

Engaging students in community-based learning: a case study from UKZN, South Africa

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Engaging undergraduates in work linked to social justice and change

- In many UG curricula, limited opportunities until recently
- Student volunteers
- Increasing numbers of UK courses offering a 'work-based' unit of 6-10 weeks – 'employability' links
- Community-based learning (CBL) still a relatively new concept
- In psychology, >80% of graduates do not go into professional training

Community-based learning (CBL)

- Found in HE in a number of countries, including Australia, USA, SA
- Terminology: community-based learning or service-learning
 - “the type of experiential education in which students participate in service in the community and reflect on their involvement in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content and of the discipline and it’s relationship to social needs and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility”

(Hatcher and Bringle.1997:1)

- Studies have shown that “... undergraduates and other citizen volunteers can have as much, or more, of a positive impact on people with problems in living as do professional mental health workers.” (Rappaport, 2005).

Some features of CBL

- Imperative in SA to develop **partnerships**
 - ‘Psychology’ implicated in maintaining the status quo during apartheid era
 - Post apartheid community context is challenging
 - Need for ‘depowerment’ of professionals
- Health - promoting (‘salutogenic’) rather than responsive to ‘problems’
- Central role of **critical reflection**
 - “the intentional consideration of experience in light of particular learning objectives” (Hatcher and Bringle, 1997:153)

CHESP at UKZN

- Background
- Psychology's involvement
- Psych 307 – design and elements

Student responses and learning

- Case studies ...

Grappling with psychological theory in a real world context:



- Learning, not just *about* psychology but also *from* psychology (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005)
- Integrating traditional / indigenous knowledge with Western psychological concepts
- Learning to negotiate involvement in partnerships
- Channelling students' desires to become agents of change in their own communities and contexts

Reflections ...

- Encouraging students to question status quo and become critically reflective in practice
- CBL enhances quality of learning (and teaching)
- Need for institutional support at both the level of principle & practically (i.t.o. resources, dealing with difficulties)

HE & promoting social justice

- Morton (1997) 'charity' vs justice: Charity "too readily becomes an excuse for maintaining laws and social arrangements which ought themselves to be changed in the interests of fair play" (p.8)
- Kahne and Westheimer (2000): "When the emphasis is on helping but **not on the factors that create the need** for help, we risk teaching students that need is inevitable, that alleviating momentary suffering but **not its origins** is the only expression of responsible citizenship" (p.52)



“If you’ve come to help me you’re wasting your time. But if you’ve come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together” (Watson, in Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005, p.27)

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