

“Community psychology is all theory and no practice”: Training educational psychologists in community practice within the South African context

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Community psychology is often viewed as the answer to many of the social and psychological problems that exist in South Africa. However, there appears to be a gap in terms of how it should be integrated in the training of psychologists. A qualitative research design was used in this study to explore how this gap can be bridged by describing the training of educational psychologists in community psychology at a university in Gauteng. Data were collected through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with qualified and trainee educational psychologists. The interviews were transcribed and analysed for recurrent themes. The findings were demarcated into three distinctive thematic categories. In the first category, the principle of exclusion emerged as a consistent theme. In the second category, there were two major findings, namely that there was very little exposure to community psychology during the training and that most of the participants were actually self-taught in community psychology. The final category explores several recommendations made by the participants to improve the training of educational psychologists.

Since the election of a democratic government in 1994, there have been major transformations in all sectors of South African society, including the discipline of psychology. In recent years, there have been extensive changes in the theory, method and practice of psychology. Change was inevitable because prior to 1994, psychology was dominated by norms and standards developed by whites. During the apartheid years, the practice of psychology within black communities was relatively unknown; the majority of registered psychologists in South Africa before 1994 were white and middle class (Seedat, 1990). Different cultural beliefs and practices, as well as the lack of affordability of psychological services further contributed to the unpopularity of psychology within black communities.

However, with radical changes in the demographics of the Professional Board for Psychology and the Psychological Association of South Africa, as well as the numerous policies and regulations generated by these structures, one expects the situation to change. It would be a fallacy to believe that institutional and structural changes are all that are needed to foster transformation. Parallel processes also need to be put in place to deal with transformation on the personal, interpersonal and cultural levels. This means that while there are changes in rules and regulations, there need to be changes in personal attitudes, values, beliefs, behaviour and interaction with others, and all of these need to be incorporated in the training of psychologists.

It has become evident over the years that the traditional individual approach to psychotherapy is not adequate to deal with psychological problems in the South African context. According to Pretorius-Heuchert and Ahmed (2001, pp. 23-24), this stems from the following:

There are too many people with psychological problems and a limited number of people who could help; financial and physical resources are inadequate to provide help; traditional mental health services provide inefficient, ineffective and inappropriate services; traditional mental services function on a waiting basis, rather than a seeking and preventing basis; societal factors, such as apartheid, poverty and oppression caused psychological problems

and stressors; there is a need for intervention in the larger system; prevention rather than remediation is becoming a priority and the struggle against apartheid and oppression demands psychologists to apply their knowledge and skills towards liberation.

All these factors clearly indicate that the practice of psychology needs to move beyond individual sessions in a consulting room to a broader focus on the community and society as a whole. Pretorius-Heuchert and Ahmed (2001, p. 28) note that community psychology appears to be the answer for South Africa since it “aims at mass intervention, trains and uses large numbers of people for interventions, and purports to prevent psychological problems before they arise”. I concur with these writers that community psychology is a good alternative to traditional individual psychotherapy. However, I believe that all psychologists should be trained in community psychology and that such training should cut across all disciplines within psychology. This means that perhaps community psychology should not be a discipline on its own at this point in the South African context.

Furthermore, I believe that if all psychologists engage in community interventions the chances of us eradicating the negative psychological effects of the previously disadvantaged would be more realistically achieved. However, the involvement of psychologists in community interventions gives rise to some of the following critical questions: Do they have the necessary training and skills to engage in community interventions? Did their training as psychologists prepare them to practice in communities? What training and skills do they need to make them confident in the practice of community psychology?

I decided to explore these questions as a result of my work at a particular South African university in Gauteng. At the time of conducting the research on which this article is based, I was coordinating a module on community psychology in the Master’s Degree in Educational Psychology programme at this University. In my short time at the university, I was surprised to find that the trainee psychologists in this programme had hardly done any significant work in community psychology, and that their coursework comprised several fragmented modules,

namely, counselling, assessments, careers, psychopathology, education learning support, research and family guidance. They were exposed to some theory on community psychology, but were lacking in research and practice in this sub-discipline. As a result, I decided to explore the kind of training offered at the institution at the time of this study, as well as that provided in the preceding seven years. The seven years were chosen to coincide with the election of a democratic government in South Africa, which warranted a change in the practice of psychology in the country. I wanted to conduct action research to explore the past training of educational psychologists at the university concerned and also to explore their recommendations to improve the coursework, if required.

Hence, the purpose of this study was twofold: firstly, it was to explore and describe how educational psychology students at the university experienced their training in community psychology; and secondly, it was to obtain their recommendations for making the training more relevant to their context. The study was guided by the following research questions: (a) How did their training as educational psychologists prepare students to practice community psychology? (b) What training and skills are needed for educational psychology students to be more confident about working in communities? (c) What recommendations could participants make for improving the training of educational psychologists in community practice?

COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY IN SOUTH AFRICA

As is evident in the work of different writers, there is no single definition of community psychology. Orford's (1992) definition, for example, focuses on understanding people within their social worlds, while Trickett's (1996) definition includes theory, research and intervention as important components in locating individuals within communities and socio-cultural contexts. Edwards (1998, p. 79) gives a very simple definition of community psychology by referring to it as the psychology "of, with and for the people". However, Pretorius-Heuchert and Ahmed (2001, p. 19) indicate that it is reasonable to say that all approaches in community psychology have a common purpose of "improving the human condition and promoting psychological well-being". They believe that this is achieved by applying knowledge, research, interventions and evaluations from the broader disciplines of psychology and the social sciences in community and organizational contexts (Pretorius-Heuchert & Ahmed, 2001, p.19).

Community psychology focuses on preventing, rather than treating dysfunction (Levine & Perkins, 1987). It adopts an ecosystemic framework, which places emphasis on the individual and the context (Donald, Lazarus & Lolwana, 1997). Some writers argue that sensitivity to minorities and under-represented groups is critical in understanding the community perspective (Heller, Price, Reinharz, Riger & Wandersman, 1977; Rickel, 1985). Furthermore, community psychology demands that research and evaluation be conducted with scientific rigour in order to benefit people; it must also add to a strong knowledge base (Rickel, 1985).

Measured against the current situation, the above characteristics may imply that there has to be a change in the training of psychologists in South Africa. According to several writers, their training has to prepare them to function within an ecosystemic paradigm, that is, to focus on prevention and mass intervention, whilst developing theory and research, especially within the context of oppressed and disadvantaged communities (Berger & Lazarus, 1987; Biesheuvel, 1991; Butchart, 1995; Nell, 1989; Seedat & Nell, 1992; Serrano-Garcia, 1994). For this to happen,

the role of psychologists has to change. Indeed, they need to take on different roles, such as that of advocate, consciousness-raiser, consultant and activist (Rappaport, 1996). They have to get closer to communities and community organisations in order to focus on prevention as well as to expand their interventions (Swartz, Dowdall & Swartz, 1986).

In a survey conducted by Lazarus (1985) on the role and responsibility of psychologists in the South African social context, it was found that most psychologists believed it necessary to engage in social issues, such as oppression, poverty, cross-cultural understanding, education, family life and abuse. However, they viewed their involvement in these issues as part of their social responsibility as citizens and not as psychologists. Many of them used the argument that psychologists need to be "value-neutral" if they intend to be effective in working with their clients. This finding is not surprising since most psychologists during the period of the study were whites who had benefited from the apartheid system. I concur with Gilbert (1985) that psychologists cannot afford to remain neutral if they are not to support oppression in their society. Dawes (1985) aptly argues that psychologists who are silent about social issues inadvertently support the *status quo* in a society that is destructive to people's mental health.

Lesch (1998) conducted a study with trainee psychologists to find out why they experienced a community psychology course as difficult and demanding. She found that the students were so focused on understanding and helping with individual problems that they could not think in terms of communities and ecological principles. Most of them believed that they were not the right people to engage in community psychology and some of them viewed psychology as synonymous with psychotherapy. Also, many experienced feelings of guilt and felt powerless because of their relatively privileged status, compared with the status of the intended recipients of community psychology. Some of them believed that psychology could not address social issues and many saw community psychology as social work in disguise.

Edwards (1998) moves beyond the training of psychologists in community psychology to its actual practice. He argues that traditional views, customs and practices must be considered in the healing of mental illness as part of an ongoing developmental cycle of community psychological interventions. Community relationships and reverence for ancestors have functioned for a long time as a means of preventing illness and promoting health. As such, community psychological services should include "networking, education and developing projects" (Edwards, 1998, p. 79). Community psychology should also attempt to redress the past psychological effects of apartheid in different communities and bridge the racial, gender and ethnic boundaries that exist in our society.

From the discussion above, it is clear that community psychology can be relevant to the South African context, especially if we wish to redress the psychological ravages of apartheid. Psychologists need to engage in social issues if they want to be more effective. Furthermore, social-cultural context is important in terms of community interventions. Implicit in all of the above is that psychologists need to be adequately trained and skilled to practice community psychology. However, there is a gap in the literature in terms of what this training should comprise. We still do not know how best to prepare psychologists in community psychology, particularly within the South African context. Qualitative research is used in this study in an attempt to bridge this gap by exploring and describing the past training of educational psychologists at the university under

study, with the aim of using their recommendations to improve the training of future graduates in educational psychology.

METHOD

Design

A qualitative research design that is contextual, exploratory and descriptive in nature was used in the study. The essential point of qualitative research is that the researcher attempts to learn about the experiences of research participants and tries to describe such experiences as they are lived by the participants rather than working with pre-conceived ideas about such experiences (Coe, 1991; Denzin, 1978; Guba, 1981; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983; Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Zaharlick, 1992).

This study was contextual in that it focused on a specific social and educational context, that is, the training of educational psychologists at a particular university (Mouton & Marais, 1991). Exploration was used in this study to gain insight into the actual training that educational psychologists were exposed to during the period relevant to it. The researcher attempted to provide an accurate description of the experiences of the participants during the course of their training by using the actual data that they provided.

Data collection

Data was collected through in-depth interviews and two focus group discussions. Interviews were conducted individually with five educational psychologists who were purposively selected according to the following criteria: they should have trained as educational psychologists at the university during the previous seven years; they should have been in practice for more than a year; and collectively, they had to constitute a diverse group in terms of race and gender. Diversity was included as a criterion to explore as broad a range of experiences as possible.

I believed that if the participants had been in practice for more than a year they would have had a reasonable amount of time to determine whether they possessed the necessary skills to work in their communities. The participants included an African, Indian and coloured female and a white and coloured male. I hoped that this diversity would bring a variety of experiences from different perspectives. There was great difficulty in obtaining male participants since a greater number of females than males had been selected to train as educational psychologists at the university in the previous seven years. The following questions were asked during the interviews: (a) How did you, as a trainee educational psychologist, experience your training in community psychology? (b) What training and skills would make you feel more confident about working in communities? (c) What recommendations would you offer to make the training more relevant to community psychology within the South African context?

The focus group discussions were conducted separately with 10 second-year students registered for the educational psychology master's programme and 11 first-year students from the same programme. These groups were selected for the study since they were currently in the training programme and were in the position to make recommendations about how to make the training more relevant to the South African context, especially after being exposed to a module on community psychology. The second-year group comprised five white, two black and two Indian females, as well as one black male. The first-year group comprised eight white and two black females, as well as one black male. Both groups were asked the following question: "What recommendations could you make to improve your

current training as an educational psychologist in community psychology, especially within the South African context?"

The interviews and the focus group discussions were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. The length of the interviews ranged between forty and fifty minutes, while the focus groups were about an hour long each.

Data analysis

The methods of reduction, display, conclusion and verification - as described by Miles and Huberman (1996) - were used in the analysis of the data. Furthermore, the levels of data analysis as outlined by Merriam (1998) were used. The researcher read each interview transcript and in the margins jotted down notes, comments, observations, and queries important to the study. Each transcript was then analysed to construct categories and themes that indicated some recurrence in the pattern of data. The categories were systematically devised with the study's purpose in mind. Categories and sub-categories were constructed through the constant comparative method of data analysis. This involved the continuous comparison of participants' responses. Units of data, that is, bits of information that had something in common were grouped together according to the patterns and regularities that were identified. These patterns and regularities eventually became the categories or themes into which data were sorted.

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) model was used to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. They identify four strategies for ensuring trustworthiness, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility establishes how confident the researcher is with the truth of the findings. Data were collected using different methods, namely, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions from different sources. The sources of data and the diversity of methods used to collect the data were used to ensure credibility (Sherman & Webb, 1988; Smith, 1987). Transferability was ensured through a purposively selected sample to allow other researchers to make comparisons (Krefting, 1990). This was further achieved through a dense description of methodology, literature control, and the use of verbatim quotes from the data collected. Dependability, that is, the consistency of the findings (Krefting, 1990), was achieved through peer examination of the data. Two educational psychologists were asked to conduct an independent analysis of the data collected. The research protocol and the audit process that was followed by the researcher were discussed with them. The researcher and the two independent coders then met to reach consensus on the findings. Confirmability was obtained through the use of saturation during the data analysis. Themes were identified by their repetitive nature so that the researcher's biases could not interfere with the findings.

Ethical considerations

Strict ethical measures were adhered to during the research. These included obtaining the informed consent of the participants and ensuring confidentiality and anonymity (Denosa, 1998). Great care was taken to ensure that no participants were identifiable in the reporting of the results.

RESULTS

The results were clearly demarcated into three categories, namely, a critique of traditional training offered, skills development in community psychology, and recommendations for a future training programme for educational psychologists which integrates community psychology.

A critique of traditional training offered

All the participants criticised the traditional training offered at the university in question. The principle of exclusion emerged as a repetitive theme, especially with regard to language, race, the full-time nature of the course, and its theoretical emphasis.

According to some of the participants, language was used as a means of exclusion, that is, to prevent some students from enrolling for training in educational psychology at the university. This is clearly depicted in the words of one African student: "Only those people who could speak Afrikaans were able to enroll for the Master's Degree in Educational Psychology" (Interview 1). The course was only offered through the medium of Afrikaans, which meant that those people who were not able to speak and write the language would not be able to register for the course. This exclusion on the basis of language is supported in the following statements by two other participants: "I couldn't do the course because it was in Afrikaans" (Interview 2). "How can I do the course in Afrikaans when English is my language?" (Interview 5).

According to all the black participants who were interviewed, the training was also characterised by racism, which often made them feel excluded from the group. One of the participants stated the following: "We were not accepted in the course because we are black" (Interview 1). This is further confirmed by two other participants: "It was not easy to be the only black person in the group. Sometimes the racism was there and this is not a good thing" (Interview 2). "It is difficult to be part of a group if you are seen as inferior because you are black" (Interview 1).

The training was initially only offered on a full-time basis. It would appear that many of the black students saw this as a means of exclusion since they had no funds to do the course full time and they needed a full-time job to earn a living. This is succinctly captured in the words of one participant who stated: "As a black person it is a struggle to study full time. I need a full-time job to feed my family even before I can think of studying. Only white people could afford to go full time to study" (Interview 2). This view is reinforced by another participant who said: "We blacks could not afford to go and study full time" (Interview 3).

All the participants indicated that the course was too theoretical and excluded adequate practical exposure. This is explicitly stated in the words of one of the participants: "It was all theory and no practice" (Interview 4). Furthermore, some participants stated that they would have felt more equipped in their work context if they had more practical sessions during their training. This is illustrated in the following quotation: "I would say that if they had given me more practical training, I think perhaps I would have been a little bit more equipped in my work situation" (Interview 1). Even though the training lacked an adequate practical component, it would appear that there was good grounding in theory which students had to apply on their own:

There was a good generic grounding of theory. There wasn't a specific focus that provided a basis for an intervention, say for instance that could be sustained over the medium to long term. It was more a sense of here is the theory; you can apply it in different contexts (Interview 5).

The above findings clearly indicate that participants felt that important components were excluded from their training as

educational psychologists. It would also appear that a subtle form of discrimination was practiced, since the course was still offered on a full-time basis and through the medium of Afrikaans. Koopman and Robb (1997, p. 18) refer to this type of discrimination as a form of modern racism, that is, a subtle or disguised form of racism. In this context, black students are indirectly denied access to the training since they are more likely than other students to experience difficulty with Afrikaans and course fees. While the university may claim that it is open to all students it may be undermining the progress of some.

The above findings also support the argument of several writers mentioned earlier (Dawes, 1985; Gilbert, 1985; Lazarus, 1985), namely, that the practice of psychology in South Africa was reserved for an elite group of whites. Other writers (Heller *et al.*, 1977; Rickel, 1985) indicate that sensitivity to minorities and under-represented groups is essential in the understanding of community psychology. Whilst this is true, one needs to note that in the South African context we had a unique situation where a minority group dominated the majority of the people. This may imply that community psychology in South Africa should then be sensitive to the needs of the majority. This links up with Rappaport's (1996) suggestion that community psychology should serve the needs of the disadvantaged and oppressed since this was the experience of the majority.

Exclusion was also evident in the theoretical emphasis of the training – to the exclusion of adequate practical exposure. The students received substantial grounding in theory but still felt ill-equipped to work directly with clients. In addition to this, the training modules seemed to be fragmented and lacking an integrated, holistic and cohesive perspective. All the participants in the study seemed to want the modules in the educational psychology programme to include some form of community intervention. These interventions should be integrated throughout the coursework; for example, the assessment and therapy modules should involve a variety of assessment tools and therapeutic interventions in diverse communities. This would be in keeping with the position put forward by Pretorius-Heuchert and Ahmed (2001, p. 21), namely, that community psychology should not be restricted to a particular module, but should be integrated throughout the course and even across all sub-disciplines within psychology.

Skills development in community interventions

Nearly all the participants indicated that they had received very little training in community psychology during their coursework and would like to develop skills in community interventions. This is evident in the words of a participant who said: "I don't think the focus was on community work and community psychology as such" (Interview 2). However, the following statement aptly sums up the point that the training in community psychology was virtually non-existent: "As far as communities and interventions with communities, there wasn't much specific preparations for working with communities" (Interview 5).

Most of the participants experienced a need for working within communities and, as such, they took the responsibility of teaching themselves, mainly through direct on-the-job training and/or through their collaboration with colleagues. This is reflected in the following statements: "I think because of my experience of being a remedial specialist and working with the people within the community, it made it much easier for me" (Interview 1). "I learnt through sort of trial and error. I think I have learnt from my colleagues that I worked with... especially at the school clinic" (Interview 2).

Recommendations for future training

Several recommendations were made by the participants on how to make the training of educational psychologists at the university more inclusive of community psychology, especially within the South African context. These recommendations were integrated into the following sub-themes: the need for practical, rather than only theoretical training; the need for cross-cultural training; the need for a collective, rather than an individualistic practice of psychology; the need for action research; the need for an ecosystemic training perspective; the need to focus on prevention, rather than cure; and the need for generic, rather than specialist training for psychologists. I shall now explore each of these.

The need for practical rather than only theoretical training

The need for practical rather than only theoretical training has already been emphasised above. However, it is mentioned again in the category of recommendations because here the participants highlighted specific examples of how the training could be made more practical. Many of them stated that the training should be more practically orientated, through projects and fieldwork. One participant said: "What I also felt was that there should be some kind of community projects included in the training, so that you can actually go in and feel how it is to work in the community" (Interview 2).

Some participants felt that they should be exposed at a practical level to communities during their training. This would give them the opportunity of reaching out to educators and learners, while simultaneously gaining experience in testing what they learn. This is evident in the following quotation: "You must be able to go out to work in the community. It must be part of the course. There must be projects to reach learners and educators" (Interview 4). The statement made by another participant, "It is also a de-linking of that theory to very practical situations and testing that theory in practical situations" (Interview 5), further supports this point. Some participants in the focus group discussions also indicated that the coursework should be more practical, rather than merely theoretical. This is highlighted in the following statement: "We must have more time in test practice rather than just reading about the tests" (Focus group 2).

The need for cross-cultural training

The need for cross-cultural training emerged as a consistent theme with all of the participants. Most of them indicated that the training should expose and equip them to work in different communities. The students should not be limited to working with their own communities, but should acquire the knowledge and skills to work in different contexts with different people. This is aptly captured in the following quotation: "I would say that white psychologists need to know more about what is out there like, for example, the schools [in] Soweto instead of reading it from textbooks or listening to it" (Interview 1). Another participant repeated this view when she stated: "Maybe people need to be educated that even if you are of a different race group, you can still go to a psychologist of a different race group, it shouldn't matter" (Interview 1). Two other participants further emphasised the need for psychologists to have more practical experiences in different communities. The first one did so by stating: "Take the students into a township, go through the township, organise a visit to a community clinic" (Interview 3). The second one confirmed this when he said: "Educational psychologists must be able to work in communities, and different communities as well" (Interview 4).

The need to work in different communities links up with another critical point that was strongly emphasised by most of the

participants, namely, that the training has to include an African perspective in terms of its framework. Psychotherapy must, for example, take into consideration a directive approach that includes the role of traditional healers if it is to have any success or relevance for many black people. This is explicitly stated in the following statement:

Training might work in a western environment where people have expectations, or an individualistic environment, a lot of these ideas were not going to work within the African context where people are more used to a much more directive approach, you know, working with the traditional healer (Interview 3).

Another participant supported the above statement by saying: "We need to look at traditional forms of healing in South Africa and the fact that it does sometimes work" (Interview 3). This is further confirmed by another participant who said: "In some cases traditional healers are more effective at curing people or healing people with schizophrenia within the African context" (Interview 3).

The above statements indicate that psychologists should receive cross-cultural training. This corroborates the argument of writers such as Edwards (1998), namely, that the training of psychologists should take socio-cultural contexts into consideration. However, this study goes further by stating that they should not only read books; their training must prepare them to intervene in a variety of communities and cultures. They must, for example, be able to understand the role of sangomas in the African culture, and possibly go even further by incorporating these indigenous healers into the therapeutic or intervention process. Their training should enable them to understand, respect and appreciate other cultures.

The need to practice collective rather than individual psychology

Most of the participants indicated that the training of educational psychologists should focus more on working with groups than with individuals. Their own training did not adequately prepare them to work with groups since it was more individually focused. If this continued, then there was a concern that psychological services may not be accessible to the majority of people who may need them the most. The following quotation adequately illustrates this point:

If a person look now today at the new South Africa, you can see how small your focus was and that you won't reach a lot of people with that kind of approach. So I would definitely have another kind of approach, where I would design it in a way where I could deal with a lot of people at one time and not only individuals because we spend hours with one individual and the question is how much more could we have done for a group of people (Interview 2).

The data collected in the focus group discussions did not directly indicate that the participants felt the need to work more with groups than with individuals.

This study concurs with the view of several writers (including Edwards, 1998; Pretorius-Heuchert & Ahmed, 2001), that there should be a paradigm shift that includes the individual and a collective practice of psychology within the South African context. Most participants indicated that training should focus mainly on interventions with groups rather than only with individual clients. However, it is essential to note that the

participants in the focus group interviews did not explicitly state that there should be a shift from an individual to a collective approach in training. This could be due to the fact that many of them are relatively young and inexperienced in community interventions, unlike the participants in the individual interviews who are experienced psychologists.

The need for action research

Three of the interviewees highlighted the need for research to be included in the training of educational psychologists. Specifically, research should be directed at action and interventions in terms of meeting the needs of communities. This is reflected in statements such as: "Research must be interventions. We must look at what is working" (Interview 3). "We must look at what the situation is within particular schools, research their specific needs, it is not a one size fits all" (Interview 5).

Participants in the focus group interviews supported the view that research should be included in the coursework as a necessary part of interventions. This is reflected in two of their statements: "We need to observe real situations" (Focus group 1). "Action research is what we need in the course, we should be trained to look at things that work and evaluate and implement ideas when we need to" (Focus group 2).

Some of the above comments link up with Dick's (2002) description of action research. He describes it as a family of research methodologies that explore action and research at the same time. It involves a cyclical or spiral process that alternates between action and reflection. McNiff (2002) further elaborates on the cycle of action research by describing the processes that should be involved, namely, identifying an area of practice to be investigated; thinking of a solution; implementing the solution; evaluating the solution and, finally, changing practice in the light of the evaluation.

It would appear from some of the above statements of participants that they believe that their training should enable them to conduct action research so that they could make meaningful interventions in their schools and communities. They should be trained in conducting needs analyses and designing research interventions in particular contexts. Such training should adopt a "scientist-practitioner" model that would train educational psychologists not only to become practitioners but researchers in their field.

The need for an ecosystemic training perspective

Almost all of the participants felt that the training of educational psychologists should be from an ecosystemic paradigm. Psychologists must be able to look at people in their own context and they must be able to integrate what they get from their clients into the process of therapeutic healing. These points were made explicit by one of the participants who said: "We need to look at the ecosystemic approach; you know the fact that you are looking at people in context" (Interview 2).

Further support for an ecosystemic training paradigm is noted in the words of another participant: "A whole ecosystemic kind of approach to looking at communities, what they are made of, what are the issues, how they differ with regard to institutions and bodies, stakeholder groups, if you like, are essential to work within communities" (Interview 4). The participants in the focus group discussions also supported the need for an ecosystemic framework during the training. This is evident in responses such as the following: "Training should be from an ecosystemic perspective" (Focus group interview 1). "We must look at

systems and ecosystemic functioning of clients" (Focus group interview 2).

The need to deal with social issues

Most participants identified the following social issues as being common within communities: lack of parental guidance, conflict with teenagers, teenage pregnancy, community and school violence, poverty, discrimination, prejudice, and systemic forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism and ableism. Some of them indicated that the training of educational psychologists should focus on dealing with these social issues. Furthermore, educational psychologists should acquire skills to empower and mobilise people in the community to deal with social issues. As one interviewee stated, "Staff in Soweto clinics could be trained to set up projects to deal with specific social issues like HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancies and parental guidance" (Interview 2). The involvement of the trainee psychologists should at least assist those people who could not afford services to deal with the social issues identified. This is reflected in the words of one of the participants:

I would have appreciated more people coming here on a [regular] basis, like even if they didn't have funds to pay for this. There should be some kind of set-up where we could say this client can't pay, and they are coming in from say Zola clinic, then I would say that would have been some kind of positive contribution back to the community (Interview 1).

All of the participants in this research corroborated the findings of Lazarus (1985) that psychologists should be involved in social issues. However, unlike the participants in Lazarus' study, the ones in this study strongly indicated that psychologists should engage in social issues as part of their responsibility as psychologists and not only as individual citizens. This implies that they cannot be value-neutral when it comes to the practice of community psychology, a point that concurs with the view of the writers mentioned earlier (e.g. Dawes, 1985; Gilbert, 1985).

The need to work with stakeholders

Most of the interviewees indicated that within an ecosystemic perspective of training there should be interventions with a variety of stakeholders. Within the context of the school, the main stakeholders identified were learners, parents and educators: "We must involve our educators, parents and learners as part of a community" (Interview 3). Some participants indicated that stakeholder involvement should include inter-departmental and inter-sectoral collaboration and networks. This is captured in the words of one of the participants: "So you need to have a component that looks at interventions at all levels, made up not only of schools but departments as part of an inter-departmental and inter-sectoral kind of collaboration" (Interview 5).

Some of the participants in the focus group interviews also supported the view that a variety of stakeholders should be consulted during the process of training as an educational psychologist. This is implicit in the following quotation: "Training must be done in collaboration and teamwork" (Focus group 1). The inclusion of business partners and other significant people in the community, such as traditional healers, was also suggested.

It is significant to note that the participants in the focus groups did not refer to as broad a range of stakeholders as those in the in-depth interviews. Here again, this could be due to the fact that the latter had more experience since they were qualified

psychologists and had been in practice for more than a year.

The need to focus on a preventative rather than a curative perspective

Many of the participants explicitly stated that the training of educational psychologists should focus on preventative rather than curative interventions. The statements of two of them reflect this point: "The university must link up with the education departments and focus on preventative work, especially in our schools" (Interview 1). "If we don't go into that kind of preventative approach, clearly I think we'll be missing out on what we want to do" (Interview 5).

It was felt that prevention would be essential if more people were to be reached, especially the previously disadvantaged communities. Clinics in the townships should concentrate on preventative programmes. The following statements serve as evidence of this emphasis on prevention: "Prevention would be the route to follow if we want to get to more people, especially the disadvantaged" (Interview 2). "Set up clinics in Soweto and other advantaged areas like Sandton to focus on prevention programmes" (Interview 3).

Participants in the focus group interviews also supported the idea of focusing on prevention during the training of educational psychologists. This is implied in the following statements: "Therapeutic skills must focus on prevention and interventions" (Focus group 1). "Programme development must help to develop interventions, for example, on how to help teachers develop programmes they can use" (Focus group 2).

The participants' apparent preference for a preventative rather than a curative training perspective lends support to the argument presented by some of the writers mentioned earlier (e.g. Levine & Perkins, 1987). This study also points to the fact that educational psychologists are in a strategic position of interacting directly with schools, communities and the education system as a whole. Hence it would be logical for them to be trained in preventative work if they wish to eradicate some of the social evils in our society.

The need to focus on generic training of psychologists

Most of the participants in the individual interviews indicated that the training of psychologists should be generic. All psychologists, irrespective of their disciplines, should acquire generic skills to work with communities. This is illustrated in the statement made by one of the participants: "There should be a link with other psychologists. As an educational psychologist I should feel competent enough to deal with aspects from other psychology disciplines" (Interview 2). Another interviewee felt that there should be a move away from specialist training: "I think it is important for us to [avoid] going into a specialist role, but there is a set of specific skills and competencies that is required for us to provide generic support" (Interview 5).

Thus, the findings in this study generally support a training of educational psychologists that is generic in nature. Educational psychologists should be able to deal with a variety of problems and also be able to implement a diverse range of interventions if they want to be of value to their clients. This emphasis on generic training was made by the participants in the individual interviews, largely as a result of working in communities and the diverse needs they identified on a continuous basis. Participants in the focus group did not mention the need for generic training, but one would expect this need to change as they get more involved with communities.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study provide certain guidelines for making the training of educational psychologists at the university in question (and maybe psychologists from different disciplines at other universities) more relevant to the South African context. Above all, it suggests that the training must be open to more black students if we really intend to make a significant difference in our country. The resultant diversity of trainees is likely to bring a richness of experience into the training programmes that should add value to these programmes. Also, I think it is essential that universities establish support programmes for black students so that they are provided with the support necessary for success.

The need for training in community psychology is abundantly clear. Such training should be integrated in all the modules in a cohesive and holistic manner and must be more practically orientated. The trainees must not just be exposed to theories; they must gain experience in working directly with communities through fieldwork, projects and case studies. Perhaps the notion of training has to be reconstructed in such a way that it involves practical work, theory and research so that the opportunity for developing new theories may emanate from this experience.

Trainees must also be exposed to diverse communities, and this means that they should receive cross-cultural training. Such training should provide an opportunity for the students to learn more about traditional healing and how different cultures deal with healing. At the same time, it should also provide previously disadvantaged students the opportunity to engage in communities that were previously advantaged. The training should prepare them to work with groups and not only individuals. If we intend to be successful in addressing the psychological needs of the majority in the South African context, we need to focus on mass interventions and move away from only seeing individual clients in a consulting room.

It is important that research should be integrated with the training. If we are working with communities then research should ideally be action-orientated, that is, it should identify particular needs of communities with the aim of implementing strategic interventions to empower them. The training should adopt an ecosystemic paradigm, enabling students to view individuals within their respective contexts. This would provide a holistic perspective of the difficulties faced by clients. This demands that the trainees should be exposed to a variety of stakeholders during their training as part of a collaborative process if they want to make meaningful interventions. This ecosystemic perspective is likely to enable students to work with a variety of social issues, such as teenage pregnancy, parental guidance, abuse, suicide, poverty, oppression, and all forms of discrimination.

The focus of training should be preventative rather than curative. The students should be trained in preventing the occurrence of psychological stressors, rather than only focusing on those that already exist. In this way, they would be of greater benefit to more people. Finally, the training should be of a generic nature, enabling the students to work effectively with a diverse range of community needs. All of these suggestions imply a radical shift in the training of educational psychologists, challenging the foundations and processes of training in the profession. It is worth noting that some South African universities have already made this shift and they should provide support for institutions that still need to transform.

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