

# 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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