with feedback from tutors that is supportive. Schwartz's (2002) model refers to students' attitudes in CBSL, where students first experience "activation", becoming aware of others' needs; they then respond by displaying "obligation" due to their empathy; the situation is then re-assessed and students may move through a stage of "defen-se"; before the final "response" where they become more intentional in their activities. The latter model would seem to resonate with the identification of the shifts from sensitization towards conscientization as reported by Akhurst et al. (2016).

A theoretical perspective

Theoretically as authors, we are very aware of the need to situate ourselves "here" (Ratele et al., 2019) within a decolonial Africa(n)-centred Community Psychology, concerned with the fundamental influences of systems on the intra-individual and interactive aspects of people's functioning. The term Africa(n)-centred Community Psychology follows the exposition of Ratele and Malherbe (2022), where psychologists are encouraged to "situate and think" (p. 13) both Africa as a continent, considering all its diversity, as

well as foregrounding African people's worldviews and positioning, towards promoting psychosocial change. From this perspective, mental health and distress are viewed as being largely shaped by the physical, social, economic environments in which people live (World Health Organisation, 2014), due to limited access to both material and symbolic resources. Such an approach focuses on promoting people's wellbeing, especially for those who have been affected by historic and persistent discrimination and oppression, with social justice as a foundational principle (Ratele et al., 2022). It recognises that power is exercised in ways that maintain privilege, leading to discrimination against particular groups (Fisher et al., 2007). A decolonial approach to psychology eschews the dominant post-positivist influences of Euro-American versions of the discipline. In order to intervene therefore, explicitly values-based and participatory work, through forging alliances and building reciprocal consciousness, is recommended (Ratele et al., 2022). The resultant collaborative work draws from the expertise and knowledges of all participants, actively rethinking and reconstructing systems of knowledge and practice, from the perspective of the marginalised majority. This leads to the possibilities of transformed relationships and collective action (Kagan et al., 2020). Thus, a participatory constructivist paradigm informs the exploratory research to be reported below.

This paper aims to further add to the evidence-derived model (Akhurst et al., 2016) described earlier. Based upon inductive, qualitative underpinnings, it will provide evidence reflecting on the interface between the Master's level professional training programmes in psychology and a potentially ground-breaking community-based partnership, expanded to also include Intern Counselling Psychologists (in their final year of refining practice before qualifying). We hope to offer insights into these postgraduates' experiences and learning in a community setting that could contribute to the dialogues on transformative change in the training of psychologists in South Africa.

CBSL at Master's degree level

CBSL has been embedded into the Community Psychology module in the Master's level programme training psychologists at Rhodes University (RU) for a number of years. Accounts of these developments may be found in various publications (e.g., Akhurst, 2017; Akhurst & Msomi, 2022). The CBSL was designed to provide structured opportunities for students to apply theoretical learning to practice, in socially responsive ways, with the intention of producing psychologists who would then be more likely to promote and integrate work towards social justice into their practices. Research into the previous form of CBSL from 2015 – 2020, as described in Akhurst & Msomi (2022), evidenced the community members' reports of the value of the work of the Master's students who provided psychological services through their CBSL, not accessible through other channels of service delivery. The partners appreciated the student's time investments, competence in consultative planning of their interventions, the customised materials that were used (mainly in groupwork) and their professionalism on site.

These aspects were all based on the foundational element of relationships that were built and established over time, through working together. The research findings illustrated the possibilities of building collaborative approaches and diffusing power differentials, which were appreciated by partners. These CBSL partnerships were thus concerned with addressing the influences of various systemic crises (especially related to poverty, inadequate schooling and inequality of opportunities) on young people's well-being. However, the work was limited to engagement at micro-systemic levels and, due to the limited time periods of the work and the students' low status as trainees, they were unable to influence broader systems to lead to longer-lasting changes or sustainability.

In brief, through a re-curriculation process in 2021 against a backdrop of seeking to further shift the predominantly westernised curriculum towards being more Africa(n)-centred as described earlier, the module-confined form of CBSL was expanded to become a core element of the respective curricula, as summarised below in figure 2. It impacted on three programmes: (i) year 1 of Counselling Psychology, where the Community Psychology module was key to providing the principles of practice and encouraging interventionist approaches; (ii) year 1 of Clinical Psychology, with the focus on Public Mental Health providing the framework into which the practice was integrated; and (iii) year 2 of Counselling Psychology, during which the trainees who worked as Interns at the student Counselling Centre (CC), were each released on rotation in blocks of 7-9 weeks, to be based at the community partner's premises.

Figure 2: Cohorts, levels of study and associated programmes and modules

Year of Master's study	Short-name	Cohort of students
Year 1 (theory / practice)	M1	Counselling (module: Community Psychology) / Clinical (module: Public Mental Health)
Year 2 (practicum)	M2	Counselling Interns (released on rotation from CC)

The modules provided the students with theoretical frameworks (derived from the disciplines of Community Psychology and Public Mental Health as applied in SA), to inform their approaches to psychological intervention on site, challenging many traditional individually-focused biomedical conceptions, to promote health and wellbeing. Key topics for M1s were taught in the initial term of their programme, to prepare them to engage in weekly casework in the community setting from April until October. Funds were also raised to support the release of each M2 to work in the community setting for a block of eight to nine weeks, to compensate for their time at the CC and to cover the extra supervision needed for an hour per week. CBSL has thus been consolidated as central to the programmes through re-design of the curricula, with its focus being provision of services for individuals and groups through the work of the M1s attending the centre each week, supported by the on-site M2 Intern psychologists, within the partnership as described below.

Background to the partnership

The Assumption Development Centre (ADC) is a registered Non-profit Organisation (NPO) with the SA Department of Social Development (169-204 NPO), founded in 2014 and located in the Joza community, which is on the Eastern side of the city of Makhanda. Because of South Africa's socio-political histories, those categorised as Black mostly still reside in the Joza Township area. Funding and partnerships of the ADC are formed with a variety of profit and non-profit organisations, foundations and institutions. The ADC became a partner organisation of the RU Psychology Clinic in 2022, with the initiative focused towards providing a Counselling Hub in Joza, to meet the extensive needs for services there (as described in Akhurst & Msomi, 2022). Briefly, the partnership is rooted in a rich history of relationship-building, dating back to the founding of a smaller counselling service for learners in a nearby secondary school and the previously established Youth Hub, as well as some earlier careers-related work at ADC with a group of unemployed youth. Then, during the 2020 COVID pandemic, online counselling support sessions were provided by the second author for school leaders, educators, and learners, which formed further links to the partnerships evolving around the site.

The collaboration with ADC evolved through discussions with and facilitation by the RU Psychology Clinic (coordinated by the second author throughout the time), the central RU Community Engagement Division and the RU Student Counselling Centre. The mission of the ADC is to transform the economy of Joza by supporting young people as they explore their business ideas (including provision of a second chance matric for a number of people). Over the past decade the ADC has supported the activation of 16 viable and sustainable businesses. The programmes at the ADC include business coaching, support and mentorship, legal advice, curriculum vitae and business plan development, financial literacy training and support, work placement opportunities, *Thabiso* Life Skills courses and *SaveAct* groups, to encourage financial planning and saving.

It was noted by our ADC partners that frequently the people accessing their programmes could have also benefitted from psychological assistance and counselling, but none of these services existed due to the legacy of unequal provision of services in the area. The focus of the partnership that has evolved is thus to address these needs, as identified by the ADC team, within their particular context, challenging trainee psychologists to work in collaboration to design and bring about interventions that meet the identified needs. Important Community Psychology principles that form the basis of this work include promoting the partner's agency in guiding the work, providing for a system that is sustainable and "giving psychology away" (Miller, 1969). The latter term refers to a psycho-educational approach in which the benefits of psychological research are actively disseminated to promote mental health and well-being, for the purpose of improving the quality of people's lives and thus to enhance societal relationships (Evans, 2020). The team adopted many of the features of partnership-building as described in Akhurst & Msomi (2022), including careful building of collaborative relationships; appreciating the knowledges and resources that each partner

brings to the process; and careful consultations through weekly and on-site engagements between the ADC team, the M2 trainees who offered peer support and the M1 students.

Although the research to follow might seem again to be focused on students' (or trainees') rather than our partner's perspectives (in contrast to the arguments made earlier), from the perspective of promoting the sustainability of this work (a key concern expressed by our ADC partners), through the ongoing provision of time and expertise from the trainee psychologists (who provided individual and group interventions throughout 2022), it was important to gather accounts of their learning and the value of their work at the ADC site, for both M1 and M2 placements. This paper thus considers the impact of CBSL on both the first year Master's students' learning, and the second year Counselling Psychology Interns' learning, by posing the research question: What is the evidence of learning through their work, in the feedback provided by the M1 and M2 trainee psychologists?

Methodology

Firstly, ethical approval for the study was granted (approval number 2023-5957-7392). The study was designed to be exploratory and its findings aimed to be preliminary to a more structured ongoing programme evaluation, over a period of time. The authors hoped to draw lessons from the experiences of the participants to understand how professional training in psychology might be moved further towards a more Africa(n)-centred approach.

Then, data were collected through purposive sampling of the published comments from the two cohorts involved at the ADC in 2022: the twelve M1s and the five M2s (of the 17 trainees, 15 were women and two were men, ages 25-45). These data were sourced from the trainee psychologists' reflections, as reported in the RU Psychology Clinic 2022 Annual Report; and the Intern Counselling Psychologists' reflections on their learning, which were integrated into the ADC Counselling Hub Annual Report for 2022. The trainees' reflections were part of individual and group processes of evaluating their experiences (Kolb, 1984) and these were not facilitated by any of the authors. This meant that the authors could not in any way bias the findings or skew the data towards the aims of this research. The data available was selected by others for the purposes of reporting to funders and the university. These data are therefore archival, because they were reported in documents available to the public, for which the contributors gave permission. The analysis was completed during April 2023.

A thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of the published reflections was done by the third author, who is broadly familiar with CBSL, but had not been involved in the partnership with ADC. This research decision was again to reduce any potential bias of the first two authors, who had been intimately involved in programme delivery during 2022. After the initial identification of themes, the three authors then conferred to further consolidate the findings. The aim of the analysis was to illustrate any commonalities between the trainees' reports of learning, as well as hoping to identify any deepened insights and shifts in their accounts of their experiences.

Findings

The main findings that became evident to the research team from the analysis of the students' and Interns' reflections were grouped into six themes: 1) Situated, contextual learning; 2) Academic learning; 3) Learning about the profession; 4) Building on university training; 5) Enhanced interpersonal effectiveness; 6) *Ubuntu* as expressed in "giving psychology away". Each of these will be expanded upon below, with quotations in speech marks that back up the assertions made.

Theme 1: Situated, Contextual Learning

The first theme identified in the data relates to evidence of the situated, contextual learning that was facilitated. The following excerpts reflect on this:

The ADC Counselling Hub gave students "the opportunity to take our practice out of the office into the community made our learning come alive even more" [M1].

An M2 said it had: "really inspired me to widen my lens way beyond that of an office space. Instead, working towards 'giving psychology away' as much as possible on as many platforms as possible, i.e. in schools and local clinics". Another M2 noted: "My greatest highlight was having the honour to serve".

Cooperation between staff at the ADC was highlighted, in isiXhosa this aspect is termed *ukubambisana*: "The staff were extremely helpful and assisted wherever possible ... with setting up workshop spaces and printing advertisements. The team was also always on hand to assist with translation, when language barriers occurred" [M2]. This illustrates the collaborative work that resulted from the relationship-building.

The helpfulness of the two-way relationships, or *ukuncedisana* in isiXhosa, is illustrated in: "It has been fulfilling serving the community, working with the community members but also learning from them" [M2]. It is encouraging to see this reflection of reciprocal learning that was contextually rooted.

This first theme thus illustrates the learning based upon providing interventions in less formal community-centred and "real-life" environments. The M2s further expanded on the relationships that developed as engaged participatory practice, where their learning was about providing service through connecting their prior knowledge to this people-centred context, and where they appreciated mutual provision of assistance.

Theme 2: Academic Learning

Building on the above, the students and Interns gained experience of applying concepts from their university course to real-life situations by being out of their "comfort zones" (i.e., offices) [M1]. Through this they gained a deeper understanding of the theory learned "to evolve into value-laden praxis and a lived reality in terms of making psychological services accessible to all" [M2].

They appreciated the opportunity to build knowledge and manage an innovative pilot project where "we were both excited and nervous, as this meant that we would have to

start up and manage a project which was something new to us all" [M2]. Knowing that the placement meant that they needed to "think on their feet", where there were no prior guidelines, challenged them to move from application of prior learning to more informed praxis. This challenged them emotionally to manage any anxieties as they engaged, but also encouraged them to work both autonomously and collaboratively.

Theme 3: Learning about the profession

In stating: "I have learned the essence of building the plane while it is flying, and persevering and growing through the ups and downs of the process of building" [M1], a student identified the challenges of having to be inventive. Through their work they gained a deeper appreciation of what the profession might offer in such a setting: "my highlight is seeing the value of psychology as a profession in the Joza community" [M1]. The placement led to explorations of the potential roles of Counselling Psychologists in an atypical setting and of their ability to work effectively, by employing "a lot of knowledge and exposure in terms of working within a community but also in the field of psychology" [M2].

The Interns became sensitised to being responsive practitioners, skilled in adapting methods, for example: "Lessons were learnt in terms of what style of interventions would work best for the communities we were called to serve and this allowed us to set up more responsive systems" [M2]. This led to opportunities to use professional tools in innovative ways, for example: "I unexpectedly grew fond of conducting assessments" [M2].

In each of the above excerpts, an emergent professional identity is evident, as trainees saw the value of their skills and the application of their knowledge of psychology for the benefit of the clients with whom they worked.

Theme 4: Building on university training

The following excerpt highlights a student's account of experiencing CBSL outside of the confines of the university environment: "My greatest highlight was the work done at the ADC; being afforded the opportunity to engage with psychology in the multicultural context; and bringing psychology to communities outside of the Ivory Tower was rewarding and grounded me in my purpose" [M1]. This was satisfying for the student and reiterated for her the reason why she had engaged in training as a psychologist.

Looking ahead to becoming an independent practitioner in the following year, a trainee noted that "my time at ADC has equipped me with knowledge and skills that I would need if I were to have my own practice" [M2]. Another commented on the wide variety of roles and functions that she had experienced in her work at ADC: "I have been able to do child therapy, individual therapy, workshops, a trauma debriefing, provide psycho-education, act as a referral source as well conduct a cognitive assessment for my child client" [M2].

Drawing these ideas together, what emerges is the progress from being equipped with knowledge and skills in their M1 training towards greater ownership of these, wider experiences of roles, and the capacity to adapt when needed, as evidenced by the M2s.

Theme 5: Enhanced interpersonal effectiveness

In relation to specific competencies, several aspects were highlighted. For example, problem-solving skills were evident: "My greatest learning, especially at the ADC, was the experience of being pushed to access creativity when working in contexts where clients may not readily have material resources to navigate life challenges (e.g., having to include neighbours as client contact points for clients that do not have access to cell phones)" [M1].

Relational skills are identified in: "The support and guidance assisted me greatly in adjusting to the new environment and being able to work effectively. In addition, the working together of my managers at ADC and my supervisors ... allowed me to work effectively" [M2].

Reiterating the satisfaction that was derived from overcoming challenges and providing psycho-education was noted: "Despite the growing pains we have encountered, I think the team has done incredibly well and has achieved our mandate of 'giving psychology away'" [M2].

There was also reference to becoming more reflective practitioners through their supervision, readings, and experiences: "I have learnt so much, not just in terms of my practice as an Intern but also about myself – XXX [name] is a fountain of knowledge, and through supervision sessions which included readings I could critically reflect upon, I have been able to explore various aspects of my role as an aspiring counselling psychologist" [M2].

Theme 6: Ubuntu as expressed in "giving psychology away"

In two of the themes above (1 and 5), trainees mentioned the importance to them of "giving psychology away". This was achieved through providing accessible psychological services to community members on site and near to their homes, because of trainees' concerns, as noted in "I believe it made us more accessible, and it also made it much easier to meet with clients where they felt more comfortable" [M1]. This was further reiterated: "it was rewarding to be able to work with the greater Makhanda community and to have the opportunity to serve outside of the Rhodes Counselling Centre" [M2]; in addition: "It has been meaningful in being able to make therapeutic services more accessible to the community of Makhanda" [M2]. These trainees therefore demonstrate their concerns for people who have lacked accessible psychological services and indicate the rewarding nature of being able to provide these.

In this theme, the foregrounding of aspects of relational caring as incorporated into the concept of *Ubuntu* (Letseka, 2012) was identified. Illustrating her compassion for the situations of many people, an Intern further noted that the provision of psychological services at the ADC Counselling Hub "truly felt like the thick of what many South African grapple with. I therefore had an appreciation for solution-focused therapy, which may prove relevant to a population like ours" [M2]. The latter emphasises the need for interventions that are useful if one perhaps only sees a client on one occasion.

The focus of the trainees also moved from individual people towards the systems that impact on people's circumstances, illustrating the need for social change, activism, and greater justice. One M2 noted the importance of "advocating for social justice, for learners in particular ... the importance of being a driver for social action to take place, and I feel as though I have served as an advocate for social justice". This highlights the participants' growing awareness of roles beyond the counselling room, prompted by their sensitivity to and care about people's concerns (emphasising the relational aspect of *Ubuntu*), to engage in social action for and on behalf of those whose voices are not heard in the corridors of power.

Discussion

The themes explored above are a start towards evidencing the work in transforming Psychology curricula for "here" (Ratele, 2019), to better fit the SA context. The identified themes resonate with some of the ideas of situated learning (Wenger, 1998), where active participation promotes learning through engagement in real-life problem-solving and social interactions. This occurred in the weekly meetings with ADC staff members, the trainees' weekly supervision sessions, as well as in the informal discussions that occurred on-site. This highlights the value of trainees drawing from and adapting their academic learning to a context very different from that of the university setting, as in Vygotsky's (1962) ideas of the bridging of scholarly and everyday or spontaneous learning. The findings also reflect some of the competencies debates in Community Psychology (e.g., Arcidiacono, 2017), where respectful and reciprocal relationships based upon mutual trust (expressions of *Ubuntu* in practice) are seen to be foundational to effective work. Furthermore, the practitioner needs to be sensitive to positionalities, learning to work with variations and diversity and, in the case of the ADC, being able to work multilingually (a skill that most trainees had already developed, prior to their training). This evidence thus complements some of the existing literature about CBSL in SA.

Referring back to figure 1, some of the accounts in the findings illustrate the development of "conscientization" (Freire, 1970) as the trainees engaged in participatory psycho-educational approaches, where psychology is "given away" (Miller, 1969). Furthermore, there is a sense of the trainees moving from one-sided more "charitable" approaches to the work towards deeper relational engagement; for example, the M1 accounts lack some of the depth or detail more evident in comments from the M2s, illustrating the continuity between the learning of M1s and M2s. The M1 accounts appear to be more limited to their own developing practice, whereas those of the M2s provide evidence of the interactive nature of the internal - external, reciprocal community of practice that was identified in figure 1. For the M2s the more prolonged exposure to these different ways of working (due to their immersion in the setting), has the potential to promote more active citizenship (as noted in Akhurst et al., 2016) and, in their accounts, there is evidence of trainees expressing solidarity with those who have experienced oppression through the system (Aron & Corne, 1996).

There is no doubt that trainees felt supported by their partners at ADC and RU. This emphasises a key element of an Africa(n)-centred psychology, which at its core expresses the importance of interpersonal relations linked to the ideals of *Ubuntu* (Mkabela, 2015). The findings resonate with Nguyen's (2016) emphases on the primacy of relationships, the reciprocity that then results from knowledge sharing and learning from each other, based upon the rigour of praxis that draws from and applies academic theories in real-life settings.

In relation to explicitly describing aspects of their learning, there is some evidence of similarities to earlier literature cited. For example, in themes 2 and 5, the trainees note some aspects of initial disorientation, as described by Ricke (2021), and one Intern noted the value of support from a supervisor to balance this. It is also clear from the comments, that many feel commitment (the final of the four stages identified by Perry, 1998) to working in similar non-traditional settings. Three of the four attitudes referred to be Schwartz (2002), namely activation (sensitivity to others' needs), obligation (prompted by their empathy to the situations of their clients) and response (being motivated to assist), are evident in trainees' reflections.

This study has a number of limitations. It was based on the reflections of only 17 trainees, who had experienced the first year of the establishment of a CBSL partnership with the ADC. Because the excerpts were all previously published in reports, they are mainly positive in nature. It would be valuable to be able to probe for more negative experiences in future feedback opportunities with trainees. Then, these reflections were mainly self-generated by the participants; therefore, further engagement with these ideas could have been enhanced by focus group discussions, facilitated by a researcher to explore the meanings further. This could be enhanced by specifically addressing the aspects of "abstract conceptualisation" and the "active experimentation" that follows (perhaps in group reflections), as explicated by Kolb (1984). The cross-sectional nature of the data collected also limited the identification of aspects of individual students' development over time. There is thus the need for the evaluative research to be expanded upon through follow-up studies, perhaps capturing information from the same trainees over a period of time.

In addition, from a critical Community Psychology perspective, a question may be justly asked about whether the work at ADC was transformative enough systemically? Clearly, the project is in its early days, and the route towards social justice is a long one, requiring sustained engagement and advocacy, because issues such as recognition, representation and redistribution need to be integrated into systems (Mapaling & Cherrington, 2022). There is limited evidence of some of the trainees becoming aware of an expanded role that includes advocacy for others (Naidoo et al., 2007), and the challenge for future trainees, as well as our partners in the ADC, is how to engage in appropriate activism for greater social action, especially with governmental departments whose mandate is to deliver better services for all. In addition, a concern of the ADC staff members is how to promote the sustainability of this form of CBSL, as developed in this project (*personal communication* Nduna, 2022). We hope that this article provides some evidence to persuade funders of the

value of this work, but we also realise that more evidence of the benefits of the work for the service users themselves needs to be captured and publicised.

An important concern also relates to the term “community” in both CBSL more broadly and as used in trainees’ accounts. We are reminded that in the apartheid era, the term was used as a euphemism to support so-called “separate development” and thus the oppression of the majority (Carolissen, 2006). Community is not a term that refers only to areas that were previously disadvantaged and still show signs of impoverishment, but rather we all have links to communities of various sorts, whether to places geographically (e.g., neighbourhoods), through association with people who have similar interests or even through online and virtual connections. Kagan et al. (2020) use the term community as a verb, in ways that resonate with the findings reported above, foregrounding the active social ties of inter-relationships, for example of affection and interdependence, but also not being naïve about the negative possibilities of coercion and power dynamics that may be present in community-based interactions.

The social ties of affection (also a central feature of *Ubuntu*) form bonds that lead to concerns for one another’s welfare, as expressed in several of the M2 excerpts. Where social ties are based upon interdependence (also noted in the accounts of collaborations and reciprocity in the findings), the social capital of bonding (Claridge, 2018) leads to stronger links that promote working together. Clearly, the relationships and bonds formed in the ADC partnership enabled the participants to pursue the initial objectives identified in the formative stage. The challenge, though, is how to reach outwards to develop bridges with other structures and groupings, as will be necessary for the ADC partnership in gaining support from governmentally funded entities in the geographic area surrounding the centre.

Conclusion

This article has described the impact of experiences in an innovative community-based practice setting on the training of Counselling Psychologists in SA. The learning that trainees report, based upon their work in partnership with the ADC staff, reveals the potential of what community-engaged, multicultural, Africa(n)-centred psychologies might look like. We hope that this article contributes to the limited CBSL literature on postgraduate students’ learning; and to giving an account of an innovative project to extend the settings of Counselling Psychologists’ training. The trainees’ learnings were clearly multi-faceted, including more inward-facing learning about themselves, developing their skills and honing their professional identities, as well as more outward-facing learning in relationships with others (whether colleagues in the partnership or service-users) and concerning the design and implementation of interventions in non-traditional settings for psychologists (due to the contentious histories of Psychology). Ratele and Malherbe (2022, p.13) note the need for “positioning the psychological within social change efforts” and that this potentially contributes to “decolonising psychologies of community within and beyond Africa”.

Community Psychology takes an unapologetic political stance, identifying where power lies and how it is exercised in ways that maintain privilege or discriminate against groups. The awareness of these issues needs to be explicitly incorporated into CBSL, in order for partnerships to be able to lead to transformations in people's lives as they move forward. Opportunities to rethink and reconstruct systems of knowledge and practice from the perspectives of the marginalised majority (Burton & Kagan, 2005) need to be optimised in these settings, and in the training of psychologists, to move towards imagined transformed societies (Kagan et al., 2020). Thus, Community Psychology could play further important roles in the decolonisation efforts towards a more relevant and applicable Africa(n)-centred psychology.

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