Abstract

In a context like South Africa's, the prevailing numerous social inequalities and problems place additional demands on psychologists and educational psychologists. Western-based, individualised medical approaches are increasingly regarded as inadequate. We thus contend that the inclusion of service-learning is an alternative approach to the training of Educational Psychology master's students. Little has been written about the role of service-learning components in the curriculum of an Educational Psychology master's programme and in general in post-graduate programmes. Thus, we argue for the integration of service-learning in the curriculum of a psychology-oriented programme that could serve as a vehicle for the achievement of the professional development of the students. The main research question is: What do Educational master's student' reflections and artefacts reveal about the contribution of a service-learning project to their knowledge of the young adult?

A qualitative case study design was followed utilizing a convenience sample of master's educational psychology students. Data collection methods included observation, interviews and documents. Content analysis was employed as a data analysis strategy.

The contribution of this study consists of emphasising the centrality of reflective practice as teaching and learning tool. The peculiarity of this study is its unique context, namely, an educational excursion to a conference site involving young adults and master's students.

The Use of Reflection in a Service-Learning Project in a Post-Graduate Programme

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Service-learning in postgraduate education

The traditional training of educational psychologists includes field-based components colloquially known as practicum placements (during their studies) and internships (after the completion of their coursework). These types of professional experiences call for students to be placed in recognised training locations, where they undertake particular professional tasks under the guidance of qualified educational psychologists. Throughout these practicum experiences, students have to meet curriculum programme prerequisites by fulfilling a particular number of hours of supervised services; this is often a pre-requisite to obtaining their qualification in a professional field like Educational Psychology. The value of internships is well-documented in the literature, with advantages that include enhanced understanding of how organisations operate, the acquisition of experience in an increasingly competitive job market (Severance, & Starr, 2011, p. 200) and, sometimes, possibilities for exposure to new professional roles.

Nonetheless, the downside of internship experiences is that they often reflect fixed, rather than innovative practices (Kenny, & Gallagher, 2000, p. 190). For instance, in the field of mental health services, students would often find internship placements in locations with a sound reputation for the provision of psychological services, training in individual counselling and assessment skills. However, this type of training is limiting and could contain the idea and skills of forthcoming professionals who would need to function in contexts other than individual therapy sessions. Consequently, such professionals

would be ill-equipped to operate within schools, work with families, communities, and young adults in ways that expand traditional professional borders (Kenny, & Gallagher, 2000, p. 190). This limitation in traditional training methods leads to subsequent limitations in the definition of a transformative role for educational psychologists. Doherty (1995, in Kenny, & Gallagher, 2000, p. 190) affirms that traditional psychology training places emphasis on individuals' adjustment to social facts with the least consideration given to bringing about societal change or upholding the ethical duties or community responsibilities of either psychologists or clients.

The focus internationally and nationally has shifted to primary prevention of mental problems, the advancement of psychological welfare and contextually applicable community centred services (Sheridan, & Gutkin, 2000; Van Niekerk, & Prins, 2001, in Pillay, 2011, p. 352). Western-based, individualised medical approaches are increasingly regarded as inadequate for the purposes of training psychologists. This is because the focus should be on resiliency and competencies, as well as availing community-oriented psychological services to groups who are side-lined and vulnerable (Seedat et al., 2004, p. 597). Most importantly, in a context like South Africa's, the prevailing numerous social inequalities and problems – notably poverty, racism, discrimination, bigotry, dislike of foreigners, criminality, HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancies, drug abuse, rape, and violence at schools – place additional demands on psychologists and educational psychologists practising in South Africa. This justifies the need to train them to enable them to acquire additional information and skills.

The transference of the abovementioned information and skills is vital to positive mental health. As such, they should be provided in training programmes for educational psychologists. Pillay (2003, p. 267) asserts that the training of the latter in community psychology ought to be incorporated in all subjects, in a unified and all-inclusive way, and should be positioned in a more practical manner. He further argues that trainees must not be taught theories but should also acquire experience in working directly with societies by way of fieldwork, assignments, and case studies. In other words, alternative approaches to training should strive to address the challenges experienced in the South African context and play a more transformative role in the development of psychologists. Thus, these alternative training approaches should include preparing psychologists to work also with groups. We agree with this stance to work with groups because it is becoming increasingly apparent that if the psychological requirements of the majority of South African citizens are to be addressed successfully, mass interventions that deviate from consulting merely with individual clients (Pillay, 2003, p. 267) are needed. However, it remains to determine the types of alternative approaches and how best they can be leveraged towards the preparation of educational psychologists. This would ensure that the latter are adequately trained or equipped with the requisite knowledge and skills that would allow them to do justice to their task by adopting a more transformative approach to their role in society. In this regard, we contend that service-learning, which is a form of experiential learning, is one such alternative approach. We thus argue for the integration of service-learning in the curriculum of a psychology-oriented programme such as Educational Psychology. However, little has been written about the role of service-learning components in the

curriculum of a post-graduate programme even though service-learning is widely used (Lu, & Lambright, 2010, p. 118).

Service-learning as a pedagogy

Service-learning is a well-developed pedagogy in higher education (Zimmerman, Dupree, & Hodges, 2014, 144). Bringle and Hatcher emphasise that service-learning is a course-based, credit-bearing learning experience in which students participate in an organised service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996, 222). This definition illustrates important attributes of service-learning as a pedagogy (Bringle, 2017, 50). It is distinguished from volunteering because it is course-based and is focused on educationally –meaningful community service for which credit is based on the learning that occurs and not the just the completion of service hours. It involves intentional collaboration with community partners to design, implement and evaluate the educational experiences for student learning and the community's benefits. The community-based activities are intentionally identified to fulfil the goals of different constituencies such as faculty, student and community partners.

Numerous studies in other disciplines indicated the effectiveness of service-learning (Zimmerman, Dupree, & Hodges, 2014, 144). Sax and Astin (1997, in Zimmerman et al, 2014, 144) point out in their study that participation in service-learning leads to increased knowledge in the discipline of the student. Experiential exercises that includes personal involvement or immersion in diverse communities help students to move beyond the acquisition of knowledge (Pope-Davies, Breaux, & Liu, 1997; Ridley, Mendoza, & Kanitz, 1994, in Burnett, Hamel & Long, 2004, 180).

Service-learning is one method to introduce concepts such as cultural awareness, sensitivity, knowledge and skills (ingredients for multicultural competence) to students to enable them to have direct exposure to diverse cultural groups (Burnett, et al., 2004, 180). It involves students in a way that allow them to gain experience by involving them in social, cultural and environmental and other important aspects of our community. This method of learning according to Burnett et al. (2004, 180) moves away from a missionary ideology of working for the community and instead is based on working with the community. Furthermore, it is a method that embodies the tenets of mutuality, collaboration and equality that are critical aspects for improving multicultural awareness and sensitivity (Weah, Simmons, & Hall, 2000 in Burnett et al., 2004, 180). Students are better able to move beyond individualized and personalized thinking and place themselves within a broader social and cultural context while learning about cultural and community similarities and differences through service-learning says Burnett et al. (2004, 180).

Reflection as a tool for professional development through service-learning

Reflective activities are designed to link the service and the academic content in ways that generate, deepen and capture learning (Ash & Clayton, 2009, in Bringle (2017, 50). Without reflection, service learning by itself will not lead to learning (Bringle and Hatcher, 1999). Service-learning allows students to engage in the real-world activities to practice skills but reflection forms an important part thereof. Reflection is regarded as the bridge between service and learning (Eyler, 2001). Ball and Chilling ((2006, 279) described reflection as a thoughtful self-examination or an introspective and probing self-assessment (Ball, 2008, 73) that serves to link service and learning experiences in a service-learning course ((Riddle, 2003; Swords, & Kiely, 2010, in Bloomquist, 2015). The key differentiator between service-learning and other types of experiential learning such as internships, practica and volunteerism, is reflection (Becker, 2000 in Bloomquist, 2015, 170).

Reflection and reflective practices have been researched extensively (Norrie, Hamond, D'Avray, Collington & Fook, 2012, 565). Although extensive these studies did not look at post-graduate students' reflections about their experiences during a service-learning project. Reflective practice is described as activities in which individuals engage to explore their experiences (Boud et al. 1985, 19). Reflection is a key concept in service-learning. It also plays a role in the process of learning as a connection between experience and theory (Shaefer, 2014, 78). The idea of using reflection and reflective thinking in education has been often attributed to the work of Dewey (1993, Hickson, 2011, p. 831). Dewey used the words reflection and thinking interchangeably according to Hickson (2011, p. 831). He further indicates that this is perhaps the reason why reflection is often regarded as little more than thinking about our experiences. But, he states, for Dewey the concept of thinking is intricately connected to doing. Further, that for Dewey thinking is an active process that involves forming theories and trying them out in the real world. The use of reflective practice later builds on the work of Donald Schön (1983). The author provided insights in understanding the complex nature of professional practice. The concepts reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action was introduced by Schön.

Building reflection into a service-learning project is common practice (Fiddler, & Marienau, 2008, 80). Different techniques such as portfolios, structured journals, discussions or reflective assignments, in the case of this study, are used. These techniques are useful as a tool for students to engage in reflection as a bridge from what they are doing to what they may or should be learning (Fiddler & Marienau, 2008, 80). The results of reflection are learning and improved personal and professional efficiency (Rogers, 2001, 48).

Reflection is an essential component of professionalism, especially in the health profession context (Smith, 2011, 211). The skill to be a critical reflector is regarded as essential throughout the health and social care occupations (Smith, 2011, 211). Critical reflections can strengthen professional development through the evaluation of decisions and activities; it can also enhance service delivery as well as patients' experiences and care (Brookfield, 1987; Mezirow, 1994, in Smith, 2011, 211). Through the development of critical reflection skills by HE institutions, practitioners gain an insight into their

personal professionalism (Schon, 1991; Larivee, 2000, in Smith, 2011, 212) and the knowledge and power of their disciplines (Giddens, 1976; Habernas, 1978; Foucault, 1982, in Smith, 2011, 212). In support of these reasons, critical reflection is a morally and professionally good thing hence the aforementioned is promoted in various spheres of professional development practice. Critical reflection is described by Biggs (2003, in Smith, 2011, 212) as a lengthy and conceptual consequence of learning, which suggests that students will understand such knowledge and skills during their higher learning experiences. Several theorists, social theorists, investigators, teachers, and therapists have debated extensively on what it means to critically reflect (Smith, 2011, 212). This notion was linked to a variety of results that include enhanced thinking, learning, and evaluation of the self and social systems.

Valuable reflective techniques include structured journals, discussions, blogs, debriefings related to lessons learnt, as well as literature to link and provide contextual viewpoints on service-learning activities. These techniques can be utilised as a means for students' engagement in reflection as a method of closing the gap between what they are doing and what they should be learning (Fiddler, & Marienau, 2008, p. 80). Gallego (2014, 97) considers journaling to be a useful tool for self-exploration. It can raise awareness of one's own biases and beliefs, it ensures more thoughtful responses to students' requirements and establishes the required links between theory and practice (Genc, 2010; Maarof, 2010, in Gallego, 2014, 97). In this enquiry, reflection occurred during the service-learning project among the master's students and between master's students and their lecturer. Students also worked on an assignment that was submitted as a reflection task. The reflection during this service learning project required students to consciously consider the connections between their service experience and both their class work/readings/theory and their experience at the site of learning. Their purposeful writing was placed within the discipline of Educational Psychology. In this way, the reflection was elevated from being a mere collection of participating students' experiences to a true learning catalyst (Bloomquist, 2015, 170).

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is thus to capture what Educational Psychology master's students' reflections and artefacts reveal about the contribution of a Service-Learning project to their knowledge of the young adult. Thus, the main research question is: What do Educational Psychology master's students' reflections and artefacts reveal about the contribution of a service-learning project to their knowledge of the young adult?

Research design and methodology

Context and participants

In an Educational Psychology programme for master's students, the professional practice module was adapted to include a service-learning project in the curriculum. Although students complete a practicum of 200 hours in partner schools during which

these master's students do psychological and educational testing, parent-guidance, workshops for teachers at these schools and school-related individual or group therapy for children and their families, they were not exposed to work with young adults. A service-learning project was introduced to include the annual educational excursion for student-teachers who are part of the First Year Experience (FYE) seminar of the Faculty of Education. First year teacher-students attended the three-day breakaway camp, from the UJ to a more informal setting, during the April holidays. The value of the investigated service-learning project for master's students is twofold. As qualified teachers with a number of years of teaching experience, they played a mentoring and supportive role during the excursion that helped scaffold first year students' learning. In turn, the master's students worked on their own professional development as educational psychologists through their interactions with a group of young adults. In this reciprocally-beneficial learning process, the master's students acted as co-facilitators of the excursion programme. They assisted with learning activities, supervised the more socially-oriented activities and served as positive role models for the first-year group.

The unique nature of a service-learning project in an educational excursion for beginning teacher-students, we argue, could serve as one vehicle for the accomplishment of the professional development of students in Educational Psychology with respect to learning about how to work with young adults. Through reflections during their service-learning experiences, students learn to examine their knowledge, beliefs, and practices. They state their opinions and thoughts about what happens on the field; discuss what they have learnt through activities; and raise questions about their interactions with the activities as these occur to ensure that their learning is both authentic and relevant. Students bring their own learning and development into the programme and the module; in this way, they are able to merge theory and practice. Through reflection, students engage in interpretation, as it relates to their previous experiences, knowledge, and ideas (Hay, 2003, 188).

Design

A qualitative case study research design as enquiry strategy was used. In this study, the focus was on specific people (group of post-graduate students) who are in a specific place (an educational excursion of campus) and are engaged in a specific activity (service learning) at a specific time. The study was naturalistic as it took place in a real-world setting, rather than a laboratory. The site of learning was situated on a camping site in Gauteng in South Africa. The researcher was present at the research site during the excursion

Sampling

Purposeful and convenience sampling was used in this qualitative case study to discover, understand, and gain insight into the case. The educational psychology masters' students attended an excursion with young adults, first year students, as part of their professional practice.

Data Gathering and analysis

Several methods such as observation, interviews and artifacts were employed to collect empirical materials over a period of time. Unlike interviews and observations, the presence of the researcher does not change what is being investigated. Content analysis was employed as a strategy to analyse the qualitative data collected.

Ethics

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Faculty of Education, to conduct the research with the master's students in Educational Psychology. Participants gave written informed consent for participation in the research and the use of their reflective assignments. Participants were informed that the findings of the study would be published. Credibility was enhanced by the use of different data collection methods over a specific period of time in a specific setting.

Findings

In this section we report on the relevant theme and related sub-themes that emerged from the content analysis and interpretation of the data relevant to the focus of this study. The overarching theme derived from the data is: Making meaning of the service-learning experience through reflection. Sub-themes related to this are:

1. Learning through critical reflection
2. Participants' reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action
3. Reflection-based growth and development
4. Theory-practice gap leads to reflection
5. Barriers to learning from experience
6. Personal reflective learning during the SL experience

Discussion

Learning through critical reflection

One participant demonstrated critical reflection by relating a matter of concern that was prompted by an experience with the young adults on the views of the young adults concerning culture. She questioned whether the first-year students would be able to teach in a multicultural environment.

> *"And also how to include different cultures in your group and also how if they will have to teach in a multicultural environment. Will they be able to manage such … because if you look at the majority of students they are more the black students and I can say that? … there is a minority of other race that is in the profession right now. And when the old folks died out in the ex-model-c schools they will have to take a lot of students into that. Will they be able to go into such an environment or will they be more okay in an environment where their own race is?" (FGI1).*

The participant noted her concern that these young adults might not be able to work in a multicultural environment. Thus, she also reflected on her previous experience, that is, what she knows about schools – as she was previously trained as a teacher. She questioned and evaluated the opinions of the young adults by giving a different perspective on the inclusion of different cultures into group settings, which is a reference to multiculturalism.

The abovementioned participant reflected on her previous training experience that had prepared her for the role that she had to play in a mono-cultural society (segregated society then). In this regard, she reveals that:

"You have to go to a different organisation or a school where different races being exposed and I think that is the extra help too. Because from my own personal training I wasn't taught like that, because we were coming from a background from the coloured community. And we know that we were going to teach coloured children and we never actually faced any issue of race maybe the social issues but not race, different cultures" (FGI1).

She further explained that, in the context of todays changed South African society, the young adults have to prepare themselves to work in a multicultural society. The participant exhibited a social awareness of multiple cultures and religions through her reflection. She related her current experience to previous knowledge and previous personal experience. She questioned the thinking of the young adults.

One participant was not only concerned with thinking about her experience, but also reflexively explored the process of learning itself. In the reflective assignment, this participant notes:

"It was a fantastic, inspiring experience, leaving me hopeful about the future of SA, and hopeful about my developing therapeutic skills. It was rewarding to be an active part of an experience where I and the students had shifted paradigms and world views … Looking back, my overall worldview was altered at the site. I learned so much from talking and listening to the students and lecturers. Mainly about different beliefs, cultures, customs, traditions, the significance of it, and the importance of understanding a person's context, community and reality, before one can really help them. I realised that as a therapist, I can only truly join with the needs of the client, if I understand their socially constructed reality, family patterns, traditions and beliefs. This would mean a lot of reading and investigating, before I begin interventions with a client. This way, step by step I can keep learning about different cultures and multi-language issues, particularly in various Black groups where my knowledge is limited" (R6).

The participant highlighted the importance of context. It is clear that the reflective learning went beyond the consumption of knowledge to involve some critical awareness of the sociocultural environments in which the learning occurs (Rolfe, 2002, 22).

Reflection is identified by many authors as a necessary intermediary between the experiences of students and their understanding of those experiences. It is the linking of thinking, performing, and feeling. Reflection places emphasis on learning through questioning, as was done by the lecturer in order to develop understanding. Indeed, during the reflection sessions, the lecturer would ask questions that permitted the participants to reflect on their current and past experiences in terms of their engagement with the young adults. This was an important aspect, as it ensured that the theory they had learnt was linked to their real-life experiences with the young adults, thus making learning more meaningful.

Students were invited by their lecturer to reflect on their experience, thus encouraging reflective practice. The latter can be defined as learning that occurs through reflection on or in practice (experience) (Merriam, & Bierema, 2014, 115). These authors note that many professional preparation programmes strive to cultivate reflective practitioners as is the intention of the course under which the excursion was undertaken. Schön's basic premise, according to Merriam and Bierema (2014, 115), is that the actual world of practice is in trouble and that our "technical" planning for this world is only an opening point. Further, that it is in practice itself that valuable learning actually happens (Merriam, & Bierema, 2014, 115).

Schön (1987, in Brockbank, & McGill, 2007, 87) discovered that students participated in reflection on an emergent practice that was to strengthen their learning and thus improve their practice. In other words, students learnt by listening, watching, doing, and by being schooled in their doing (Brockbank, & McGill, 2007, 87). They did not only apply what they had picked up and learnt from lectures, books, and presentations. They also included what was gained when they performed an action that was part of their forthcoming career, for example, facilitating group dialogues, discussing with students, or counselling them. They also learnt by reflecting on their own as well as with their peers and lecturer on how the action went (Brockbank, & McGill, 2007, 87). Thus, they reflected on their practice. They will take that reflection on their prior action with them, as part of their knowledge or learning when they move into the action stage. In other words, the next time, they will bring their prior acquired understanding and practice as well as their ability to reflect in the action, especially if a new experience presents itself (Schön, 1987, in Brockbank, & McGill, 2007, 87).

Personal reflection-on-action is essential in the continuous internal discussion about practice, as it may impact future action and reflections-in-action (Brockbank, & McGill, 2007, 94). However, while this method of reflection is essential and appropriate, it is not necessarily adequate. Reflection-on-action with another person in conversation, which promotes critical reflection about the actions taken by a person, is more likely to be effective in advancing reflective learning. Indeed, dialogue plays an important role in learning (Osterman, 1998, 8). Furthermore, research demonstrates that dialogue and discussion improve the learning process that enables students to elucidate and deepen their understanding. Osterman (1998, 9) further stresses that when students have an opportunity to ask questions, to contest views, and to process their learning orally, they learn more. The deed of engaging in dialogue, as the master's students did, strengthens the learning process.

Reflective practice is primarily construed as a critical assessment of personal practice. The standards for this assessment are personal social values and goals (Osterman, 1998, 9). The capability to participate in reflective practice requires one to view events and actions in new and diverse ways. To be a reflective practitioner requires enhanced observational skills. A careful explanation of experience (observation) becomes the base for the later stages of the reflective practice cycle: assessment, reconceptualization, and experimentation (Osterman, 1998, 10). Observation is one of the most effective methods to advance an understanding of the theories-in-use that form behaviour. The only means to expose their presence is by investigating practice. Critical reflection transpires when people are able to understand and test the validity of their presumptions – as the participants did in the interview. Engagement in critical reflection entails an understanding of experiences in the social context as well as how the gained knowledge can be used to develop future practice (Hoyrup, 2004, in Hickson, 2011, 831) Critical reflection through reflexivity becomes part of a procedure of investigating the interrelationship between self and knowledge production. It unwraps and assesses how personal and epistemological effects are intertwined with the research (Smith, 2011, 214).

Reflective skills could be a required competency in promoting professional development for educational psychologists, as is the case in the nursing professional development curriculum (Tashiro et al., 2013, 171). Schön (1983) has performed an important role in illustrating the position of reflection in professional education and explaining reflection as an important means to enable learning from one's experiences. Schön (1983, in Tashiro et al., 2013, 171) believes that professionals can surface, criticise, restructure, and signal their understanding and further action through reflection-on-action. Reid (1993, p. 306, in Tashiro et al., 2013, 171) defines reflection as "a process of reviewing an experience of practice in order to describe, analyse, evaluate and so inform learning about practice". Critical reflective learning confronts individuals to question suppositions, beliefs and generally accepted wisdom, and urges them to actively take part in what they learn (Hedberg, 2009, in Bosangit, & Demangeot, 2016, 210).

Participants' reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action

Reflection-on-action and reflection-in-action are two important concepts in reflective practice (Merriam, & Bierema, 2014, 115). Reflection-on-action is what is usually thought of in experiential learning, that is, one has an experience and consciously thinks about it after it has happened. In assessing this experience, one may resolve to do something similar or different in their future practice, as indicated by the participants. Indeed, one participant captures her gains thus:

> *"Also I've learnt that case studies they also work wonderfully, you know. So that's what I've learnt, whatever workshop that I will conduct whatever that I want to be facilitated to make people to be involved use the case studies and let them explore "(DI1).*

This participant indicates that she will draw on the experiences she had at the research site, to bring about changes in her practice. In her evaluation of her experience in terms of the activities she engaged in at the research site, she decides to apply the lessons learnt from the case studies in her future practice. Another participant notes some of the activities that they could do: *"I think that the variety of different things that we can do. For instance, I loved the … dramatisering (dramatisation) of the case studies."* *(FGI2)*. Another example of reflection-on-action is provided by a participant who indicated, in her reflective assignment, that she was "deeply shocked" by the view that HIV/AIDS could be healed through faith and prayer. However, her reaction changed after reflecting on it, as indicated below:

> *"I was deeply shocked by this view but upon reflection came to realise that I could understand the view to the extent that I believe that there is a connection between body and mind, biology and biography, and that faith and choice can change our chemistry. While appreciating that we in South Africa have to be extremely careful of simplistic analyses, cop-outs and limited thinking, I also need to be less judgemental if I am going to be open to a different cultural and religious context"* *(R5)*.

Reflection-in-action differs from reflection-on-action in that the former occurs as one is engaged in the experience. It happens simultaneously with practice. When one of the first-year students revealed his homosexual status, one of the master's students had to react quickly and control the situation by using her previous knowledge: "*I prompted it by saying: that was so brave of you to disclose that and who know and how did it go*" (IndI2). This type of reflection "reshapes what we are doing while we are doing it" (Schön, 1987, p. 26, in Merriam, & Bierema, 2014, 116). Reflection-in-action characterises professionals who think on their feet, investigate, reroute course, and instantly react to a transforming context of practice, as one of the participants did when a first-year student declared his homosexual status to his group. Refection-in-action is also associated with knowing-in-action or tacit knowing, that is, knowing what to do without expressing it.

Theory-practice gap leads to reflection

The participants revealed some gaps between what they have learnt in class and what they have seen in the real world. One of the participants confessed that she *"does not understand culture and language"* (OBG2). Another participant confided that: *"…I have never facilitated a big group and talked about sex" (*FGI2). This participant further indicated: "*And tonight I saw ----- culture. And wow, uhm I haven't seen, you don't have to just need to be aware that there is different cultures you need to be aware that people are extremely passionate about their culture"* (FGI2). Another participant highlighted the following with regard to the young adults: *"I actually learn about where learners are, their development and how they actually respond to certain things and react to certain things. And sometimes theory says this in a book and in reality that is what happening"* (FGI1).

One of the participants acknowledged her lack of theoretical knowledge, in her reflections after the service-learning experience: "*I don't feel that I have enough knowledge or experience to critically analyse conversations…*" (R1). The same participant noted earlier, during the service-learning project, that she needed to read more about Bronfenbrenners' theory. As the observer notes:

> "*The master's student said that she needs a map to understand people. She mentioned that perhaps she should use Bronfenbrenner's theory. She could look at social context*" (OBG2).

Referring to Bronfenbrenner is an indication that this student recognises the value of the eco-systemic approach in her training at the research site. Pillay (2003, 266) notes that educational psychologists should implement an eco-systemic approach in their training and that trainees should obtain skills to empower and organise people in the society, so that they are able to deal with social issues in the South African context. Furthermore, educational psychologists should collaborate with stakeholders to acquire a repertoire of generic skills that would enable them to work with communities if they wish to be of value to their clients and communities. Educational psychologists must also have the ability to cope with a range of problems and be prepared to put into action a diverse variety of interventions.

Tashiro et al. (2013, 172) note that various authors mention the use of reflection because of the need to integrate theory and practice. This is why the lecturer included discussion sessions with master's students and reflective assignments as part of the course. It was suggested that the gap between theory and practice may be closed through reflection (Clark, 1986; Conway, 1994, in Stoddard et al., 1996, 438). However, reflective learning does not necessarily occur when students simply review clinical or other experiences (Tashiro et al., 2013, 172). An inquiry into the difference between reality and what they have learnt leads to the realisation of the theory-practice gap which is the beginning of the reflection process (Tashiro et al., 2013, 172). Therefore, the core antecedent of reflection is the theory-practice gap, according to these authors. Tamura (2008, in Tashiro et al., 2013, 172) says that this gap results from the interaction with others. In the context of this study, it is the interaction between the Educational Psychology master's students and the young adults, at the research site.

The idea that formal professional knowledge is embedded in an academic knowledge base forms the conditions for the critical pedagogical problem of professional education. This problem referred to is the relationship between theory and practice (Shulman, 1998, 517). The challenge of all professional learning is to find a way through this unavoidable conflict between theory and practice. In other words, in virtually all forms of professional training, students see practicum experiences as really valuable, whereas they hardly endure the academic experiences. It is clear to students how the practical experiences are pertinent to preparing the new doctors or teachers or educational psychologists, in this case. It is the more theoretical grounding in developmental psychology or the interpretation of the writings that frequently appear to be doubtful (Shulman, 1998, 517).

The researchers, Stoddard et al. (1996) and Epling, Timmons and Wharrad, (2003), note that the development of independent, skilled, and self-directed professionals is promoted through reflection (in Tashiro et al., 2013, 176). This is perhaps why this reflective component was built into this programme. Students had several chances for reflection through discussions, during the programmes, and the reflective assignment.

The training of educational psychologists needs to groom them to operate within an eco-systemic paradigm that focuses on prevention and mass intervention, while advancing theory and research, particularly in the context of oppressed and underprivileged groups (Pillay, 2003, in Ebersöhn et al., 2010, 87). Pillay (2003, 265) stresses that the training of psychologists should be more community-oriented so that they could test theory in practical situations and have a cross-cultural training within a South African context – as was the case in this service-learning project.

In this project, the participants had an opportunity to make the paradigm shift from individual to collective practice (Pillay, 2003, p. 265), by working with groups of students. Working with these big student groups was problematic for some master's participants who still wanted to work with smaller groups and individuals.

The use of live case studies could be another method of integrating theory and practice (Wilson, Blitzer, & Newmark, 2015, p. 309). Thus, the master's students worked with the young adults at the research site, observing them in the setting. Disciplinary knowledge was connected to community needs.

Barriers to learning from experience through reflection

Some participants showed signs of apathy in the SL project. In my observation notes, I indicated: "*The students got into their different groups and started with the activity. The two master's students walked together not really engaging the students*" *(OBG1).* These participants would not interact with the first-year students at first. They would be on their own, not observing the first-year students' small group discussions. In this regard, one of the participants indicated that their role at the research site was more of being:

> "*Helpers in terms of any odd jobs that needed to be done were sort of handed down. And anything in terms of you know we think you can handle this, give it to us type of thing. I don't think that my role here as an educational psychologist was fulfilled to its full capacity. Especially considering in the South African context the type of schools and things that we are going to end up being involved and working in communities and things like that. I think it would have been better to have done a set workshop where we could have had an hour given to us where we could have done…the three of us in our group could have come up with something that we felt relevant to provide them with some more knowledge. I think we were more used as helpers in the sense of you know (name) there are some things that we like you to help us along with. I don't really see the daily what the activity for us to be doing, the crazy games is tomorrow*" (FGI1).

The same participant further expressed her confusion with regard to their role at the site: "*Again what role are we playing here are we helpers or are we here as Educational*

Psychologists. What are we here for?" (FGI1). Boud and Walker (1993, 80) describe barriers as those aspects which hinder or impede students' readiness for the experience, their active engagement in it, and their skill to reflect sensibly on it – with a position to learning from it. Barriers can inhibit learning at every step of the learning process: the preparation, the experience itself, and the reflection on it (Boud, & Walker, 1990, in Boud, & Walker 1993, 80). In the preparation stage, barriers can inhibit learning by reducing the learning prospective of the experience, constraining the students' consciousness of the educational situation, being unable to focus current knowledge and skills in relation to it, and by forming an unclear purpose for coming into the experience. Within the experience, barriers can constrain the fundamental processes of seeing and interceding, thus ensuring an unfavourable impact on the students' engagement in it. Barriers are able to halt reflection procedures during and after the experience; consequently, the experience develops into thoughtlessness and is thus deprived of its learning potential. Following the experience, these hindrances can increase emotional aspects that make reflection unattainable or limit it; they can separate and ruin the new experience by creating difficulties in connecting the new experience to the previous one; and they are able to make it challenging to assimilate new learning with previous knowledge, to consider opinions and make inferences. Barriers can also present a challenge for the learner to seize the new learning.

Barriers can be classified as external or internal to the learner (Boud, & Walker, 1993, 80). External barriers can come from other persons, the educational setting, the larger personal position and background of the student, as well as from social forces such as typecasting, cultural expectancies, and classism (Boud, & Walker, 1993, 80). Internal barriers, according to these authors, stem from the distinctive personal experience of the learner. Prior negative experiences, acknowledged assumptions around what the student is able to do or around what learning can occur, an absence of awareness of one's presuppositions, the emotional condition of the learner, and established patterns of conduct can be included.

The above classification of the types of barriers raises the important issue of the interaction between them. Many of the supposedly external barriers only begin to have real force when they are paid some attention and taken as true. Often, self-imposed restriction is more damaging than anything imposed by others. The power of external forces is in proportion to the degree to which they can be appropriated. Learners are tricked or trick themselves into thinking that barriers are external when they are not. Another realisation was that personal distress – mixed with the mostly unconscious oppressive behaviour of others – underlies many of the identified barriers (Boud, & Walker, 1993, 81). Although barriers can be experienced as internal, they frequently result from external influences which affected people at an earlier time and which left individuals feeling disempowered, de-skilled, or withdrawn. When the master's students were treated as helpers (according to them) rather than the particular individuals whom they were (counsellors/educational psychologists), the external oppression was internalised, and own aspirations were censored.

The last point above raises the issue of an attitude of openness to new learning. Ronnestad and Skovholt (2003, 13) emphasise that a mindset of openness to new learning is important to improve professional proficiency.

Personal reflective learning during the SL experience

One participant articulated her changed views about the young adults, when she reflected on her interaction with the latter during the interviews. As she puts it:

"I've also learnt to understand them better like I said my perception it's going to be that the young adults have got attitude, the peer pressure because of what- what but I've learnt that it's not the case. You need to understand them, you know, give them a chance. Understand them let them express their views" (DI1).

This participant noted that she had preconceived beliefs about the young adults, which changed as she interacted with them at the site. Similarly, another participant stated the following with regard to her new learning:

"So, I think with this one it really will assist in terms of …also guiding the parent that they need to understand their children. And if they have a problem, they need to discuss with their children. Because I think other parents they don't discuss they want to just give instruction. I know as a parent we have to give instruction, but we need to listen first and see why the child is behaving like this or why the child is saying things in this way instead of behaving like a young adult or a child. Understand the children I think this is the way (DI1).

This participant indicated that she would apply her new knowledge to her practice, when working with adults. She highlighted that she had learnt that one needed to listen to these young adults, discuss matters with them and try to understand them, instead of instructing them.

Personal reflective learning concentrates on individuals' perspectives or personal insights. It enables people to reflect on how they can apply what they have learnt and stresses its influence on or significance to their lives (Hedberg, 2009, in Bosangit, & Demangeot, 2016, p. 210). Palmer (1983, in Bosangit, & Demangeot, 2016, 210) indicates that personal reflective learning occurs at the junction between who they (educational psychologists) are (what they think, feel, and know) and what they learn about a subject (place, people, and culture). Personal reflective learning has a possibility for personal transformation (Bosangit, & Demangeot, 2016). Nonetheless, Huber (1991) and Gibbs (1995) contend that learning does not necessarily have to cause changes in behaviour rather it is the prospect to act differently that characterises this process (Copes, & Watts, 2000, in Bosangit, & Demangeot, 2016, 210).

Limitations

A key shortcoming of this study is its being limited to the UJ context and to a sample of students from one programme. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be

generalised beyond the sample group, as the study used purposeful sampling. It should be noted though that the aim of this qualitative enquiry was not to generalise the findings to other cases. However, this downside was countered by the in-depth nature of the inquiry. Thus, the value of the study lies in the fact that its findings may be useful to educators and researchers in the field of Educational Psychology.

Another drawback consists of the fact that the reflective assignment formed part of the Professional Practice module assessment. Thus, the participants may have felt inclined to over-sell the positives of the experience, rather than give an exact or critical description. This links to the wider and challenging question that seeks to establish how to appraise service-learning (Service-Learning website, 2001, in Parker, Myers, Higgins, Oddson, Price, & Gould 2009, 594). The assessment in the present case study concentrated on learning rather than service. The participants' reflections were important and contributed significantly to learning effects that transcend the academic outcomes (Service-Learning website, 2001, in Parker *et al.*, 2009, 594).

Conclusion

Educational Psychology training should happen in the field not only in the laboratory of a clinical setting. Reflection in service-learning should be more often used as a means for teaching and learning in postgraduate professional courses, to enhance professional practice.

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