

"UFUNDA DE UFE"
THE STORY OF A VILLAGE PSYCHOLOGIST
IN A RURAL, SOUTH AFRICAN SCHOOL SETTING

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ABSTRACT

In 2001, participatory research, incorporating various participatory rural appraisal techniques, was conducted in five, rural, primary schools in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. The participatory research was aimed at identifying and addressing schools' needs in terms of life-skills education in a changing South Africa and educational environment. This whole process has been written up as a case study and further analysed in an attempt to describe the emerging role of the psychologist, working in participation with educators, in this kind of setting. Going beyond description, the researcher reflects upon the function and nature of the role of the psychologist within the developmental participatory process. In doing so, the article addresses the need for participatory research results to be further analysed in generating theory, particularly within Psychology. The article highlights some of the strengths of qualitative research, and the primacy of the personal in that endeavour.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2000, a colleague and I worked in four rural schools in the broader Stutterheim region as part of our psychology masters practical training. That experience set the tone for my current work as a psychologist in schools in the same area. This article describes the process of participatory research I engaged in at five rural primary schools with Grades 4 to 7 educators in addressing Life Orientation education. The analysis and discussion are presented as a case study.

The article first looks at the context of the study. This includes a brief situational analysis of the area, a description of the Stutterheim Education Trust (my employer), a brief look at community psychology, as well as a discussion of educational policy changes in South Africa with particular reference to Life Orientation education. A rationale for the research methodology used, and relating it to my epistemological position, will be followed by the case study; a historical account of the participation process at the schools. Key elements to this process are identified and then further discussed, in analysing the function and nature of the role of the psychologist in a rural school setting.

2. CONTEXT

2.1. Stutterheim and the Stutterheim Education Trust

Stutterheim is a small, rurally based town in the Eastern Cape of South Africa; a region of approximately 6 million people, of which some 80% are rural (Nussbaum, 1997). The Stutterheim

education projects were initially part of a broader Stutterheim Development Foundation program (SDF). Since 1989 the SDF and Local Council have promoted development and community self-reliance throughout the broader Stutterheim region. In 1996 the Stutterheim Education Trust (SET) was registered as a separate trust. It runs various programs at and for schools in rural Stutterheim; one being the Psychological Assistance Services Program (1999 - 2000). This program runs in tandem with the Rhodes University (East London campus) Psychology Department (also referred to as Rhodes). From 1998 – 2000, Rhodes students or interns visited Stutterheim rural schools on a weekly basis. Intervention strategies varied from year to year and student to student trying to establish what would be useful and sustainable given the various constraints: limited available time, long distances to travel, few material resources at the schools, language difficulties between educators and students/interns, etc. 2001 was the first year the SET employed an intern – myself – full-time to live and work in Stutterheim.

2.2. Schools as a Focus Point for Community Psychology Interventions

The Eastern Cape Provincial Transformation Plan For Mental Health Services (1999), emphasises the need for all individuals living in the Eastern Cape Province to have access to mental health services. Psychology has failed to address the broad mental health needs of large sectors of South African society, particularly in the Eastern Cape where the majority of people live in isolated, rural areas (Gilbert, 1998). Addressing this, shifts in the focus of the discipline, mirrored by shifts in health care world wide, are taking place. Firstly, mental health is now understood to be more than just the absence of disease: It is the presence of wellbeing. Secondly, mental wellbeing is tied to social and economic development, and one's understanding of the psyche should relate to one's understanding of society (Vogelman in Gilbert, 1998). Psychology needs to promote wellbeing

and provide curative services, and be accessible to families, communities, and individuals.

Community psychology recognises the mutual adaptation and interdependence of individuals and social structures and addresses both individual and collective needs (Holtzman, Evans, Kennedy, & Iscoe, 1987). It attempts to integrate health, human resources, education, social interventions, citizen empowerment and cultural values into one strategy, focusing on particular communities. More and more, the school is the locus of delivery for community psychology (Holtzman, 1997), as education can be integrated with a wide array of health and human services, both treatment and prevention. Holtzman describes this as the larger vision for the school; a place not only for academic learning, but also the primary institution for promoting child and family development. This, he maintains, has profound implications for community renewal, family support, and the nature of delivery systems for mental health, health, education, and other human services. As such he cites Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) as a key intervention in community psychology to promote human development at a grassroots, local level.

In South Africa community psychology has mainly focused on urban or peri-urban centres.

2.3. Changes in Education Policy in South Africa

As part of South Africa's Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP), Education has received much attention. The *Lifelong Learning through a National Curriculum Framework* document (informed by the 1995 White Paper on Education and Training) emphasises the need for major changes in education and training in South Africa (1996). The *Curriculum Framework for General and Further Education and Training*, written by a task group set up by South Africa's

Department of Education (also referred to as the Department), refers to South Africa's educational vision. This document is, in form and content, similar to many other contemporary framework documents in countries as diverse as Namibia and England, that have replanned their education systems within an outcomes-based paradigm (Gultig, 1998).

Outcomes-based curriculum development processes have as their starting point the intended results of learning in terms of knowledge, skills, and values rather than the prescription of content to be learnt. If correctly applied, the focus on outcomes encourages the development of flexible, relevant programs of learning (Gultig, 1998).

The General Education and Training Band is subdivided into three conceptual school phases, corresponding roughly to the developmental phases children move through as they mature. Whilst the curriculum in the first (Foundation) phase is largely integrated, the Intermediate and Senior phases see progressively less contextualised, more abstract and area-specific content. A new learning area that forms part of the curriculum for these phases, is Life Orientation (LO).

2.4. Life Orientation: A New Learning Area

Life Orientation includes health education, career guidance, lifelong learning skills (life-skills), inter- and intrapersonal development, religious studies and physical education (Gultig, 1996). Much of this was the previous guidance teacher's domain; a teacher who majored in psychology at university and specifically trained in guidance and counselling. In reality, many schools within the former educational framework did not employ guidance teachers. They were often considered an ill-affordable luxury. Not surprisingly, none of the 42 rural Stutterheim schools employed a

qualified guidance teacher. Hence, educators are faced with, not only shifting from traditional to transformational teaching paradigms, but also with teaching a subject or learning area previously the domain of someone qualified in psychology and counselling.

In addition, the demand for life-skills in this area is heavy. The majority of people are what Korten refers to as marginals (1991). Many fall within the approximately 1 billion people on the planet who live in absolute poverty. This, as well as the fact that the Eastern Cape has the second highest HIV/AIDS incidence (next to KwaZulu/Natal) in South Africa, makes "empowering learners to live meaningful lives in a society that demands rapid transformation" (Department of Education, 1997, p. LO-2) critical.

This study describes the process of facilitating the development of a LO program for rural learners in the Stutterheim region. The process unfolds through participating with educators as a means of intervention and increasing knowledge, linking action and research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1982). The research question was "What is the psychologist's role in a rural school setting in relation to Life Orientation education?"

3. EPISTEMOLOGICAL POSITION

The case study describes the participatory process of engagement with educators in rural schools. Participation is now widely advocated as a philosophy and mode in development that contrasts with extractive data-collecting, traditional methods of inquiry. Behind this shift lies a belief that a reversal of power in research, passing much of the initiative and control of collecting, analysing and interpreting data back to local people, is needed (Chambers, 1994a).

Adopting a participatory approach to research stems from a person-centred orientation to development work. Person-centred development holds all people as potentially recognised and respected contributors to their family, community and society. It acknowledges that the practices, skills and knowledge of people within a targeted community are as useful and meaningful as those of the developer or psychologist (Korten, 1991). Korten speaks against consumption-driven, modernist development and argues for capacity building, skills development and protecting and conserving the natural environment, our most important and finite resource. Person-centred development strives for a healthy global economy in a democratic global community, and identifies participation as a key to working in the spirit of consensus, as opposed to coercion or bargaining. "Putting the last first", as Chambers might say (1993).

This epistemological position informs the formulation of the research question, the choice of methodology, and the way conclusions derived from the data are represented. Epistemologies are theories of knowledge which answer questions about who can be a knower, what kinds of things can be known, what legitimates knowledge and who can use knowledge (Harding, 1987). Jackson and Van Vlaenderen (1994), in their feminist critique on participatory research, see the function of the dominant, also called traditional, orthodox, mainstream or "male stream" paradigm of scientific knowledge as maintaining social order, cohesion and consensus. Whereas male stream methodology requires a distancing of the researcher from the research object (giving the researcher elevated status as scientist, allowing complete control over the research process, Ellis, 1983), Harding argues that the researcher's beliefs and behaviour are part of the empirical evidence for, or against, the claims advanced in the results of the research. This evidence too must be open to critical scrutiny no less than what is traditionally defined as relevant evidence. Introducing this subjective element into the analysis actually increases the objectivity of the research and decreases

the objectivism that hides this evidence from the public.

Revealing the meta-theoretical position informing decisions made throughout the research process is especially necessary since the very area of enquiry – the role of the psychologist in a rural South African setting – is relatively poorly researched with little theory to guide the novice researcher. Choosing a methodology, the theory of how research does and should proceed in this setting, is not a straightforward, scientific deduction.

4. METHOD

In doing participatory research with educators in addressing Life Orientation education, two distinct processes operated simultaneously. Firstly, participatory research took place in highlighting and addressing needs of educators and learners. Secondly, that process provided data for my own inquiry into the role of the psychologist in this setting.

Taking this kind of meta-perspective on the participatory process is relatively novel and, I would argue, much needed in making broader sense of the process and its implications for other psychologists working in similar settings. Participatory research has been criticised for contributing very little to theory formation (Jackson & Van Vlaenderen, 1994). Latapi (1988) explains this lack of theory building in the following way:

The process of scientific knowledge requires synthesis, systemisation and accumulation.

It is difficult, to say the least, that participatory research, carried out by a local group (facilitated by a researcher) on isolated concrete topics may reach the level of integration and synthesis required. In other words, participatory research may be suitable for reaching

conclusions on local situations, but such *conclusions require a further treatment* in order to obtain broader validity and to develop into theory. [Author's emphasis]

In attempting to provide such further treatment, data will be presented in the form of a case study. In discussing the case study of small groups, Harper (1992) mentions the "post-modern tale of culture, in which description is taken as problematic, and in which theory, rather than an edifice from which hypotheses may be mechanically derived, assumes a more tentative, inductive character" (p. 141). In grappling with the question of what constitutes a case study in community research with small groups of participants, Harper cautions the researcher that "understanding human action requires a more complex set of tools than those employed in natural science, and that the goals of social science should move beyond the search for 'recurrent sequences' of social life to include an understanding of the point of view of the subjects of study" (p. 139).

What then, is this more complex set of tools? Gilbert, Van Vlaenderen and Nkwintini (1995), and Van Vlaenderen and Gilbert (1995) have used the case study method to take a step back from the participatory research processes in which they acted as facilitators, by critically reflecting on and analysing various themes that emerged from this process. In a similar fashion, a description of the case, the process that unfolded, constitutes the data for the purpose of this article, and actual content data that emerged from various PRA's is only mentioned where it highlights this process. The traditional case study principle of thick description (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993) guides the crafting of the original report and interpretive claims are grounded in verbatim accounts from the data. [Please refer to Appendix A for details of data gathering and processing]

The study attempts to answer Vygotsky and Goethe's respective advocacies for a more responsive,

gentle approach in researching living beings (in Shotter, 2000). Goethe sought...

...a delicate empiricism which makes itself utterly identical with the object, thereby becoming true theory. ... The ultimate goal would be to grasp that everything in the realm of fact is already theory. Let us not seek for something beyond the phenomena – they themselves are the theory. (Goethe, quoted in Brady, 1998, p. 98)

Shotter (2000) classifies this kind of understanding of phenomena as relationally-responsive as opposed to referential-representational. In this way, a state of affairs is accurately "pictured" without coming with "strings attached" as to what, conceptually, must precede or follow it. This kind of understanding of phenomena is much closer in form to our everyday, spontaneous, common-sense understandings of the world around us. Shotter speaks of a kind of research where the task is not to seek to be the master and controller of one's surroundings, by imposing on them prior plans of one's own. The task is simply to seek to be a sure and confident participant in them, to feel "at home" with them to such an extent that, at every moment, we know how to act in ways responsive to the "calls" they exert upon us or the "invitations" they offer us. To be able to do this, Shotter argues, one must understand one's surroundings not just statically, as if constituted only of fixed and completed objects, but dynamically, as being in a developmental form of motion.

5. THE CASE STUDY

5.1. A Problem Emerges

As mentioned, the SET and Rhodes have had a relationship since 1998. However, identifying appropriate intervention strategies in the rural schools has been difficult. In wanting educators to

speak for themselves, "handing over the stick" (Chambers, 1994b), my colleague and I adopted a not-knowing stance upon our initial entry (Anderson & Goolishian, 1990). This concept originally described the therapist's orientation to a client's language in appreciating that meanings are locally determined, not universal (Griffith & Griffith, 1992). Here it referred to a broader, person-centred orientation that wanted to acknowledge the skills and ideas of the local people. It also, we thought, made transparent our uncertainty around the level at which to aim our intervention.

Educators, in their own words, wanted assistance with: 1) remedying learning problems, and 2) getting money from the state. They wanted us to train them in the first instance, and lobby on their behalf, in the second. Thus we were sensitised to what Van Vlaenderen and Gilbert (1993) identify as the need for a development orientation. In their study, too, schools saw development and change as primarily the government's responsibility. Hence we faced a dilemma between wanting to hear from the people, but not being able to address directly the educational and economic problems they brought us. Making some sense of this dilemma, researching the psychologist's role and at the same time providing a useful service, became the impetus for this study.

5.2. Enter the Psychologist – Yes, But Where?

Our superficial understanding and naïve adoption of the not-knowing stance created problems at the outset. As highly educated, white people with no immediate solutions or plans, we were met with suspicion. We experienced enormous pressure to, in the words of one angry educator, "do something!" This made it clear that research in this context: 1) should have a definite focus, and 2) include action or intervention. In trying to focus the area of research, I spoke to many people who had worked in this setting before. Working with learners, or even learners and educators

together, had proven ineffective. Institutional development is receiving more attention in community psychology (De Jong, 2000), but the SET already spearheaded a Whole School Development Project. Further discussions raised the question around life-skills education in the schools. This was an area in which I could apply my expertise, and at the same time research schools' needs in relation to psychological assistance.

5.3. Sampling and Gaining Access to Schools

In participatory research, voluntary participation is essential. Furthermore, De Jong (1996) draws a link between a school's readiness for change at the outset, and the sustainability of the intervention. I therefore wanted to engage schools eager to participate in the research, who also had a degree of this "readiness". I asked other SET facilitators to nominate schools they considered interested and motivated. I visited the principals at five of these schools to invite them to participate, and they briefed their staff about the proposed intervention. Every one of the schools (three village, one farm and one township school) accepted the invitation to participate.

I spent 1½ to 2 hours at each school per week for 11 weeks. A combined workshop for all five schools were held the final, 12th week.

5.4. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) of Educators' Needs Around LO Education

LO educators at each school formed a focus group, and initial mapping and ranking exercises revealed the following expected outcomes from the intervention:

- formulating context-relevant content for Life Orientation education

- developing facilitator skills
- networking with other educators; working together; sharing information
- learning how to assess one's effectiveness as an educator
- gaining confidence in implementing OBE
- learning how to use resources effectively
- learning how to address individual child problems
- developing a positive attitude towards the change process

These outcomes (notably the last one) reveal the enormous pressure felt by educators to shift to outcomes-based education (OBE). Notwithstanding numerous workshops run by the Department, educators were still left feeling confused and frustrated. Educators reported that even OBE trainers didn't seem to understand what OBE was. Practically this necessitated helping educators understand the principles of OBE before developing and implementing a LO program.

5.5. Evaluation

In participatory research, evaluation of the program is handed over to participants. Even in consultative programs in peri-urban South African schools, Gibson (2000) sees evaluation as a sensitive issue requiring negotiation with schools as partners. He questions whether consultants have the rights to evaluate aspects of the functioning of organisations or schools. A double-bind arises where evaluating the effects of my intervention inevitably implied evaluating the educators' performance in the classrooms. In an attempt to side-step this dilemma and adhere to the principles of participation, I asked educators how they preferred evaluation of the program to take place. Educators thought the outcomes would be achieved if they observed a difference in the way their learners responded to them and others in the classroom. Towards this they decided to do

continuous assessment of learners' behaviours through observation, monitoring attendance, and assessing participation and communication skills. They also wanted to reflect on their own practice and hand me a written summary of their experience. Towards this I compiled an open-ended feedback questionnaire.

Mirroring OBE continuous assessment, I asked reflective questions about the process, throughout. Gibson (2000) supports this practice, stating evaluation is only really helpful as part of an ongoing process of reflecting, monitoring and adapting to new understandings of information. Drawing links between evaluation and sustainability, Schmuck's definition of organisation development includes the notion of maintaining an ongoing momentum of self-evaluation and development (1982). De Jong (1994) identifies this as the developer's greatest challenge.

5.6. Making Sense of OBE

Contrary to my expectations, I had to address educators' confusion about OBE, before addressing the question of Life Orientation Education. As a result, I studied much literature on OBE, and spent six weeks untangling what educators understood OBE to be. This process took much longer than I anticipated. All meetings were conducted as workshops which I co-ordinated and facilitated. Through activities, open questioning and group tasks during and outside workshops, the knowledge educators had was made explicit. Once explicit, participants were encouraged to critically evaluate their knowledge and decide how they would apply it. All written material (apart from the policy document) were typed-up notes from what emerged during the workshops. At times I imparted information I had access to that was relevant to the process.

Once educators had a better understanding of OBE, and had formulated their own outcomes for LO education, the workshops focused on creating syllabi from these outcomes. At this time educators reported a great sense of relief in understanding what was expected from them, and in appreciating the value of OBE. Comments included: "We didn't know that we know this, but now we are doing it ourselves." "We are ploughing the soil so we our seeds may grow." "This language is like poetry, I like it!" "Now I can move forward. I am not a statue anymore."

At one school, developing LO content was a difficult task. The educators confessed their fear of saying the "wrong" thing. At another, critical thinking was said to promote individualism and disobedience. One educator told me his wife berates him for "acting white" when he speaks his mind. Critical questioning and analysis were considered very "white" notions.

5.7. Fleshing Out a Life Orientation Syllabus

By the 11th week, schools were identifying topics for their LO syllabi. According to OBE, each school or cluster of schools should develop context-specific relevant content. Doing this evoked in educators knowledge they had of their learners, and their living conditions, but also of their own personal hardships and coping strategies. In reflecting on their role as LO educators, it became apparent to them that developing life-skills – the basic outcome for LO – is an ongoing, life-long process with no easy answers or cures. One educator put it: *Ufunda de ufe*; you learn until you die.

5.8. Implementing a Life Orientation Syllabus

Working in a rural setting takes time. I found myself near the point of exit from schools without

having consulted on the actual implementation of the program we had developed. Towards making this shift from workshops to actual implementation in the classroom easier, a combined workshop for all schools, with the focus on planning and implementing lessons, was held in the last week. All schools, except the township school, were represented. (Participation at this school was largely motivated by the principal and erratic throughout.)

5.9. Exit the Psychologist – Yes, But When?

Although the terms of our initial agreement in part made the decision for me, it was still very difficult to assess when would be appropriate to exit the schools and how I should negotiate this. Even in urban schools, Gibson (2000) describes how difficult it is to identify the precise moment when a "desired end-point" is achieved in the consultative relationship. Rather than terminating altogether, I, in line with research on interventions in urban schools (De Jong, 1996), wanted to maintain some kind of relationship with gradually decreasing input as the educators' capacity increased. However, on handing over the stick to participants at the final workshop, they seemingly preferred to contact me should they need to. Rightly or wrongly, in wanting to be supportive and not evaluative, I let educators determine the nature of any ongoing relationship.

6. DISCUSSION

6.1. Participation: The Psychologist as Participant

In adopting a participatory approach to work in rural schools, the psychologist is inevitably cast in the role of participant. The discussion will therefore not attempt to either prove or disprove this

for, to quote Vygotsky, the method is the theory; it "is simultaneously prerequisite and product, the tool and the result of analysis" (1978, p. 65). This is particularly true in the case of the participatory method, for it is simultaneously the means for gathering information, as well as an end in itself towards involving people in decision-making, regaining control, and building organisational and personal capacity in making informed choices for future action (Gilbert, 1999). What the discussion will rather attempt to do, is look at various ways in which the role of participant plays itself out.

Merely identifying the psychologist as participant is problematic. The term participation has come to prominence in the field of health through the emergence of the primary health care (PHC) movement (Kelly & Van Vlaenderen, 1997). Bennet (1992), however, points out that the term has come to mean different things in different contexts, but that it is still spoken about as a singularly clearly definable process. Apart from PHC, participation is also, as mentioned, a key concept in person-centred development (Brown, 1985; Cohen & Uphoff, 1977; Erasmus, 1992; Korten, 1990; Moulik, 1987; Santhanam, Sastry & Vijayakumar, 1982) and in the participatory research movement that developed alongside it (Brown, 1985; Van Vlaenderen & Nkwintini, 1993). Kelly et al (1997) strongly argues for the need to clarify the meaning of the term for it not to become a buzz-word merely legitimising community projects in South Africa. Chambers (1994b) argues similarly that although participation's emergence is largely experiential, not metaphysical, and theory is induced from practice, not deduced from propositions, "one contribution to be sought ... is a better understanding of underlying theory" (p. 1448).

In taking a critical meta-perspective on the preceding case study, I have identified three major ways in which my role as participant has played itself out: 1) the expert participant, 2) the facilitator

participant, and 3) the learner participant.

6.1.1. Not All Participants Have Equal Power: The Psychologist as Expert Participant

Chambers (1994a, p. 1265), addresses the issue of power in PRA, in the following way: "Reversals of frames, modes and relations contribute to reversals of power. In the forms which have spread, PRA has stressed abdication of power..." My experience, however, suggests that while it is certainly desirable to attempt to balance the power distribution more evenly, it is questionable whether one can abdicate power, let alone reverse the power distribution.

Several authors in the field of participatory development, in grappling with a clearer definition of participation, have stressed the relationship between participation and dialogue. Dialogue is put forward as the communicative context in which participation becomes possible (Kelly & Van Vlaenderen, 1997). Schrijvers (1991), however, is pessimistic about the possibilities for participation using dialogue, especially in the research context where two participants wield different degrees of power. Smaling (1995) stresses that a really dialogical relationship requires a certain communicative symmetry or reciprocity – equal chances for participants to initiate, continue or stop acting and reacting, talking and listening, discursive speaking and empathic feeling – and that this symmetry presupposes equality concerning power.

In contrast, I found myself in a typical, contemporary South African sphere of public service in need of transformation, as described by Kelly and Van Vlaenderen, 1997. This kind of situation necessitates parties meeting under adverse speech conditions (both educators and I communicated in our second language), and parties are grossly different in terms of access to resources, education,

power and the sense that their efforts can make a difference.

Gilbert (1997) describes this "meeting of minds" as two communities of practice (a concept borrowed from Lave, 1993) coming together to join in an activity, without being neutral in relation to each other. "Each ... brings with them their own knowledges which have varying degrees of power when used in engaging in joint activity with participants from other communities of practice (Gilbert, 1997, p. 285). He continues:

The issue of power in the joint activity is also tied up with access to resources. The change agent usually has access to a world of material or ideational resources not immediately available to local community members. ... The introduction of new technologies ... invariably requires maintenance or support from an outsider. These circumstances place the change agent in a considerable position of power even when there is no wilful attempt to coerce people into following a specific ideology or practice. The change agent is in the position to control the flow of information and determine the amount of access to resources.

One might agree with Gilbert (1998), that participation must be understood in relation to local dynamics of power. As White (2000) has said in addressing power relations in therapy (which includes family and community interventions), to deny the existence of power relations in the name of participation or co-construction, makes the change agent less accountable for exercises of power and for the real effects of this in the shaping of people's lives. However, he stresses we should make distinctions among different acts of power:

This is important because if all acts of power in the name of therapy are equal – if it is not possible to differentiate between those acts that are more imposing from those that are less imposing – then we don't have anywhere to go in terms of questioning therapeutic practice,

and there will be no impetus for us to find ways of making what we do more accountable to the people who consult us. (p. 100)

Jenkins (1994) says psychology is political. It never takes place in a political vacuum, and the participant, be it psychologist, researcher, developer, change agent, has an obligation to carefully monitor the use of power and the political implications of decisions made and actions taken. Like White, Jenkins implores us to acknowledge our power as participants and use it responsibly.

A number of examples from the case serve to highlight the researcher's powerful role as expert participant, and how this role might be used to empower as opposed to oppress.

6.1.1.1 Explicitly Know and Own One's Expertise

Being a highly educated, urbanised, white South African immediately put me in a more powerful position than other participants. Whether or not I chose to see myself as an expert upon entering the schools was irrelevant. What was relevant was that educators saw me as an expert. This immediately raised their expectations and hope that some kind of intervention and improvement was immanent. Although the not-knowing stance was adopted out of respect for educators' own knowledges and abilities and acknowledgement of our own inexperience, it instead functioned to minimise the very real problems people faced. Paradoxically, it also made problems seem insurmountable, for even the "expert" had no answers.

I, therefore, did not do educators a service by adopting the role of non-expert and trying to abdicate power. By doing this to promote dialogue, I was rather perceived as disempowered and of little use. I was in a position of power, and educators needed me to use that power to assist them.

My first ethical dilemma emerged. I felt bound to provide some service, to make my expertise available, but was next alerted to the fact that owning one's expertise means being relatively clear about what that expertise might be. Using PRA, as a psychologist, is not grounded enough in theory to guide the novice researcher. Among its many applications it has been used in natural resources management, agriculture, health, nutrition, food security and programs for the poor (Chambers, 1994a). My experience in a rural school setting taught me that an unbounded PRA expose needs felt by the community at large, and these most commonly focus on issues of unemployment, poverty, hunger and illiteracy. Once these needs are expressed, the expectation exists that solutions for these needs will be found. And whilst this is within the scope of PRA in addressing community development at large, it begs the question how PRA may be responsibly used by a psychologist to illicit educators' needs that may realistically be addressed by the psychologist. Whilst addressing poverty and its effects on a community may very well be within the scope of a community psychologist (Lewis & Lewis, 1989), the researcher working alone in a rural setting, with time constraints and lack of financial and other resources, has to define her role in that situation very carefully. PRA is generally undertaken as part of a broader, multi-pronged development initiative, and facilitators usually work as part of a team. However, in the current study, defining a specific area of focus such as Life Orientation education, was very important in making best use of my expertise in addressing the educators' needs, as well as taking into account the realistic constraints of a single person working in an isolated area for a limited period of time. In this way, the kinds of expectations raised matched my available expertise and access to resources. Whilst I could not attempt to alleviate hunger or give any remedial educational training, I could assist in the development of life-skills – such as critical and creative thinking, problem-solving and decision-making – through focusing on LO.

Furthermore, making one's own expertise explicit, makes it open to critique and allows the participants themselves to evaluate the usefulness of the expert in their midst. This proved to be a much more effective way of dealing with power differentials – by exposing it – than trying to assume a position of equal power.

6.1.1.2. Assessing a School's Readiness For Participation

As mentioned, De Jong (1996) draws links between the sustainability of any intervention, and the psychologist's ability to accurately assess and select which schools have the capacity for change and development. This is also found to be the case in small town development, where the small towns with a "champion" quality (local leadership potential, high motivation and capacity for change) seem able to continue the process of development once developers leave (Koch & Hethington, 2001). Perhaps part of the reason for this, has to do with the developer's power. The principal at every school I approached (considering this to be the correct etiquette in entering a school), unquestioningly accepted my invitation to participate. I was seen as the bringer of something good, something the school needed, even if participants were not at all clear of what that might be. Their faith in my expertise, my power to make a difference, seemed enough. Under these circumstances, from my position of power, my invitation was more an injunction. This was confirmed once I met educators, and experienced the ambivalence of some about participating, particularly at the township school. The ambivalence at this school was reflected in the ultimate lack of progress and educator's absence at the final workshop.

6.1.1.3. The Expert as Evaluator

My position of power inevitably put me in the role of evaluator. This was seen on a number of occasions: Educators did not want say the "wrong" thing, and also did not want to be "checked up"

on (as noted in the feedback questionnaires). As White (2000) has said, even though one might not be able to eradicate one's power, one can engage in practices that are less toxic in their effects. These include routinely consulting people about the direction of the conversation – something I did throughout the 12 weeks. White describes it as the difference between directing and discovering and suggests that some consciousness of this difference may be a partial remedy for engaging in conversations in a way that simply contributes to what we psychologists already know. Conversations that just contribute to a confirmation of the known, are dead-ended in White's view, and a warning that one's power as a psychologist is being misdirected.

Smaling (1995) refers to open-heartedness in describing the delicate balance participatory researchers strive for when revealing personal information about themselves to encourage participants to feel at ease to do the same. Of course, being in a position of relative power, the researcher's utterances may stifle the participants' reactions by influencing them to act in a socially desirable way (Smaling, 1995). In my experience, however, opening myself up to questions did promote spontaneity from the participants once rapport and a trusting relationship had been established. I found a successful way to negotiate this, was to adopt a relaxed, authentic, professional stance. This meant I did not force intimacy with educators by being overly familiar with them, and I tried to be meticulous about punctuality and honouring appointments. I recorded notes on every meeting, reviewed it before the next, and consistently followed up on questions and requests. Being consistent in my behaviour, I believe, promoted a professional relationship. At the same time, I met with educators on their terms, in their environment at times decided by them. This is very different to the usual researcher-subject, or client-therapist arrangement, and did help to balance the power between researcher and participants more. In addition, I was open to questions of almost any nature, for example about my views on being a single woman, a white

Afrikaner, and my upbringing and education. This further differs from the usual researcher-researched relationship, and helped to distribute power more evenly by making the professional approachable and vulnerable as a person. I refer to this as being the professional person, as opposed to the professional professional; the sometimes-knowing relative expert, as opposed to the not-knowing non-expert or the all-knowing expert.

6.1.1.4. The Expert Has Access to Information and Resources

Early on in this case, I faced the difficulty that educators needed input on a subject I was also relatively unfamiliar with. This is an example of where the psychologist's power and position of privilege can be used to empower the participants (Lewis & Lewis, 1989). I tried to contact the district's educational development officer (without success), but had further access to the Rhodes University Library, as well as the Education Department at Rhodes University and the East London Education Support Centre. Through accessing these resources, I accumulated information on Outcomes-Based Education and Life Orientation that was not available to educators in the rural schools. Van Vlaenderen and Gilbert (1995) draw attention to this sensitive position held by participatory researchers as people with a base outside the community and access to knowledge local people do not have. In attempting to meet the educators at their level of need, I had to educate myself in an area that was relatively unfamiliar to me but to which I had easier access. I shared this information in its entirety; not wanting to act as gate-keeper to knowledge I had privileged access to (Van Vlaenderen et al, 1995).

6.1.2. The Psychologist as Facilitator Participant

Whilst participatory research attempts to illicit most of the content or data from participants, the

researcher or psychologist remains an expert in co-ordinating the process; setting up meetings, introducing activities and generally facilitating the participation of everyone. There were various instances in which my role as psychologist implied acting as facilitator. The primary instance, facilitating a development orientation, is discussed below. [See Appendix C for others.]

6.1.2.1. Facilitating a Development Orientation

Right at the beginning of my entry into the schools – and throughout the following months – I became aware of educators' approach towards change. Educators' primary efforts in mobilising change were aimed at Government. Whilst the need for action at this level may be important, building one's capacity for change and empowerment at organisational and individual levels are as well. Van Vlaenderen and Gilbert, 1995, refer to this as the need for a development orientation; the need to mobilise positive change at a local level as well as putting pressure on Government to make broader changes. They argue that participatory research is a means by which such a development orientation, and the building of human capacity, may be promoted, since the process inherently provides opportunities for the acquisition of skills – prioritising needs, negotiating, problem-solving – that can be applied outside the research context.

6.1.2.1.1. Promoting a development orientation through reflexivity.

Much has been written on the process of participatory research in making local knowledge and expert knowledge explicit, first of all, and secondly critically evaluating the usefulness of these knowledges (The reader is referred to Gilbert 1997; Jackson & Van Vlaenderen, 1994; Rankin & Gilbert, 2000; Van Vlaenderen & Nkwinti, 1993; Van Vlaenderen & Gilbert, 1995; White, 1996; White, 2000). In brief, participatory research assumes that deprived communities have traditional,

well-established systems and carefully developed techniques which, over many years, allowed them to survive in very harsh conditions. The researcher should play a catalytic role in the process of tapping local knowledge, indigenous technologies, survival skills and resources that will serve as a foundation for the development of an appropriate action plan. It is believed that building on indigenous knowledge and resources will reduce the likelihood that a program intervention will de-skill the local people and increase their dependency on external experts (Korten, 1980). However, this process, although relying on activities (see Chambers 1994a/b) in allowing tacit knowledges to become explicit, is also heavily reliant on questioning – a rational function – to promote discussion and reflection. This process of reflexivity is integral to participation, and to promoting a development orientation, and is employed in consciousness raising (Freire, 1970) – a process of increasing political and critical self-awareness. As Jackson et al, 1994, put it: "Critical inquiry by the researcher, involving a combination of self-reflection and historical analysis of inequitable systems produces critical knowledge" (p. 7). Whilst an open, reflexive attitude is called for in promoting a development orientation, Combs and Freedman point out that the dominant stories in Western culture still value decisiveness, action and certitude (1996). Bearing in mind that educators expected me to come with some certitude and promise of action, balancing on the tight-rope role of facilitator is a constant trapeze act: The psychologist needs to find a balance between owning her expertise and being flexible; and between promoting reflexivity and innovation without coming across as aggressively questioning and problem-solving.

Two more balancing acts present themselves in facilitating human capacity building and a development orientation: making sense of "African time" as a professional, and encouraging independent critical inquiry whilst respecting local values on communal respect and obedience.

6.1.2.1.2. Reflexivity and ubuntu.

Does critical inquiry, or reflexivity, oppose ubuntu? This question emerged in my mind in response to educators' concerns about the impact of critical thinking on African values such as obedience and respect for elders as reflected in ubuntu. Ubuntu is a moral concept that includes a composite of community oriented values (Gilbert, 1997), with a particular focus on sharing and humility (Biko, 1978). In the words of the educators, the following Xhosa idiom encapsulates the spirit of ubuntu: *umuntu ngumtu ngabanye*: a person is a person because of others.

What does this have to do with reflexivity, and why would the latter be construed as a threat? Responses from a principal in a subsequent study draw explicit links between Apartheid (and particularly Bantu Education) and a culture of dependence of African people on outsiders. Van Vlaenderen & Nkwinti (1994) write about this characteristic of dependence among rural Eastern Cape people, and lack of confidence in looking at themselves as sources for innovation. Furthermore, Gilbert (1997) stresses that while ubuntu has always been essentially conservative, the blurring of the distinction between humility and passive submissiveness is a corruption of the value that has developed in recent times. Case studies conducted in farm schools in the Eastern Cape region, show how the concepts respect and submissiveness were conflated to help control classrooms of up to 60 learners (Gilbert, Nkwinti & Van Vlaenderen, 1990).

It seems the concern about critical inquiry, a more progressive action, is aimed at the effect it might have on this "submissiveness" or "dependence", rather than posing a real threat to ubuntu. In fact, reflexivity may ironically be instrumental in restoring ubuntu to its authentic meanings. This seemed to be the case at the school where the above idiom was evoked in the minds and hearts of the educators. Whilst reflexivity may uncover the preferred meanings and practices of ubuntu, it

may also unmask the ills of dependence and in so doing promote a development orientation that wholly takes preferred cultural practices and beliefs into consideration.

6.1.2.1.3 "African time".

A point of immeasurable frustration for me, was the lack of professionalism, especially in terms of punctuality and honouring appointments. Unlike a few years ago, almost every educator in this study had a cellular telephone, and I undertook all travelling. Educators simply had to diarise appointments (which were at regular times) and let me know if they could not make it. However, this rarely happened. I often traveled up to 60km, taking pains to be punctual, to arrive at an empty school, albeit during school hours.

During a subsequent study, educators explained this as the "African time" phenomenon. They proposed that even though educators now carry cell phones and wear wrist-watches, one can still expect them to arrive up to an hour after the scheduled time. Apparently carried over from days when rural people only had the sun by which to keep time, one has to wait patiently for others to arrive. Interestingly, it appears this concept of African time is not always preferred. In relating it to their learners, educators stated that not being mindful of time was a sign of laziness. (In a subsequent study, "time consciousness" was identified as an important LO topic.) There therefore seems to be some ambivalence about the reasons and preference for or against it.

I responded by trying to set an example of professionalism by being punctual and consistent in my behaviour, and at the same time exercise patience when educators did not respond reciprocally. It was hoped that this modelling would inform educators' own practices with their learners and other professionals (Rankin & Gilbert, 2000).

6.1.2. The Psychologist as Learner Participant

Fowler et al (1946) defines participant as one who shares in by common action or position. By definition, it therefore means that the psychologist also shares in the learning that takes place.

6.1.3.1.Learning About Education Policy, History and Politics

Holtzman (1997, p. 382) makes this point when discussing the role of the community psychologist in schools within various cultures: "Community psychology is based on systems and ecological thinking that integrates health, human resources, education, social interventions, citizen empowerment, and cultural values into one strategy..."

From the outset, I was confronted with a lack of knowledge and understanding of current educational policy and implications for life-skills education in the classroom. I was informed by educators, but also had to take initiative for a large part of my learning by sourcing and studying material I might previously have considered outside the scope of psychology.

In participating with educators about their LO education priorities, I also learnt much about the history of and current affairs topical in this context. Learning about the social and political history of people I engaged with was imperative for the participatory process. Similarly, learning about provincial government's policy on redeployment and redistribution of educators, was equally important in appreciating educators' reality and making sense of my role in assisting them.

6.1.3.2.Personal Learning

In my experience, participation inevitably implies some kind of personal change, or learning.

Thorne (1997, p. 126) warns the participatory researcher: "In direct contrast to the requisite distance between knower and known, the researcher in an interpretivist, constructivist tradition must be prepared to be profoundly changed through the process of exploration". Traylen agrees:

The advantage of this kind of inquiry is that the approach ... focuses on their reciprocal interaction with myself, so that we become both co-researchers and co-subjects. ... The experience of exploring together in this kind of inquiry would hopefully lead to our own personal growth and development, and to some deeper insight or resolution of the issues of health visiting practice. (1996, pp. 60 – 61)

The participatory nature of my work necessitated me bringing the personal into the professional arena, and this promoted personal as well as professional learning. Perhaps a key aspect of my role as a psychologist in a rural community setting is that I, as participant, could not be neutral. Throughout the participatory process, my personal political, ethical and spiritual beliefs and values came into focus. I was challenged to reveal my position on various issues, and how these impact on my life and work. This process made explicit my own agenda – not only to other participants, but also to me. Becoming critically aware of and accountable for myself in this way has had profound effects on how I make sense of my life and decisions before me.

Chambers (1994b) emphasises that participatory work in rural settings cannot be learnt about in academic environments or through formal teaching. PRA has spread, first and foremost, through field learning experience and outsiders living close by to other participants. He even advocates for senior officials and policy makers to spend time unofficially living and learning in rural conditions, if rural development were to happen positively.

6.1.3.3. Gaining Expertise through Experience

Echoing Chambers, I found that no amount of formal learning adequately prepared me for defining and playing my role. Although acknowledging my expertise was imperative in defining some kind of platform from which to work as I entered the schools, there were no textbooks or manuals to guide me once I had done that. Chambers says:

When so much is unknowable and so unpredictable, it seems right to seek solutions through methodological pluralism, through flexible and continuous learning and adaptation, and through the exercise of judgement. ... The most striking insight from the experience of PRA is the primacy of the personal. This is easy to overlook. Responsibility rests not in written rules, regulations and procedures but in individual judgement. The one-sentence manual for PRA "Use your own best judgement at all times" (KGVK, 1991) originates in North American business management (Peters, 1987, p. 378). In this mode, every PRA experience can be seen to be different, the outcome of local people and facilitators. Authority and responsibility reside then not in a bible or manual, nor in a sequence observances or procedures, but in personal interactions, judgements and choice. (1994b, pp. 1449 – 1450)

Chambers says that means making mistakes and learning on the run. A great learning from this experience was that 12 weeks was too short to meet all the educators' expected outcomes. It also did not allow for a gradual withdrawal from the participatory process and follow-up visits as advocated by other studies already mentioned. Whereas PRA conducted in rural settings outside schools generally take place over a number of days or at most a couple of weeks, the role of the psychologist participant benefits from a longer engagement. This learning may be what Chambers (1994a) refers to as "failing forwards"; the willingness to face failure positively. Error is embraced as an opportunity to learn not a calamity to be avoided.

The image of a trapeze artist emerges again. The role of the psychologist demands flexibility and dexterity in allowing constant adjustment and re-adjustment to others and the environment. At the same time, an intensely steady focus, personal strength and professional consistency is required to contain and facilitate a dynamic process of reciprocity and learning. All in all, a highly rewarding experience, albeit not for the faint-hearted.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This case study has outlined a 12-week program run in five rural, South African schools, based on the principles of participation and including various participatory rural appraisal techniques in accumulating data from educators. The aim of the study, however, was not simply the accumulation of data, but also conducting some form of intervention in dynamic response to data, as per the objective of participatory research. This whole process has been written up as a case, and then further discussed in an attempt to analyse the possible role of the psychologist in this setting. Whilst I heed Thorne's (1997) warning that qualitative research is inevitably contextual and recognise that my findings will undoubtedly not withstand the test of time, there are perhaps yet ways in which my conclusions may benefit others.

Firstly, defining one's area of expertise as a psychologist, and knowing how one may realistically offer one's assistance, is key in laying the foundation for a trusting working relationship among participants. Whatever one's focus – be it whole school development, Life Orientation education, community projects, poverty alleviation, literacy programs, etc. – be relatively sure that one can responsibly engage at that level, that one's expertise measures up and that one has available resources and support to sustain that kind of involvement.

Secondly, once one has identified an area of focus, further expertise and networking are called for in identifying "champion" participants or schools with the capacity for development. Upon entering these schools, various PRA (or perhaps Appreciative Inquiry, Gergen & Gergen, 2001) techniques can be used to assess what kind of development is needed and how the psychologist may facilitate in this process of growth and transformation.

Thirdly, the psychologist facilitates the process throughout, and has a particular role to play in facilitating the emergence of a development orientation in participants. Becoming aware of one's own local and tacit knowledges and beliefs, and critically reflecting on the implications of these for one's work and one's life is perhaps the psychologist's primary facilitatory function. It is also a process the psychologist participates in, and becomes transformed by. In facilitating human capacity building, the psychologist's personal and professional capacity for making decisions and responding appropriately in unique situations from moment to moment, are enhanced.

Feedback from educators has suggested that there may be a need for other roles not explored in this study. For example, in dealing with individual child problems, the psychologist may want to adopt a role as consultant to educators. Or, alternately or in conjunction with this, take on the role as educator in training educators to identify various child behavioural problems, and how to respond to these. Further study into the appropriateness of these roles in a rural school setting is needed. Towards this, I would like to add my voice to Korten's (1980) and emphasise that psychologists, if they truly want to be effective and offer a worthwhile service to the broader society, should become familiar with development agencies and deprived communities and engage themselves in a process of learning how they can become more relevant to their clients' needs. I agree with Korten that the world needs more human capacity building more than it needs more technology.

Finally, I have attempted to present myself as the researched as much as the other participants.

Qualitative research with its emphasis on the interconnectedness and the holistic nature of the phenomena it studies, calls for an attitude of personal involvement. More strongly formulated, the striving towards quality in qualitative research seems to call for the qualitative researcher to involve the totality of her being, to acknowledge, accept and use her unique individuality. ... Methodologically, the researcher's subjectivity is approached in a positive sense in qualitative research, as an asset to be exploited rather than a calamity to be avoided. New personalised methodological guidelines have been formulated to replace the norms inherited from the empirical analytical research practice. For example, Guba and Lincoln (1989) emphasise the researcher's trustworthiness and integrity, while Smaling (1993) calls for an open-heartedness and open-mindedness. Thus existing methodological criteria are challenged and reinterpreted in such a way that space is created for the personal involvement of the researcher. ... One could also say that the researcher's subjectivity, the area of the "personal", is so crucial a dimension in the qualitative research process that it cannot be ignored in a discourse focusing on the quality of research. The personal is too important to be left alone. (Meulenberg-Buskens, 1997, p. 112)

In working in this kind of setting, it is my conviction that a psychologist adds to the quality of her research by recognising and acknowledging her primary role as a human being. This implies working in a holistic way that does not see one's scientific technologies and human responses as distinctly separate entities. Although this may produce the kind of research results less common in a Western, scientific, modern world, it may actually illuminate the complex kaleidoscope of roles embodied by a psychologist working in an African, rural school setting.

APPENDIX A: DATA GATHERING AND ANALYSING PROCESS

The case study is presented as follows:

1) A description of the process of engagement with the schools: analysing the raw data takes the form of explaining a process (McNiff, Lomax & Whitehead, 1996). A rich description of the process (how I gained access to the schools; various participatory activities in which educators engaged; pertinent data that emerged through these activities) will be produced in narrative form. This description will be informed by the following sources of data:

- 1.1) the researcher's log, as it is described by Ely (1991), which is a complete collection of field notes, personal reflections and monthly reports
- 1.2) written data collected from participants whilst developing a LO syllabus
- 1.3) feedback questionnaires on the process collected from participants

The aim of this description is to highlight various challenges to my perceived role in this setting.

2) In reading and re-reading the case study with the purpose of answering the research question, general themes emerge for the researcher which are then further discussed.

3) Validity and Reliability

Qualitative research is often criticised for lacking control over the validity and reliability of findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). However, the opposite has also been argued for: Objectifying research and quantifying research findings allow male stream researchers to maintain their positions of power and dominance over the people they research. Whilst I can make few claims for the reliability or validity of my findings, these knowledge claims are entirely vulnerable to scrutiny by their very subjective nature.

APPENDIX B: THE ORIGINAL CASE STUDY

5.1. A Problem Emerges

As mentioned earlier, the SET and Rhodes have had a relationship since 1998. Providing a service to rural schools has been a difficult task, since it has been difficult to define what this service should be. The SET and Rhodes decided at the outset that psycho-educational testing would not be an appropriate use of time and resources, for even if children were assessed, no services would be available to follow up on recommendations. Intervening at the level of educator-learner interaction, facilitating better understanding and relationships between educators and learners and improving possibilities for teaching and learning, seemed more appropriate.

The service offered to schools at the time of my initial entry (August 2000), was to spend an hour at a time with an individual learner and educator. However, this attempt to model more effective interpersonal relating was proving to be unsuccessful. In wanting to "hand over the stick" (Chambers, 1994b) and let educators speak for themselves about their needs and desired assistance, my colleague and I initially adopted a not-knowing stance upon entering the schools (Anderson & Goolishian, 1990). Not-knowing was originally coined in describing one's orientation to a client's language – appreciating that meanings are locally determined, not universal (Griffith & Griffith, 1992). In this context, it denoted a broader, person-centred orientation that acknowledged the practices, skills and knowledge of the educators as useful and meaningful as ours. It was also an acknowledgement that we were unsure of the level (whether personal, interpersonal or organisational) at which to aim our intervention.

Initial interviews with educators from selected schools revealed they wanted assistance with 1) solving learning problems experienced by learners, and 2) mobilising social and economic reform to alleviate famine. Educators made it clear that spending time with individual learners hadn't promoted positive change. Rather, they wanted to consult with us directly on the first issue (learning difficulties) and have us act as advocates on their behalf on the second (getting food and money from the state). Immediately, we were sensitised to what Van Vlaenderen and Gilbert (1993) identify as a key element in development work: the importance of generating a development orientation. At these schools, development and change were seen as within the domain of the government alone. "Activities are geared at putting demands on the government. This concern for confrontation and resistance is not necessarily sufficient for implementing strategies for development and reconstruction" (Van Vlaenderen et al, p. 11). We faced a dilemma: we wanted to hear from participants on how they saw our role, yet were met with educational and economic needs seemingly beyond the scope of what we were able to address.

A problem emerged: A dialectical tension existed between what educators in this setting need from a psychologist, and what a psychologist could offer. Making sense of this tension, doing research into the question, and at the same time providing some service, became the impetus for entering schools on a full-time basis in 2001.

5.2. Enter the Psychologist – Yes, But Where?

I knew I could not re-enter the schools with a completely open, not-knowing stance in 2001. I had to be clear about what I could offer; what kinds of needs I could possibly address and what questions I could responsibly ask. In adopting a not-knowing stance before, our intention to approach schools in the spirit of openness and equality was completely misread. Educators

were angry that we offered no answers, no so-called expertise. Why were we there, if only to ask questions and find out what the problems were? They knew what the problems were and wanted them solved, not discussed. As highly educated white people with no immediately apparent expertise, answers or intervention strategies, we were met with anger and suspicion. We experienced enormous pressure to, in the words of one educator, "do something!" This experience made it clear to me that any research in this particular context would have to: 1) include action and intervention, and 2) have a clear purpose.

In wanting to learn from this experience and sharpen my focus before entering schools in 2001, I discussed possible levels of entry with people who had worked in this setting. Previous Rhodes students and interns found working with the learners themselves, or learners and educators simultaneously, ineffective. Literature supports institutional development as one of the central strategies in transforming schools, and variations on the whole school development approach are receiving increased attention (De Jong, 2000). However, the SET already spearheaded a Whole School Development Project. At which level then, and in what capacity, could I provide a psychological service to the schools? Further discussions raised the question of guidance or life-skills education in the schools. This appeared to be a service I could offer (escaping the perils of presenting myself as a not-knowing "non-expert"), that would allow me to work directly with educators (more appropriate judging from past experiences), and that would provide the opportunity to research schools' needs in relation to psychological assistance.

5.3. Sampling and Gaining Access to Schools

The SET operates in all 42 schools in the Stutterheim Magisterial District. Ninety percent are in isolated rural areas; the remaining in townships surrounding the rurally-based town. The

process of identifying schools for this study was twofold. In participatory research, active and voluntary participation is essential. De Jong (1996) also draws a link between the sustainability of an intervention and a school's readiness for change at the outset. He stresses the psychologist's role in competently assessing a school's readiness and capacity for development. Hence, it seemed imperative to select schools wanting assistance with Life Orientation education that also wanted to participate in research. SET facilitators for the English Language, Entrepreneurship Education and Maths Upgrading programs were asked to nominate 12 schools they considered "ready". These facilitators travel out to schools daily and have long-standing relationships with principals and educators. From their lists, I identified and visited six schools to invite them to participate. I met with the principals at five of the schools, who then briefed LO educators about the proposed intervention. Every principal fed back to me that educators wanted to participate.

The sample is made up of three village schools, one farm school and one township school.

The participatory research process took place over 12 weeks. I spent 1½ to 2 hours at each school per week for 11 weeks, and facilitated a combined workshop for all schools the 12th week.

5.4. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) of Educators' Needs around LO Education

Attempting to offer a service as well as gather information about educators' needs for LO education, immediately put me in the role of participatory research facilitator. LO educators at each school formed a natural focus group, and PRA mapping and ranking exercises were conducted with each to establish how they envisaged the intervention process.

The following projected outcomes emerged:

- formulating context-relevant content for Life Orientation education
- developing facilitator skills
- networking with other educators; working together; sharing information
- learning how to assess one's effectiveness as an educator
- gaining confidence in implementing OBE
- learning how to use resources effectively
- learning how to address individual child problems
- developing a positive attitude towards the change process

The last point is telling. It reveals an enormous pressure felt by educators to shift from their traditional way of teaching to outcomes-based education (OBE). This shift is problematic for many reasons. Throughout our meetings it became apparent that, notwithstanding numerous OBE workshops run by the Department, educators were still confused and frustrated. Educators reported that OBE trainers were unable to answer their questions, simplify the information, use examples familiar to them, or relate to them and their contexts. Also, they had been promised follow-up visits from subject advisors to help with developing and implementing new syllabi, which never happened. OBE workshops overloaded them with unfamiliar, jargon-laden content and were run in a very "un-OBE" fashion with emphasis on content, as opposed to participation and skills-development. By educators' accounts, their own experience and knowledge were unacknowledged during training, leaving them feeling inadequate and overwhelmed.

In deconstructing and negotiating the meaning of the other expected outcomes, it appeared they too related to educators' feelings of inadequacy around OBE and its implementation. Although

the focus of my intervention was Life Orientation, it evoked in educators their general feelings of trepidation around OBE, as LO is a new, OBE learning area. In making sense of Life Orientation – what it is, what its content should be, how it can be facilitated in the classroom – I first had to make sense of OBE and its implications for the implementation of LO.

5.5. Evaluation

A key difference between traditional research methodologies and participatory research methods concerns evaluation. In participatory or action research, the intervention is the method and visa versa, and evaluation of the intervention is handed over to participants. This contrasts Rossi & Freeman's definition of evaluation research as the systematic application of social science research procedures in assessing the conceptualisation and design, implementation and utility of programs (1993). Similarly, Holtzman, in looking at programs in schools, advocates for "evaluation to be conducted under the direction of an experienced, well-qualified expert who does not have a personal stake in the project outcome" (1997, p. 387). This was not practically possible in the present study, but also would have contradicted the principle of "handing over the stick" of participatory research. Even outside the field, in consultative programs in peri-urban South African schools, Gibson (2000) sees evaluation as a sensitive issue requiring negotiation with schools, as partners: "In this sensitively balanced relationship there are important issues about whether consultants have the rights to evaluate aspects of the functioning of organisations" (p. 335). Evaluating my role and its affects would inevitably imply evaluating the performance of educators in the classroom; not something I, nor educators, was comfortable with. White (2000) suggests this "culture of evaluation" that is part of our "era of the development continuum", is intimately associated with and in the service of reproducing modern society's norms – not the aim of person-centred development. He says:

Modern systems of power engage people in disciplines of the self. It is through the disciplining of the self that people might close the gap between where they stand and the constructed norms of our culture. It is through the sort of practices of evaluation and grading ... that therapists can become agents of this disciplinary technology. (p. 110)

In an attempt to step beyond this rating-table culture, I asked educators how they would like the program (referring to the 12 weeks participatory process) to be evaluated. Educators felt their expected outcomes would be achieved if they observed a tangible difference in their classrooms and in the way their learners responded to them and other learners. They chose to evaluate the program by doing continuous assessment of their learners' behaviours through observation, monitoring attendance, and assessing participation and communication skills. Also, they wanted to reflect on their own practice and give me a brief written summary of what they felt they had achieved. Towards this an open, qualitative feedback questionnaire was compiled.

In line with OBE's continuous assessment, I asked reflective questions on the process throughout. Gibson (2000) supports this practice, stating evaluation is only really helpful as part of an ongoing process of reflecting, monitoring and adapting to new understandings of information. Drawing links between evaluation and sustainability, Schmuck's definition of organisation development includes the notion of maintaining an ongoing momentum of self-evaluation and development (1982). De Jong (1994) identifies this as the developer's greatest challenge.

5.6. Making Sense of OBE

Another dilemma emerged: How do I promote people's understanding of what I knew little of? Although equipped to deal with the subject matter of Life Orientation, I also had to familiarise

myself with policy changes in Education, and its implications for educators. I studied a large volume of literature on OBE, and discovered I could not intervene at the level of LO without knowing how that fits into OBE and relates to other learning areas. Contrary to my own expectations, I was led in a direction I had not anticipated.

Six weeks were spent untangling what educators understood of OBE. These six weeks (as the others) were spent workshopping; in this case deconstructing the meaning and implications of concepts like the 12 critical outcomes for education in general, and eight specific outcomes for LO in particular. This process took much longer than I anticipated. OBE concepts are extremely jargon-laden, and although educators used terminology like skills development, learner-centred and critical thinking, explanations were vague and "experience-distant" (as used by White, 1997).

I facilitated the workshops by co-ordinating activities in which educators participated. Workshops aimed at making explicit the knowledge educators already had, through activities, open questioning and group tasks during and outside workshops. Once explicit, the workshops encouraged participants to critically evaluate this knowledge. All written material used (apart from the policy document) was typed up from what educators themselves had said and formulated. At times I imparted information I had access to that was relevant to the process.

Once educators grasped the concepts, outcomes and skills, brainstormed their expected outcomes for learners from LO, as well as correlated these with the Department's critical and specific outcomes, the workshops shifted focus. Participants set out to develop a LO syllabus, based on these outcomes. At this time educators reported a great sense of relief in understanding what was expected from them, and in being able to appreciate the value of this

shift in educational focus. Comments included: "We didn't know that we know this, but now we are doing it ourselves." "We are ploughing the soil so that we can sow and our seeds can grow. You cannot sow on soil that is hard and hasn't been tilled." "This language is like poetry. I am so relieved. Oh, I like it!" "Now I know the road to Transkei. I can move forward. I am not a statue anymore."

In developing a syllabus from the outcomes, I gave input on the process that had to be followed, as all schools except the township one were unfamiliar with the procedure. Workshops looked at the meaning and function of phase and program organisers, and how they scaffold the actual focus ideas or topics for each learning unit. Content should be area, or school specific and relevant to the particular learner. Each school, or a cluster of schools in an area, should identify their own program organisers for each phase, and develop their syllabi from these. Only after this has been done should educators consult textbooks for content. In reality, however, most educators were too daunted by this task and simply continued teaching directly from textbooks.

The workshops clarified and catalysed the performance of this task at each school. One school found it very difficult to come up with their own ideas, in fear of saying the "wrong thing". At another, the concept critical thinking raised concern. The principal thought it promoted disobedience. And at yet another, an educator's wife accused him of "acting white" for speaking his mind. Discussions revealed that critical questioning and analysis were very "white" notions.

Around this time, one of the schools experienced an incident with the SET that upset them. Educators believed the SET's overt agenda of offering support hid a covert agenda of

"checking up" on them. There seemed to be an unsaid expectation that principals and educators were accountable to the SET, whilst educators believed SET members should be accountable to them. I listened to educators and facilitated a discussion on possible solutions. Educators did not want to address problems with the SET directly. They wanted to withdraw participation from its programs to attract attention. This included discontinuing their work with me, even though they felt the work had been useful. I left the decision to them. Eventually they decided to continue the workshops, but hold them after hours. By this they wanted to emphasize their commitment to their work (which they believed was contrary to the SET's public opinion of the school).

Many other difficulties faced by educators were shared during these sessions. Tensions with the Department, were raised. Apart from already mentioned difficulties, educators have to educate with hardly any materials at their disposal. Many learners are raised by grandparents or relatives, since parents migrate to urban areas in search of work. Children typically share their home with many other children (cousins and distant relatives), and it is not uncommon for an entire household, to live off one old-age pension. As a result, school fees are rarely paid, and schools depend on fundraising efforts to buy materials and look after the premises. The state provides learning materials. However, during the course of this study none of these materialised.

Discussions illuminated the creative ways in which educators cope. Every visit to the schools served as a reminder of the patience and perseverance with which educators face their work every day. At these moments I stood humbled. No theory or expertise could match what people had been doing for decades. I could simply offer my presence as a witness to their experience.

5.7. Fleshing Out a Life Orientation Syllabus

Once each school had identified program organisers, they had to attach them to the relevant outcomes. Thereafter they spent the remaining five weeks brainstorming topics that related to the program organisers, phase organisers and outcomes for LO. Most schools found this a relatively easy exercise, whilst for one it was extremely difficult. Without a textbook as guide, it was difficult to name topics that related to their learners, their environment, and the outcomes they wanted. I asked these educators to reflect on their own lives as they related to the program organisers. What, from their own lived experience, was important for them to know? By the end of 11 weeks, all schools were identifying topics for their Life Orientation syllabi.

Developing relevant LO content for each school stimulated conversation about learners' specific problems. The workshops again took on a multi-level purpose. It looked at how these problems direct the content for LO, and catalysed a process of reflection on how educators deal with their own difficult issues. Three broad areas of concern were identified by all the schools:

- crime and violence (including domestic violence, child abuse, gangsterism, weapons)
- substance abuse (alcohol and drugs, notably marijuana)
- sex; sex-related crimes; STD's and HIV/AIDS; unplanned pregnancies

There was a sense that the above-mentioned issues permeated the fabric of everyday life, and should not be restricted to LO. Educators witnessed abuse in the community and were confronted by the effects of it at school. As in other instances where questions on how to deal with difficult situations were raised, I acted as facilitator in allowing them to reflect on their role as educators in addressing these problems. During this discussion, two problems confounding the issue of abuse, were identified: 1) learners do not know what happens to them

is wrong – that it is in fact abuse, and 2) there is a stigma around talking openly about problems and difficulties. Educators saw it as their role to make learners aware of what abuse is and facilitate a process of critical reflection on their own beliefs and values around what is and is not acceptable behaviour. They also wanted to offer learners the opportunity to talk about their problems; to bear witness to them in stead of perpetuating the silence. Although primarily concerned with educators' own ideas, there were times I shared information I had access to, about the topics under discussion.

The process of identifying topics for a LO syllabus evoked in educators knowledge they had of their learners, and their living conditions, but also of their own personal hardships and how they dealt with these. It became apparent that developing life-skills – the basic outcomes for LO – is an ongoing, life-long process with no easy answers or cures. As one educator put it: *Ufunda de ufe*; you learn until you die.

5.8. Implementing a Life Orientation Syllabus

One of the biggest constraints throughout this process was time. Working in a rural setting takes time. Meetings rarely started or ended on time, and quite often had to be rescheduled to accommodate other events like departmental workshops on OBE. I only had a limited amount of time to work with this sample of schools, and was naïve in my projection of what might be done in 11 weeks. I found myself near the point of exit from the schools, without any "real" work in the classroom having happened. All the time had been spent with educators making sense of what they will do in the classroom, when they do it.

Another tension emerged. Time was up, yet I felt pressured to ensure educators implemented the syllabus they themselves had developed. Although I would not be there with them whilst they practiced their facilitator skills in the classroom, I was hopeful that all the time spent in workshops that were wholly based on participation, would make this shift more experience-near albeit difficult. In attempting to connect the schools (an expected outcome), and reinforce their knowledge about how to implement this syllabus they had developed, a combined workshop (for all five schools) was scheduled for the final week.

I invited one school that had developed a first class Life Orientation syllabus (also the school troubled by the SET) to facilitate, or at least co-facilitate, the workshop and share their knowledge. Another key element of participatory research is not only to acknowledge and develop additional local skills, but also to make best use of local leadership potential and give impetus to local initiatives (Van Vlaenderen & Gilbert, 1993). Upon first discussing the idea, educators were highly motivated. However, when I raised it again, educators had decided their withdrawal would attract the Trust's attention. In the end, they decided simply to attend the workshop.

The combined workshop allowed educators from all the schools to meet to discuss LO. All except the township school were represented. Interaction with this school had been difficult. The principal had nominated the Grade 7 LO educator to join him in meeting with me, and I never established whether he would have chosen to participate of his own accord. Language was an obstacle; the educator often relied on the principal to interpret. Furthermore, the educator's sister-in-law died during the time of the study, and he was absent from school for quite some weeks in seeing to funeral arrangements and taking over the care of his brother's children. Most meetings were not met, and progress was severely deterred.

The workshop served to recap and consolidate what had been done before, and encourage educators to look forward and reflect on how they would proceed. Its main thrust was on how to implement the programs they had developed.

The workshop closed with the understanding that although my formal visits to the schools had come to an end, I would be available for consultation, on request, from educators. Educators preferred to contact me as and when the need should arise as opposed to making preliminary arrangements. To date informal visits and conversations with various educators have happened.

5.9. Exit the Psychologist – Yes, But When?

I had to exit the schools (for practical reasons, and wanting to hand over power to the people for their own process), but did not want to be guilty of rural development tourism – the brief rural visit by the professional (Chambers, 1994a). It was extremely difficult to assess when would be the appropriate time to exit, and how to negotiate this. This difficulty presents itself to psychologists working in urban schools as well, and Gibson (2000) describes how difficult it is to identify the precise moment at which a "desired end-point" is achieved in the consultative relationship. The terms of our contract in part made the decision for me, but deciding what kind of follow-up I might offer, and what would promote sustainability of the effects of the interaction, was another matter. Although my formal visits to the schools had come to an end, I was quite willing to continue working with the schools in a less intense way. Rather than terminating altogether, I, in line with research on interventions in urban schools (De Jong, 1996), wanted to maintain some kind of relationship with gradually decreasing input as the educators' capacity increased. However, on "handing over the stick" to participants at the final

workshop, they seemingly preferred to contact me should they need to. Rightly or wrongly, in wanting to be supportive and not evaluative, I let educators determine the nature of any ongoing relationship.

According to the feedback questionnaires, the program did:

- promote a clearer understanding of OBE and its principles;
- improve teaching standard in shifting educators' approach to learning and the learners;
- develop critical thinking skills among educators;
- teach educators how to plan and deliver a lesson;
- provide educators with a Life Orientation syllabus;

but failed to:

- provide "lesson facilitation"
- train educators in counselling skills to deal with individual child problems
- arrange more combined workshops with other schools
- give "teacher aids"

APPENDIX C: OTHER EXAMPLES OF THE PSYCHOLOGIST AS FACILITATOR

6.1.2.2. Facilitating the Creation of a Life Orientation Syllabus

A direct outcome of my involvement with educators, was the development of a Life Orientation syllabus based on OBE principles, and tailor-made for each school's context and needs. Here, the psychologist's role as facilitator is highlighted: I facilitated activities, focus groups and discussions to allow educators to come up with their own content. In the words of one educator: "This is a life's work we have created here. We did it all ourselves."

6.1.2.3. Facilitating the Development of Facilitator Skills

Part of building human capacity through promoting a development orientation, means people discover, develop and practice skills they can then use outside the research context. More could have been done to give educators an opportunity to practice these skills. Feedback from educators support this in that they wanted "lesson facilitation", consultation to their facilitation in the classroom. More planning around handing over the stick should be done in future.

6.1.2.4. Facilitating Networking among Educators, Schools and Outside Resources

A common mistake for rural developers is to assume that because people live or work in close proximity to one another, a community exists (Thornton & Ramphela, 1988). Especially in rural Stutterheim schools, many educators have been redeployed and are teaching in foreign regions to where they live or used to work. Even where this is less the case, many educators work in an insular way, not communicating with other educators about specific learners. Educators often lack knowledge about a learner's previous class performance or behaviour, or even whether they have siblings in the same school and what their performance is like. Engaging in joint group activities promoted this kind of connection among educators and were often commented on by them.

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