

**A COMMUNITY PARTNER'S PERCEPTIONS OF A
SERVICE-LEARNING PARTNERSHIP**

SUBMITTED BY

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

Literature has highlighted the importance of university-community partnerships in service-learning (SL) as a vehicle for conducting a mutually beneficial service-learning programme (Dorado & Giles, 2004). This research aimed to investigate factors influencing a SL partnership through the insights of a particular community partner. Based on a case study of a rural school in the Eastern Cape, three community partners perceptions were obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Thereafter, thematic analysis was used to analyse the data using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phase guide. Three main theme's emerged from the data that shed light to the key issues shaping community partners perceptions. These were centred on the effects of apartheid including resources, geographic location, and level of commitment from the university. The findings of this research brought forward the importance of awareness of context, responding to the context and commitment displayed in the partnership. This research further highlights the need for community partner's perspective in literature.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	2
2.1 SERVICE LEARNING	2
2.1.1 SL AND SOCIAL REDRESS	2
2.1.2 SERVICE LEARNING FOR PERSONAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT	5
2.1.3 THE ROLE OF COLLABORATION IN SL PARTNERSHIPS	6
2.1.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF MUTUAL TRUST AND RESPECT IN SL PARTNERSHIPS	7
2.1.5 RELATIONS OF POWER IMPACT SL PARTNERSHIPS	8
2.2 THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT ‘COMMUNITY’	10
2.3 THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY	11
2.4 LOCATING MY RESEARCH IN CONTEXT	11
2.5 CONCLUSION	14
CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	15
3.1 QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY DESIGN	15
3.2 SELECTING A CASE	16
3.2.1 SELECTING PARTICIPANTS	17
3.3 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS	17
3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS	19
3.4.1 FAMILIARIZING YOURSELF WITH THE DATA	20
3.4.2 GENERATING INITIAL CODES	20
3.4.3 SEARCHING FOR THEMES	21
3.4.4 REVISING THEMES	21
3.4.5 DEFINING AND NAMING THEMES	21
3.4.6 PRODUCING THE REPORT	22
3.5 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY	22
3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS	22
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION	24
4.1 AFTERMATH	24
4.1.1 LIVING ON THE MARGINS	25
4.1.2 BEARING WITNESS	26
4.2 PLUGGING THE GAPS	29
4.2.1 SOMEONE TO TALK TO	30
4.2.2 REACHING OUT	31
4.2.3 SHINING A LIGHT	33
4.3 COMING BACK	34
4.3.1 MAINTAINING CONTACT	35
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION	37
5.1 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	39

REFERENCE LIST.....	40
APPENDICIES	46
APPENDIX I: CONSENT FORM.....	46
APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE	47

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This research investigates a community partner's perspectives of a Service Learning (SL) programme. This research highlights the importance of university-community partnerships and examines factors influencing these partnerships. In particular, it focuses on the community partner's perspective. I chose to focus on this aspect because limited information has been said about it in the service learning literature.

My research is based on a study of one particular university-community partnership involving the University and a school located in the rural Eastern Cape Province. Data collection took the form of in-depth face-to-face interviews with representatives of the community partner. Participants were purposefully selected based on their involvement in the school and the SL programme.

I used Thematic Analysis to analyse the interview texts and identify emergent themes. The results of this research highlight the role of contextual factors shaping community partners' perspectives of the value of the SL programme and partnership with the University.

This report consists of five chapters. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature on SL partnerships and the South African context. Chapter Three describes the research methodology. The results of the study are presented in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five I discuss the results and present my conclusion and acknowledge the limitations to this study.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter I discuss the literature on Service Learning (SL) partnerships and the need to take into account community partners' perspectives. I begin with a discussion of the development of SL programmes in higher education. This provides the groundwork for a discussion of community partnerships in SL programmes, and the factors impacting these partnerships. Amongst these factors, this chapter includes critically thinking about the term community and the historical implications of apartheid. This chapter ends with a description of the context in which the SL programme is based upon.

2.1 SERVICE LEARNING

2.1.1 SL AND SOCIAL REDRESS

Community-based participation is the involvement of community members and academics in programmes that address social, structural, and environmental inequalities (Israel, Schulz, Parker, & Becker, 2001). Service Learning (SL) is one form of community-based participation. SL partners (community members and academics) integrate their knowledge gained to achieve a beneficial outcome (Israel et al., 2001). In South Africa, the interest in SL only developed in the late 1990's. This development was led by the Department of Education after a time of political turmoil, social injustice and inequality (Le Grange, 2007).

The identified need of SL was addressed initially in curriculum to teach students about social inequalities and challenges faced in communities. Such challenges faced in South African communities include poverty, lack of housing, lack of sanitation, high unemployment, diseases, shortage of resources and violence (Le Grange, 2007). Le Grange (2007) argues that when SL was first implemented, there were concerns that it was more theoretical than practical. Students were taught about challenges faced by communities in their curriculum but, at that time, there was little imperative to engage with community members to alleviate these challenges in a practical manner. Le Grange (2007) argues that it is not enough to only teach students about these challenges, it is important for students to work with communities in SL to alleviate such challenges. Each academic department in higher education has different resources to offer

communities. More specifically, and pertinent to this research, psychology departments offer psycho-education and support to help alleviate psychological stress that communities experience from these challenges.

In 2001, the Council of Higher Education (CHE) Higher Education Quality Committee's (HEQC) founding document identified a need for knowledge-based community service, along with teaching, learning and research (CHE, 2004). Therefore, community engagement was incorporated in the curriculum in the form of SL. This resulted in the HEQC releasing guidelines, in 2004, on SL and community engagement (Bender, Daniels, Lazarus, Naude, & Sattar, 2006). These guidelines were in response to the shift in SL as a theoretical endeavour to that of a practical endeavour that better assists communities in need.

Le Grange (2007) identifies the need for SL to be both practical and theoretically based, arguing that SL is an exploration of community life that is academically supported and where shared learning between the students and community partners is mutually beneficial. The importance of this leads to students acquiring knowledge of a community, which contributes to their personal development, while the community benefits from the student's inputs and enhanced circumstances. The beneficial outcomes of SL partnerships for students and community members is further explored in this chapter. However, even with these benefits, there are still some difficulties in SL endeavours.

Some authors have raised concerns about the effectiveness of services provided and the degree to which SL meets the needs of community members. These concerns arose from the aftermath of apartheid and the language barrier that may exist between university students and communities. Carolissen, Rohleder, Bozalek, Swartz and Leibowitz (2010) have raised concern about an overwhelming number of white students in many graduate programmes. During apartheid, only 10% of psychologists were black, as the majority of black South Africans were unable to receive tertiary education (Carolissen et al., 2010).

Impoverished communities continue to have little access to further education and training, while psychologists who are English and Afrikaans speaking focus on individual therapeutic interventions to enhance the wellbeing of a small minority of the South African population. One consequence of this is that the people who are most in need of psychological support are less likely to be able to access a psychologist who speaks their home language and this is a problem in terms of being able to communicate effectively in the therapeutic setting. Due to

the legacy of Apartheid, one may argue that community psychologists may struggle in developing mutual trust, respect and communication – which is the foundation of building relationships with their community partners. This may impact the partnership and its ability to help redress past inequalities.

To address this, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) identified the need for good practice and of assessment of SL programmes. To facilitate this, they published a guide, in 2006, to guide the implementation of SL initiatives at an institutional, faculty, programme and module level (Bender, Daniels, Lazarus, Naude, & Sattar, 2006). The following factors are taken into consideration in this guide: SL design and implementation; reflection; assessment and evaluation; partnership development; risk management and formalized agreements; management and enhancement of the quality of service learning (Bender et al, 2006).

While this guide has the potential to facilitate good SL practice, it is not the intention of my research to evaluate a SL programme in order to ascertain whether or not this is achieved, but to have an understanding about the SL partnership from the community's perspective. An important point raised by Carolissen, Rohleder, Bozalek, Swartz and Leibowitz (2010) is the need for students and communities to benefit from the SL programme. While I am confident that being involved in a SL programme benefited my development as a competent psychologist, I am interested to learn how community partners view the benefits of such partnerships.

Shared learning can take place for both students and for communities whereby students act as a bridge between the academic language used by the university and the language used by the communities (Vera & Speight, 2003). However, regardless of the language barrier, students carry out the services they bring to communities and their competency is evaluated in terms of the degree to which they meet learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Students who participate in SL programmes are expected to reflect on their engagement with their community partners in order to assess the usefulness of their training in relation to the needs of the community. While it is important to do this, it means that much of what is written about SL focuses on student learning outcomes (e.g. Eyler, Giles & Grey 2001).

This leaves questions regarding the benefits of SL for community members. The numerous benefits of SL for professional career development are highlighted in the SL literature. Alperstein (2007) states that most literature written about SL has been based on student learning outcomes. This research is discussed in the next section.

2.1.2 SERVICE LEARNING FOR PERSONAL AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Research on the benefits of SL for the student, faculty and university has been documented over a number of years. Eyler, Giles & Gray (2001) wrote a paper on different author's discussions of the benefit of SL. From this, they identify five ways which SL contributes to students in a positive way.

The first benefit to students is personal outcomes, which the authors describe as positive effects on personal development such as personal identity, spiritual growth, moral development and personal values. Furthermore, in relation to personal outcomes, SL contributes to developing leadership skills and communication skills. Similarly, Miron and Moely (2006) identified additional specific benefits to the students such as increased self-esteem and confidence. The second benefit of SL for students identified by Eyler, Giles & Gray (2001) is social outcomes. The authors argue that SL reduces racial stereotypes by contributing to students understanding of race and culture. Furthermore, it also contributes to social responsibility and citizenship.

The authors further identify the benefit of SL of students learning outcomes and career development. On learning outcomes, the authors discuss that through SL students develop skills on critical thinking, problem analysis and cognitive development. Research has shown that this contributes to student's career development (Eyler, Giles, & Gray, 2001). The last benefit identified by the authors is the relationship between students and institution, students in the SL programme have stronger relationships with their institutions and improved satisfaction with the institution overall.

Although only some of the literature is discussed above, there is a copious amount of research detailing the SL outcomes for students, faculty and university. Due to a lack of SL research evaluating the outcomes for community partners, these benefits can only be assumed (Alperstein, 2007; Eyler, Giles, & Gray, 2001). Research indicates that SL can be useful to community members and students when there is a balance between student learning and needs of the community. For SL to be meaningful, the goals of the community members and students need to be mutually met (Karasik & Wallingford, 2007).

Both partners require a balanced partnership where roles are discussed and commitment is portrayed. Partners need to perceive their relationship as equitable with shared power and resources (Karasik & Wallingford, 2007). Birdsall (2005) states that community partners are a key link to SL. Due to the lack of attention paid to the genuine engagement, SL fails to make

a genuine impact on community change/growth (Preece, 2013). Birdsall (2005) argues that to make a genuine impact in a community, SL partners should engage in activities together which leads to the assessment of needs, implementation of projects and overall improvement or impact in the community. This results in SL programmes providing avenues for building relationships between the university and community. In order for universities to engage in beneficial SL partnerships with communities, acknowledging the value of the partnership is an important factor (Birdsall, 2005).

2.1.3 THE ROLE OF COLLABORATION IN SL PARTNERSHIPS

According to Miron and Moely (2006), over the past few years there has been an increase in the discussion of the development of SL partnerships. Furthermore, there is a developing shift towards focusing on the relationship and nature of these partnerships. Literature has alluded to the fact that SL and partnership are considered to be inextricably linked (Dorado & Giles, 2004; Jacoby, 2003).

Jacoby (2003) defines the term ‘partnership’ as a close mutual collaboration between parties who share common interests, responsibility, privileges and power. The term ‘partnership’ is used as it reinforces the idea that both the university and community mutually benefit from the engagement (Jacoby, 2003). Recently there has been a focus on the university-community partnership as a vehicle for conducting SL and as a way to study the effectiveness of SL (Dorado & Giles, 2004). The best way to understand the benefits of SL is to use the partnership as the unit of analysis (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Dorado & Giles, 2004).

In many instances, SL partnerships have been identified as a catalyst for broader and deeper engagements (Jacoby, 2003). Dorado and Giles (2004) contribute to this view by exploring different levels of partnerships and the level of engagement. The authors put forward three different types of partnership on the level of engagement. Firstly, partnerships in a tentative engagement are likely to be new partnerships inexperienced with SL. These partnerships do not necessarily build mutually-satisfying relationships and may not be sustainable due to institutional factors. This may result in partnerships that change frequently, evidence little loyalty or investment and, as a result, little change is made within communities. Partners in an aligned engagement have engaged in improving the needs community members and students (Dorado and Giles, 2004). Partners in a committed engagement are characterized by their partner’s commitment to the partnership beyond a particular project. This form of partnership

generally has longstanding relationships with meaningful change made in communities (Dorado & Giles, 2004). In order for partnerships to move to an aligned path of engagement, partnerships need to create a better fit between their goals. This involves working together to solve problems, clarifying expectations and defining a process of interaction to help prevent previous problems. Due to the level of interaction and commitment, these partnerships are likely to provide mutually beneficial outcomes.

It may take time to build a relationship with a community. Jacoby (2003) discusses the importance of building a good relationship and identifies a number of ways that one can build a strong partnership. This is discussed in the next section which explores how SL partnerships can be strengthened.

2.1.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF MUTUAL TRUST AND RESPECT IN SL PARTNERSHIPS

Jacoby (2003) states that high quality SL that is beneficial to all partners involved must be built on a solid partnership foundation. The author gives nine principles for maintaining good partnerships over time (Jacoby, 2003, pp. 14). Firstly, the author discusses the need to maintain agreed upon goals and measurable outcomes for partnership. Secondly, the foundation of this relationship is characterized by mutual trust and respect. It is important for both parties to identify strengths, assets and areas for improvements within the partnership and it is important to balance power and equal sharing of resources. The fifth principle is clear, open and accessible communication between partners making it an on-going priority to listen to each need and to have a shared common language. Both parties should establish roles, norms and processes for the partnership. The author discusses the importance of feedback with a goal of continually improving the partnership and sharing credit for the partnership's accomplishments. The last principle the author discussed is that partnerships take time to develop and evolve (Jacoby, 2003)

From the above principles, this research argues that a successful partnership is combining knowledge, skills and resources to accomplish goals through a mutual collaborative relationship based on trust and respect (Jacoby, 2003). It has been argued that partnerships are an important factor to SL programmes. Without such partnerships, SL engagements would not be successful in bringing about change in a community. However, Dorado and Giles (2004) argue that there is little understanding of the impact of SL partnerships on communities. The

purpose of this research is to understand the usefulness of a SL partnership from the community partner's perspective, which is an under researched area in the SL literature.

In order to achieve this one needs to explore factors that may impact this partnership to determine its success. Preece (2013) states that good community SL needs to take place in a collaborative partnership that enhances mutual learning and teaching within the partnership. Miron and Moely (2006) and Sandy and Holland (2006) argue that in order to build a partnership there needs to be a development of mutual trust, respect, commitment and feedback through communication. Thus, development of this partnership starts with interpersonal relationships. Additionally, one need needs to place careful attention to the power relationship (Preece, 2013).

2.1.5 RELATIONS OF POWER IMPACT SL PARTNERSHIPS

Osman and Attwood (2007, p. 17) view power as “fluid, and existing in a multiplicity of institutional and psychological forces”. Power, in this case, isn't as it was during Apartheid – a repressive force, but rather as constantly circulating and shifting with no fixed point. Students and educators rely on contextual knowledge from their community partners, if students are denied this then they are denied an opportunity to learn. Similarly, if students do not share their knowledge, the community partners will be denied an opportunity to learn. Power is not something that is possessed by only one person or group (Osman and Attwood, 2007).

One may argue that people with authority or offering a service may have more power than the person receiving the help. However, Osman and Attwood (2007) state that power is imprinted in the everyday actions into everyone's life, power is therefore exercised continually by everyone and not only the dominant few (in this case students and university). Additionally, power is a system that surrounds us. The university and students may have intentions in which they mobilize resources or engage in the management of desired outcomes but these outcomes are not guaranteed. Osman and Attwood (2007) state that one should be aware of relations of power between institutions and community partners, and the way in which they impact SL partnerships.

To avoid power imbalances, there needs to be a mode of collaboration whereby both the university and the community act in an equitable manner in the relationship (Mitchell & Humphries, 2007). Sandy and Holland (2006) state that, to strengthen university-community

partnerships, it is important to acknowledge the value of good communication. According to Worrall (2007) communication is at the heart of good SL partnerships. Therefore, university and community partners may have a sense of miscommunication at the beginning but may develop better communication infrastructure overtime.

In addition to communication, successful partnerships require a long-term commitment to mutually agreed upon goals. Long-term relationships are sustained by interpersonal relationships. The stronger and more committed the relationship, the stronger and more beneficial the partnership (Sandy & Holland, 2006). The strength of the relationship appears to hinge on: levels of responsiveness; modes of communication, response consistency and degree of accessibility. Good SL relationships are founded on trust and respect, which is earned over time (Sandy & Holland, 2006).

Birdall (2005) and Alperstein (2007) conducted research on community partners' reflections and concluded that community partners identify the building of strong relationships, sharing of programme resources and public relations as important factors for a successful and beneficial partnership. According to Alperstein (2007), the role and expectation of both partners need to be clearly identified. Additionally, community partners need to be able to influence decision-making. Alperstein (2007) argues that the absence of community partners' perspectives in the SL literature evidences unequal relationships in SL programmes. This is problematic in the light of the fact that SL programmes are intended to enhance the social responsiveness of academic institutions in a country that is trying to address historic inequalities and power differentials.

The original focus of this research was on the role of communication in the SL partnership, but this shifted to include another important factor affecting the partnership. Through the analysis of data, it became apparent that apartheid has left an indelible mark on this community and this historic context plays a role in determining the importance of this SL partnership for the marginalized community in which it is located.

This issue has emerged in other research. For example, Mitchell and Jonker (2013) report the following issues shaping teachers experiences in similarly marginalized locations: starving children; lack of resources; overcrowded classrooms; lack of parental involvement. Such difficulties are a product of past injustices and play a role in relationships with community partners.

2.2 THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT ‘COMMUNITY’

According to Thornton and Ramphela (1988), the term community is a political one. Butchart and Seedat (1990), state that in most countries you will find exploitation and oppression of economically underprivileged political minorities. However, South Africa is unique due to the Apartheid laws. The term community was used to justify grouping people and forcing them to into different areas. The Group Areas Act separated people of colour from the white population. Persons of a particular race were given designated areas to live, conduct business, schooling and seek health care. Black South Africans were further segregated into various tribes based on the language they spoke and ethnicity, such as; Isi-Xhosa, Isi-Zulu, Venda and so on (Bhana, Petersen, & Rochat, 2007).

Counselling psychology played an important role in assisting the segregation of people in South Africa as a sub-discipline in psychology, linked to Afrikaner ideologies (Leach, Akhurst, & Basson, 2003). Counselling Psychology was used as a tool to enforce oppression and segregation in the Apartheid era. This was done by using assessments that were normed on European and North American populations to test and assess black South Africans. Their under-performance in these assessments was assumed to evidence their diminished capacity (rather than assessment bias) and was used for the justification of segregation from white South Africans (Leach, Akhurst, & Basson, 2003).

Segregation left people of colour with little access to resources, isolated in poor living conditions characterized by high levels of unemployment (Butchart & Seedat, 1990). Segregation and the structural effects of apartheid are well documented. Related to this, a number of authors have commented on how the history of spatial control and racial separation has left a mark on contemporary South African landscapes (Dixon & Durrheim, 2003). While segregation in South Africa was, historically, as a result of racist policies that determined where people may and may not live, contemporary segregation is achieved through economic disparities that occur along racial lines as a result of that history (Dixon & Durrheim, 2003). Goldberg (1998, p. 18) uses the term “white flight” to describe a phenomenon whereby whites who have lost political control as a result of political transformation abandon the districts that they have lost power over and escape from the public realm into affluent private enclaves. Thus, in building partnerships, one needs to take into account the past and current struggles of community partners.

The term community itself is thought of in different ways, commonly as a political entity. One may see the term community as linked to apartheid policy, which was used to bar people of colour from accessing resources such as housing, jobs and education (Butchart & Seedat, 1990). By contrast, Thornton and Ramphela (1988) argue that, in the post-apartheid era, the term community is used to identify victims of past injustices for the purposes of social redress.

2.3 THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY

Psychological interventions have been described as mechanisms of political ideologies shaping social formations (Butchart & Seedat, 1990). The development of community psychology began in the USA in the 1950s and in South Africa in the 1980s. The development of community psychology, in South Africa was as a result of social and political turmoil and the imperative to be responsive (Carolissen, Rohleder, Bozalek, Swartz & Leibowitz, 2010).

Community psychology is concerned with understanding people in their communities using various interventions to facilitate change and improve mental health (Ratele, 2012). Community psychologists value empowerment, collaboration, and a systems approach to understanding behaviour (Carolissen et al, 2010). Additionally, community psychology aims to enhance well-being and promote justice in communities that have experienced oppression and which are in need of collaborative empowerment (Cook, 2014). The values and applications of community psychology have shifted the discipline from individualistic psychotherapeutic practices to include community-based approaches (Carolissen et al., 2010). According to Carolissen et al. (2010), community psychology was developed to address the inequalities resulting from apartheid and provide services to those who are unable to access and afford them. Such inequalities from apartheid include lack of resources resulting in poverty, poor health and education and adverse living conditions. In the next section I describe these factors that characterise the context in which my research was located.

2.4 LOCATING MY RESEARCH IN CONTEXT

My research was grounded in a SL programme that formed a part of our training in community psychology. The community partner was a school (educators and learners) situated in an impoverished community in the rural Eastern Cape Province. During apartheid, this area was racially divided. Poor farm workers lived on farms owned by wealthy white farmers. This

pattern of segregation persists today. However, many farm workers have been forced off the farmers they work on and live in slums on the periphery of the agricultural land.

The school was built during apartheid in order to provide the white farm owner's children with an education. In the post-apartheid era, schools have been desegregated. However, as the children of the poor farm labourers rerolled at the school, wealthy white parents opted to move their children to boarding schools away from home.

The community in which the school is located is under resourced, impoverished and has high levels of unemployment and poor living conditions. These living conditions result in a sense of abandonment, as documented by Ngcobo and Tikly (2010). The theme abandonment has not recieved much recognition in the literature, but it can be inferred from many of the observations.

In South Africa millions of children are abandonded by their biological parents who are unable to adequate provide food and shelter (Whetten, Ostermann, Whetten, Pence, O'Donnell, Messer and Thielman, 2009). Studies have documented the affects of abandondment on children. These include trauamtic grief, poverty, greater liklihood of being exploited as well as impaired cognitive and emotional development (Whetten et al., 2009). The aftermath of apartheid has left communities with little resources, and this has forced many adults to seek employment elsewhere. In such instances, children are often left to care for their younger siblings, or left to be cared for by extended family or other members of the community.

In some communities, child-headed households are a familiar phenomenon. They are left to rely on charity from others, social grants, and formal employment that does not provide a reliable income (Meintjies, Hall, Marera, & Boulle, 2010). Most children in these circumstances are hungry, are in poor health, and have few opportunities to develop their potential. Furthermore, they have little protection against abuse and exploitation (Richter & Desmond, 2008). The psychological distress these children experience includes depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and peer and conduct problems (Cluver, Gardner, & Operario, 2007). Amongst the above psychological distress, there is a sense of abandonment of these children who need to become self-reliant or rely on the care of elderly people.

In some circumstances, orphaned or abandoned children will be cared for by grandparents or other elderly members in the community. These elderly live in multigenerational households,

often support the household through the National Means-Test Non-Contributory Pension Fund given by the government, which is intended to sustain individuals in their old age (Schatz & Ogunmefun, 2007). The elderly members supporting their family emotionally, physically and financially become vital members in the household and without such support, the family members would be destitute (Schatz & Ogunmefun, 2007). Thus, members in the household live on an extremely little amount of money each month. Poverty is widespread in historically disadvantaged communities and this has numerous repercussions. The psychosocial effects of poverty include unfavourable interpersonal relations, threats to shelter, hunger, violence from others, lack of social support, threats to schooling and future prospects, helplessness, teenage pregnancy and suicidality (Ratele, 2012).

Alcohol abuse is rife in low-income settings. This exacerbates poverty as expenditure on alcohol constitutes a large proportion of household income, leaving less money for food and other basic necessities (Choi, Watt, Skinner, Kalichman, & Sikkema, 2015). Thus, alcohol abuse generally leads to greater economic strain and food shortages in the household (Choi et al., 2015). Greater starvation is linked to higher alcohol consumption in low-income settings. Research has shown that children of parents who abuse alcohol are more likely to experience abuse, neglect, compromised health, disrupted family functioning, shoulder adult responsibilities, develop behaviour problems and engage in substance abuse themselves (Choi et al., 2015).

Another consequence of poverty is poor health. According to Kalichman, Simbayi, Kagee, Toefy, Jooste, Cain, and Cherry (2006), individuals living in resource-poor settings are at greater risk of becoming HIV infected. The authors argued that there is a high correlation between HIV and poverty. Ill-health exacerbates poverty and increases the number of child-headed households.

The impact of apartheid has greatly affected communities and their living circumstances. The above factors are important to keep in mind when engaging communities. Awareness of these factors provides practitioners with insight into the community's struggles and the importance of providing appropriate support.

2.5 CONCLUSION

Discussion in this chapter has highlighted the importance of SL partnerships and the factors influencing these partnerships. Included in this discussion, was consideration of the implications of apartheid in the contemporary context, and the struggles community members may experience as a result. In the next chapter I describe the research design and methodology.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The aim of this research is to investigate a community partner's perceptions of a SL programme. In this chapter I begin with a discussion of the research design. A description of the case following before describing the methods employed to collect, transcribe, code and analyse the data. The key ethical issues considered significant to the study are also discussed.

3.1 QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY DESIGN

This research takes the form of a qualitative case study that seeks an in-depth and contextual understanding of community partner's perceptions of a SL programme (Golafshani, 2003). Literature on SL partnerships has described each partnership as being unique (Dorado & Giles, 2004). This means that each partnership should be investigated in relation to its particularities and the specific context in which it is located. The use of the case study design is appropriate for this research as it seeks to provide in-depth analysis of a particular phenomenon in the context in which it occurs (Yin, 1998). Thus the use of a case study method makes it possible to gain an understanding of a particular SL partnership where the community's perceptions can be explored (Yin, 2003).

This research takes the form of a single case study. According to Ellram (1996), the use of a single case study can provide valuable information about the research question and is a feasible option where there is difficulty in gaining access to multiple organizations, or there is a rarity in the particular case to be studied. I chose to ground my study in a single SL programme because this programme was located at a school that was situated in a deeply rural area far from the university town. Service learning programmes located closer to town have better access to a variety of support services and are therefore less dependent on the university. I reasoned that this may impact the importance of the SL programme for the community partner.

3.2 SELECTING A CASE

Purposive sampling is the most commonly used sampling strategy and is generally based on selection criteria relevant to a particular research objective (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). The choice of a specific SL partnership is characteristic of purposive sampling (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). The SL partnership that was accessed for the purposes of this case study is a partnership with a secondary school in a rural community. Preliminary information was gathered about this particular partnership by talking to peers and lecturers who had been involved in the partnership.

The university students in the SL partnership are in their first year of a Masters level programme in clinical or counselling psychology. In this programme, students are involved in service learning through the Community Psychology module which involves both theoretical and practical components. The theoretical component is guided by the principles of community psychology which include enhancing the wellbeing of communities and promoting justice for all members through collaboration where there is division, oppression and need for empowerment (Cook, 2014). This is achieved through collaboration and partnership to advance social justice and effective community change (Cook, 2014). The practical component required the students to engage with community partners for a period of five months during which time they offered psycho-social and psycho-educational support. Students made use of different theoretical perspectives when engaging with the scholars. These included multicultural competence, empowerment over prevention, Asset-based community development and community participation. These theoretical perspectives provided students with knowledge of multiculturalism, empowering communities through their active participation and identification of needs.

The SL partnership accessed for the purposes of this research was initiated in 2008. The community partner is a secondary school situated in an isolated and impoverished community. During apartheid, this area was racially divided between white farm owners and black farm workers, and that segregation is still apparent today. The secondary school where this study was located was built in the 1950s, for the sole purpose of educating white farm owner's children. In the post-apartheid era, white learners who, in the past, would have attended the school are now sent away to study in city schools and the school now educates the less privileged children of the farm workers. The farm workers and their children live in informal, under-resourced settlements near the school where this research is located. This community is

severely under resourced and impoverished, with high unemployment and poor living conditions. The school requested that the university provided psychosocial and psycho-education support addressing topics on drugs and alcohol abuse, teenage pregnancy and absenteeism. Students address these topics through fun, age appropriate educational activities using their artistic skills of singing, dancing, acting and drawing.

3.2.1 SELECTING PARTICIPANTS

Three participants were interviewed in this study. The participants are educators in the school who were selected based on their involvement in the SL programme. Furthermore, they could provide detailed accounts of the services provided by the university and background information about the community and living conditions. Once the participants were identified, permission to have interviews with the participants was obtained from the school principal and each participant as well. Due to the longstanding relationship with the university, the participants will be able to provide detailed accounts of their perceptions of the partnership with the university.

3.3 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Semi-structured, in-depth, personal interviews are the best way to access and explore perceptions, opinions and concerns of community members. Additionally, the use of semi-structured interviews provides participants with the freedom to explore their experiences and perceptions without restriction from the interviewer (Barriball & White, 1994; Laforest, 2009). Barriball and White (1994) argue that semi-structured interviews also allow for clarification and discussion of relevant and sensitive issues raised by the participants. Semi-structured, in-depth, personal interviews can elicit valuable and complete information with the freedom to explore and clarify significant points.

Barriball and White (1994) state that when interviewing people whose first language is not English it is important to take into account that not every word has the same meaning to every participant. This is important to know because the first language of the participants in this study is isiXhosa. Thus, the use of semi-structured interviews enables the interviewer freedom to convey the equivalence of meaning through the use of different words (Barriball & White,

1994). This was another reason why semi-structured, in-depth, interviews were the most appropriate data collection method for this research.

I took a number of steps in developing the open ended questions. Research on interviewing was gathered from the following authors and taken into consideration when developing an interview schedule; Allan (2011); Barriball and White (1994); Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006); Heartly (2004). According to Barriball and White (1994) when developing an interview schedule one should review all the relevant literature on the research topic, consider the participants level of education and language and take into consideration practical issues of time and location restraints. Furthermore, one should ensure it is exploratory in order to elicit the participants' experiences as well as sufficiently standardized to facilitate comparability between participants. The interview schedule that I developed took these factors into consideration. The schedule consisted of ten open-ended questions and the duration of each interview was estimated at about forty minutes, depending on the amount of input from each participant and the availability of time they had for the interview.

The questions were structured around the research topic which aimed to elicit information on the background of the school and community, the SL programme, communication between the partners, the relationship between the school and university and information on other partnerships with the school. The same interview schedule was used for each interview (see appendix II). Once the interview schedule was developed, I made contact with the school to inform them about the research and to request their participation.

I ensured that the participants felt at ease throughout the interview by developing a relationship with the participants and beginning the interview with an explanation about the research. I avoided asking leading or excessively probing questions. At the end of each interview I provided time for the participants to further explore issues that were important to them or to speak on issues that they felt hadn't been adequately discussed. Furthermore, time was given to reflect on participants' experiences of the interview. These steps were taken to minimise the risks of inadvertently causing embarrassment or discomfort during the interviews. At the end of each interview I wrote down notes about significant aspects of the interview. For example, questions which participants had found easier or more difficult to respond to.

Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. An audio recorder was used to facilitate data collection and analysis as it provides a direct replication of the interview with

verbal and nonverbal cues (such as pauses or silences). Furthermore, audio recording reduces potential for interview error or giving a false representation of what the participants discussed (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006). I transcribed all of the interviews. This enhanced confidentiality and also provided me with an opportunity to become more closely aware of what has been shared during the interviews. I provided copies of the interview transcripts to my supervisor when all identifying information had been removed. My supervisor read through the interview transcripts before we met to discuss my preliminary findings.

3.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Thematic Analysis is a widely used tool in qualitative research for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I decided to make use of thematic analysis because it provides a flexible, rich and detailed account of the data. It interprets various aspects of the research topic. Thematic analysis is different from other analytic methods as it describes patterns across data without requiring detailed theoretical and technological approaches such as grounded theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The flexibility of thematic analysis is well suited to this research as it reflects key themes emerging in the interview with regard to participants' perceptions of the service learning programme. It portrays the experiences that community members spoke about and also unpacks these experiences further giving an in-depth account of their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

According to Braun and Clarke (2006) a good thematic analysis will make the number of observations about the data and elaborate on what they represent. However, there are a number of issues that need to be taken into consideration before doing a thematic analysis. A theme is not dependable on quantifiable measures, but whether it captures something important in relation to the research question. Furthermore, themes that are identified, coded and analysed need to reflect the entire data corpus in order to be valid. There is always a risk that some in-depth phenomena and complexities may be lost.

Braun and Clarke (2006) discuss potential downfalls or 'mismatches' of thematic analysis that researchers should be aware of. These were taken into consideration when the data was analysed and the following steps were taken to ensure this research reduces such downfalls. Firstly, the authors discuss the failure to analyse all the data stating that one should not paraphrase the content but rather provide verbatim extracts to illustrate and support the analytic

points. Furthermore, researchers should not use interview questions as themes that are reported. This would lead to a lack of analysis to identify theme and connect patterns. Lastly, one should endeavour to avoid mismatch between data and analytic claims where such claims cannot be supported by the data. Such instances may occur when the researcher captures their preconceived ideas or theoretical perspective rather than capturing themes and analysing the data retrieved from participants. The authors provide a step by step guide to analyse the data and retrieve themes. The following six phase guide to analysing data is taken from Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 86-93). Each phase will be discussed and a description of how the researcher analysed the data retrieved from the three interviews.

3.4.1 FAMILIARIZING YOURSELF WITH THE DATA

The first phase according the Braun and Clarke (2006) is transcribing data, reading and rereading data and noting down initial ideas. As stated, I transcribed the interviews myself in order to improve my familiarity of the contents. In the process, I took care to remove participants' names and other identifying information to maintain confidentiality. After an interview was transcribed, it was checked numerous times against the original audio recording of the interview. Braun and Clarke (2006) discuss the necessity in this phase to familiarize oneself with the data. During the transcription process, I read through each interview numerous times and began to make observations of analytic interest.

3.4.2 GENERATING INITIAL CODES

Once the interviews had been transcribed and I was familiar with the data, the analysis proceeded to the second phase. This phase involves the production of initial code. The coding process involves recognizing an important moment and highlighting it; making a note of something important prior to interpretation. A good code is one that captures the qualitative richness of a phenomenon and organises it into themes which are further analysed (Fereday & Muir-cochrane, 2006). Codes identify a feature of the data (semantic or latent content) that appears interesting to the researcher. The process of coding data involves organising the data into meaningful clusters.

3.4.3 SEARCHING FOR THEMES

According to Braun and Clarke (2006) phase three begins when data is coded resulting in a long list of different codes that vary across the data corpus. This phase entails analysing the broader level of codes and sorting codes into potential themes.

According to the Braun and Clarke (2006), it is important in thematic analysis to identify different level themes. Semantic or explicit level of interpretation involves identifying themes that have explicit meaning. By contrast, latent content holds meaning that is not immediately obvious but relates to underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations. Thus, latent content seeks to identify features that gave form or meaning to the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). During this phase of the analysis, I started thinking about the relationship between the codes and emergent themes. At the end of the coding phase, I had a collection of preliminary themes and sub-themes that all of my data fitted into.

3.4.4 REVISING THEMES

Phase four begins when the researcher has derived at a set of preliminary themes and seeks to refine these themes. During this phase, some themes may be discarded whereas other new themes may emerge, while others are broken down into sub-themes. When this was complete I reread the entire data set to test the general fit of all the themes. At the end of this phase I had an idea of what the different themes were and how they connected to the overall story about the data.

3.4.5 DEFINING AND NAMING THEMES

According to Braun and Clarke (2006) phase five commences when the researcher has a thematic map of their data. Thereafter, the researcher must further refine the themes to investigate the essence of what each theme is about and the aspects of the data each theme captures. The themes were organised into a coherent account of the data into a narrative. This was done by identifying what each theme was saying and how it fitted into the overall narrative in relation to the research question. Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that researchers need to give thought to how themes are named in the final analysis.

3.4.6 PRODUCING THE REPORT

Once the themes were fully developed, the final stage of analysing the interpretive themes commenced. Phase six entails the final write-up of these themes which provides a story of the data. At this stage literature was used to further develop the story and link it to observations made in previous research. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), the write-up must provide sufficient evidence of the themes within the data. In the final analysis, three key themes emerged. These themes and their sub-themes are presented in the findings and analysis chapter.

3.5 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Reliability in social science research is generally regarded as the degree to which results can be replicated (Silverman, 2009). However, qualitative researchers assume a changing and variable reality for individuals and therefore do not expect to find results that can be repeated exactly. Rather, they seek a degree of dependability. This means that the reader should be persuaded that the findings do reflect what is in the data. Dependability is achieved by being candid regarding the methodology used and also through the richness of analysis of the results of interviews (Silverman, 2009). One of the ways in which dependability was enhanced in this research is through the constant comparison of data. Some variation between accounts is to be expected but if common themes emerge then the dependability of the data is reinforced. Data from the interviews were also constantly compared to literature findings and, again, although variation is expected across different contexts, similarities reinforce their dependability. In this report, I present verbatim extracts from the data corpus to provide evidence for my analytic claims.

3.6 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study was reviewed and approved by the Rhodes University Psychology Department Research Projects and Ethics Review Committee (RPERC). Written informed consent was obtained from all of the participants. Prior to the interviews, the researcher had a meeting with all participants explaining the nature and purpose of the research, the interview structure and audio recording of the interview. Each participant was informed that participation was voluntary. I also explain how confidentiality of personal information would be managed. The

aim of this was to provide the participants with all relevant information and allow them time to decide if they wanted to participate without feeling pressured to do so. Once verbal consent was obtained, a time and date convenient for each participant was set up in order to conduct the interviews.

Before each interview commenced, the participants were reminded about the nature and aims of the study (see Appendix II). Furthermore, the information that I provided to participants about the study was complete and accurate and in keeping with ethical research principles as described by Allan (2011) and Terre Blanche, Durrheim and Painter (2006).

I spoke to participants about how anonymity and confidentiality would be managed and explained that their names as well as details of the school and geographic location would be changed or omitted in the write-up of the research.

Participants were informed about their right to not answer questions they did not feel comfortable answering. Participants were also informed about the use of an audio recorder to record the interviews. The researcher explained the purpose of using an audio recorder and that the interview would be transcribed verbatim by the researcher herself. Participants were asked to sign consent forms detailing this information (see Appendix I). In addition, I also discussed the amount of time the interview would take and invited participants to ask me to clarify anything point that was not clear to them. Once all the necessary information had been discussed, participants signed the consent form and the interview commenced.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research investigated a community partner's perceptions of a SL programme. Data was analysed following Braun and Clark's (2006) six-phase guide for a thematic analysis. This made it possible to examine, in-depth, the reality of each participants' perceptions. Three broad themes emerged in the analysis of participants' perceptions, each with a number of related subthemes. My analysis of each of these themes and subthemes is presented in this chapter.

4.1 AFTERMATH

Interviews with participants began with an open-ended question that asked participants to talk about the school and the community in which it is located. This question was intended to provide some context against which later discussion about the programme and the partnership with the University could be understood. In my analysis, participants' descriptions of the various layers of context (social, economic, political, historic) in which the school is located, became central to my understanding of the importance of the partnership with the university for our community partner.

Extract 1: "The school was left, abandoned"

P1 The school was built in the 1950s

K Okay

P1 So it's a very very old school

K Ja

P1 It was a white school, whites only then. ((Takes a breath)) But during 1994 after the independence, the democratic South Africa there was an outcry that there were few learners at this school then, few white learners. So it had, there were other schools like the coloured schools and the black schools in the location. And because of the few numbers of the white learners here, the community or these other two schools felt that, why can't they merge and form one school? So, because of that, the blacks and the coloureds were integrated and, unfortunately, the school was left, abandoned

K A huh, okay

P1 The whites, the white residents, they took their children to [school in town]. So it was left

K Yes

P1 So ... it became known now as [the] combined school ... most of the learners here are Xhosa speaking because in the community also they are speaking Xhosa. So yes, yes they are originally coloureds, most of them, but they speak Xhosa

Segregation and the structural effects of apartheid are well documented. Related to this, a number of authors have commented on how the history of spatial control and racial separation has left a mark on contemporary South African landscapes (Dixon & Durrheim, 2003). What is interesting about this (in relation to the comments made in Extract 1) is that while segregation in South Africa was, historically, as a result of racist policies that determined where people may and may not live, contemporary segregation is achieved through economic disparities that occur along racial lines as a result of that history (Dixon & Durrheim, 2003).

Goldberg (1998, p. 18) uses the term “white flight” to describe a phenomenon whereby whites who have lost political control as a result of political transformation abandon the districts that they have lost power over. However, relocation is difficult for farmers who are invested in the land in the district in which this school is located. Thus, in this context, white flight has taken the form of a withdrawal from the local school system.

I did not interview the white farmers, but it is likely that they would have raised concerns about the quality of education as a result of combining a historically white school with schools that are historically black. These concerns would not have been completely unfounded. Another consequence of apartheid policy was racially segregated education, which resulted in “whites only” schools and universities receiving the lion’s share of the education budget, even though they accommodated the minority of students. Thus, this mode of white flight highlights another dimension of the new segregation in South Africa. Education in the post-apartheid era remains divided along racial lines as a result of economic disparities. Many historically black schools are low or no fee paying schools, while historically white schools charge exorbitant fees in order to retain their privilege. In Extract 1, the participant describes the experience of this phenomenon as “being left, abandoned”. Importantly, this experience of abandonment is specifically raced and classed.

4.1.1 LIVING ON THE MARGINS

The significance of the sense of abandonment described above must be understood in relation to the circumstances of the community in which the school at which the SL programme is located. These circumstances are described in statements in Extract 2.

Extract 2: “Poverty is the problem”

- P1 Poverty is the problem because there are no jobs. The unemployment rate is so high. They depend on social grants, on foster care grants and the case being like that, there is an abuse of alcohol in this small community. So now, that leaves many children unattended to

In Extract 2 (above) the participant argues that poverty is the main problem facing the community in which the school is located. Ratele (2012) argues that the psychosocial effects of poverty include unfavourable interpersonal relations such as interpersonal violence and a lack of social support, feelings of helplessness and suicidal ideation, a high rate of teenage pregnancy and school absenteeism. All of these factors were identified in participant interviews. I argue that the adverse circumstances of the community exacerbate the sense of abandonment as described in Extract 1. Furthermore, participants describe the effects of poverty as a cycle that the learners at the school and the community are inevitably caught up in.

Extract 3: “They are doing it in front of them”

- P2 Parents abuse alcohol. So they are also now drinking because they think maybe what the parents are doing is the right thing because they are doing it in front of them

Parental alcohol abuse can greatly affect a child’s welfare. Research has shown that children of parents who abuse alcohol are more likely to experience abuse, neglect, compromised health, disrupted family functioning, shoulder adult responsibilities, develop behaviour problems and engage in substance abuse themselves (Choi, Watt, Skinner, Kalichman, & Sikkema, 2015). Alcohol abuse is common amongst individuals of different racial categories and is not specific to particular social groups. However, research identifies a correlation between poverty and high levels of alcohol consumption (Kalichman, Simbayi, Kagee, Toefy, Jooste, Cain, & Cherry, 2006). Parental alcohol abuse generally leads to further economic strain and food shortages in the household (Choi et al., 2015). In addition, when parents are intoxicated, children are often left unattended. These children have to assume responsibility of their own care and the care of their younger siblings. This increases their vulnerability and exposure to harm.

4.1.2 BEARING WITNESS

The adverse circumstances of the learners at the school where the SL programme is located are not unique to this community. As argued in the previous section, these circumstances are a direct consequence of apartheid era policy and practice. Thus, across South Africa, many

communities are similarly affected. Mitchell and Jonker (2013), for example, have written about teacher's experiences of witnessing starving children and the lack of parental involvement in other under resourced communities. In this study, it was apparent that the difficult circumstances in which the learners lived had a tremendous effect on the teacher's experiences of teaching at the school.

Extract 4: "It's worse when you love children"

P2 I am telling you, I am telling you. It's worse when you love children, looking at them. And some of them are eager to learn, but how can they learn if they don't have food in their stomach? We do, we do give them food here but it's not enough because by the time they get home they are hungry again

The living conditions of learners directly impacts the teachers and their ability to cope with the learners. Research conducted in impoverished communities discuss extensively the challenges faced by the learners and teachers. However, little research highlights the emotional difficulties teachers experience in bearing witness to such circumstances, especially by teachers who do not reside in the community. According to Sonn (2013), there are numerous contributors to the stress and emotional difficulties experienced by teachers. The author includes mistrust between learners and teachers, lack of support from external agents, over-crowding in classrooms, ill-mannered children and adverse living conditions that contribute to a deterioration in teachers' emotional well-being. High levels of physical stress lead to insomnia, headaches and feelings of nausea or sickness.

Teachers can also experience high levels of stress when parents are dependent on learners to perform well in school to provide a better life for the family (Ngcobo & Tikly, 2010). This puts tremendous pressure on the teachers when the children do not perform well academically. However, participants state that parents show a lack of involvement in the child's education and thus teachers are unable to work with the parents to improve their child's education.

Teachers' despair at witnessing the circumstances in which the learners live is exacerbated by the fact that, in many cases, there is little additional support (other than what is provided by the teachers at school) available to the learners in their community. Participants explained that this was because many learners had been orphaned by HIV/AIDS and had either become a child-headed household or had been left in the care of grandparents or extended family.

Extract 5: "That's where the grandmothers come in"

- P3 There are a lot of kids who are coming from, uh, child headed families. You will find out that the parents are deceased due to HIV and AIDS. You see, now that's where the grandmothers come in, they will be the ones who are looking after the kids

According to Kalichmam, Simbayi, Kagee, Toefy, Jooste, Cain, and Cherry (2006), individuals living in resource poor settings are at greater risk of HIV infection. One consequence of this is the substantial increase in orphaned and vulnerable children. In South Africa, 18% of orphaned children have been orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS (Meintjies, Hall, Marera, & Boule, 2010). Poverty is widespread in South Africa. However, children who are orphaned and/or left in the care of older relatives experience greater income poverty and poorer access to social services (Meintjies et al., 2010). In this community, children are additionally affected by their geographic location, which exacerbates their isolation and the difficulty of accessing social services and support.

Many children in this community live with elderly relatives who shoulder the burden of care. Elderly relatives rely on social support from the state to feed and provide for the children who have been left in their care (Schatz & Ogunmefun, 2007). In these households, families live off very little.

In addition to knowing that the learners have very little support available to them in their community, the teachers also acknowledged that they did not feel adequately trained to deal with the problems that the learners reported.

Extract 6: "You are not trained to help them"

- P2 It's very tough, it's very tough. As I say, looking at them and looking at their future, you just feel sorry for them because they smoke, they do drugs, sex abuse some of them have been um ((pause)) have been through a lot. But I don't know, sometimes you want to help them but you are not trained to help them, how can you help them because you are here to teach? You would love to help them but you don't know which channels or how to help them. Sometimes they will come to you and cry to you and say this is what happened to me yesterday. I went home and there was no food, or I went to home and my parents were drunk. So it's different, different, different, different, different things.

Recently, the South African government has worked to provide additional training to teachers in rural schools (Lomosfsky & Lazarus, 2010) and participants in this study reported receiving training. However, this training does not provide the sorts of skills required to teach in this context. Participants repeatedly reported feeling ill equipped to deal with the social problems

and related anxiety and stress. The rural location of the school makes it difficult for the teachers to network and to access the sorts of resources required to assist the children.

Some of the problems teachers' experience is the impact of social issues on the learner's motivation and ability to concentrate in school. Teachers complain about poor conduct and disruptive behaviour. Even with some understanding and empathy for the circumstances in which the children live, teachers report that they are concerned about losing focus on the academic curriculum and preparing students for national examinations. These working conditions have a huge impact on the teacher's experiences of working at the school. Teachers are direct witnesses of these struggles and have expressed the difficulty in managing curriculum and psychological distress with little external support.

4.2 PLUGGING THE GAPS

One of the participants in this study had been involved in the SL programme from the very beginning. In Extract 7 (below), she describes the circumstances that led to the initiative. I was interested to learn that the initial contact with the University was occasioned by the fact that a teacher at the school was enrolled in a programme at the University, and that it was as a result of this link between the school and the University that led to the suggestion of a SL programme.

Extract 7: "An educator here was also a student at the University"

- P1 Oh I started in this school in 2008, when [this programme] started. An educator here was also a student at the University. So when I came in, she introduced, eh, some of the students from [the university] to me. Then I said to her, let's go for it, because these people are going to help us. Not financial, no don't, we don't ask for donations, but they going to bring in their expertise, their knowledge, their time with the learners, so they started in 2008

Some of the SL literature is critical of the balance of benefits resulting from SL programmes. In particular, it has been argued that university partners derive greater benefit as a result of the practical experience that students are afforded. However, having listened to participants' accounts of the circumstances of the learners at the school, and how this affects the teaching staff, I am convinced of the potential benefits to the community partner; particularly as it pertains to accessing appropriate "expertise". These expertise include psycho-education and psycho-social support of emotional wellbeing. However, in relation to this point, I was interested to observe the wide range of benefits that participants expected in relation to the SL

partnership. Chief among these were the issues already identified in previous extracts, which are also summarised in Extract 8 below.

Extract 8: “So they came up with a lot of programmes that were related to the problem”

P3 So I was teaching life orientation and I was invited to a meeting with the university whereby they say they want to start a program whereby the students are going to help in our school, especially for life orientation, you know. So, they came up with a lot of programs that were related to the problem, the challenges that the learners would bring to school. So we mentioned that our learners, in the background as I have just given you, that our learners, some of them are HIV positive, there's a lot of alcohol abuse, eh, in the community, and it's affecting them you see and as a result of that their performance was very low

However, in addition to providing learners with psychological support, the teachers also viewed particular demographic characteristics of the university students involved in the SL programme as being of particular benefit to the learners. This is discussed in more detail in the sections that follow.

4.2.1 SOMEONE TO TALK TO

The benefits that participants identified varied depending on the particular characteristics of the students involved in the SL programme. However, language tended to be foremost among these.

Extract 9: “There will be somebody who knows a little bit of Xhosa”

P1 Some of the students, some of the students are struggling with English. So what I like with [the University], always they will mix. There will be somebody who knows a little bit of Xhosa, neh, always, always in all their groups, in all their groups since they started here, as if they know this place, so that they accommodate my learners

The participant's remark regarding language proficiency, and isiXhosa proficiency in particular, is an important issue. One consequence of the skewed proportion of psychologists in South Africa not being proficient in a black African language is that the people who are most in need of psychological support are less likely to be able to access a psychologist who speaks their home language and that this is a problem in terms of being able to communicate effectively in the therapeutic setting.

I also argue that, given the learners circumstances, that it is potentially beneficial for them to have an opportunity to engage with young black men and women who they can identify with,

but who represent a life path that is different to what they see in the community around them. This point was alluded to in the interviews.

Extract 10: “It was easier for the students to relate”

- P3 I think, because the university students were young[er] than the teachers there, so it was easier for the learners to relate to the students, you know. I think that they managed to get down to their level

While it was important to participants that the students participating in the SL programme were proficient in isiXhosa because this is the home language of the learners, participants also acknowledged that there were some benefits to having English speaking students involved in the SL programme.

Extract 11: “You can help us with English”

- P2 I think you can help us with English classes, reading stories for them, because we don’t have English teachers that are good in English. Come with books. Help us with reading books, because that is one thing that we don’t have

Language of instruction has been a hotly debated topic in education in South Africa for some time. While it is widely acknowledged that learners are entitled to learn in their home language (Lomosfsky & Lazarus, 2010). It is possible that learners who are not proficient in English may be at a disadvantage later on. This is partly because English is the language of instruction at almost all higher education institutions in South Africa, and because it is the language in which much of the business in the formal sector is conducted – worldwide and in South Africa. While the learners at the school where this SL programme is located may not have many prospects with regard to university education or jobs in the formal sector, it is possible that their increased vulnerability lies behind the speaker’s concern about learning English. However, it is also possible that she is just being polite, and endeavouring to see value in the participation of students in the SL programme who are not proficient in the learners’ home language.

4.2.2 REACHING OUT

Participants argued that in order to work more effectively with learners, the SL programme needed to engage the learner’s families and the community more broadly.

Extract 12: “So that it can be more balanced”

- P3 Um, as I said before, the program was working well at school. But in the community itself, uh, it was not that good

K Ja

P3 Because of the challenges that I have mentioned. So I so wish that, uh, maybe the university can send a group of students who will be going to the learners, and another group that would be working specifically with the community, so that it can be balanced

Participants stated that the engagement worked well with the learner's but they felt it was not enough in addressing the adverse living conditions. Therefore, the participants recommended that students engage with community members to alleviate these adverse conditions. At first glance, this appears to be a great solution for alleviating the adverse social conditions through addressing the perceived source of the problem. The SL literature supports this notion and highlights the need to address social issues and training for parents (Duppong-Hurley, Hoffman, Barnes, & Oats, 2015). Furthermore, research has encouraged broader-based community involvement when conducting community engagement programs (Hawe, 1994). Broader-scale interventions include helping parents to understand their child's behaviours and actively participating in addressing their child's needs. Some authors have discussed the need to work with communities as a unit as opposed to only working with individuals within the community (Cohen-Vogel, Goldring, & Smrekar, 2010). However, the findings of some research indicate that despite all best efforts, there are limitations and barriers to parental involvement (Duppong-Hurley et al., 2015).

Participants described a number of efforts on the part of the students involved in the SL programme to engage with the parents of the learners. From participant's descriptions of these engagements, I made two important observations. The first observation is that, while the students were able to establish relationships of trust with the learners engaged in the SL programme, there was little opportunity to build those relationships with the learner's parents. This had implications both in terms of establishing trust and in terms of the outcome of that interaction. In Extract 13 (below) it appears that, given the short time that the students had to engage with the learner's, their engagement focused on transferring information. However, as this participant observes, parents were unlikely to understand the usefulness of that information.

Extract 13: "They didn't know what to do with it"

P3 In terms of information, you know, they were given enough, you know, to work with. The university was coming close to them and doing everything that they could in wanting to help. But, eh, the people there are so withdrawn. And again, there was a challenge of language. As I said, they are illiterate, so I had to be the middle

person, to translate, but I was not always there to see to it [so] they have to do on their own, you know. They do it, but I only realised after, as much as they had all the information, but they didn't know what to do with it

The other important observation relates to the fact that the students lack of proficiency in isiXhosa was a key issue undermining the parent's ability to understand the information that the students were endeavouring to share with them. Participants viewed white student's lack of isiXhosa proficiency as a real challenge to engaging with the community more broadly.

Extract 14: "For the black students...it was much easier for them to understand"

P2 I remember it was an advantage for him, because he understood the language. He could speak the language that the people are speaking there, so he related very well to both the learners and the parents. Um, for the black students I think it was much easier for them to understand

Importantly, it is possibly not simply white student's lack of isiXhosa proficiency, but their presumed lack of familiarity with the circumstances of the community that also played a role in shaping participants perceptions of their suitability to this SL programme.

Extract 15: "It was difficult sometimes for white students"

P1 I don't mean to be racist, but you find out that it was difficult sometimes for white students. Some, not all of them, for some white students to, to understand and open their hearts, whole heartedly and accept the situation there and, you know, how to work with them

Race remains the foremost standard on which personal experience and social life is organised in post-apartheid South Africa (Zuma & Durrheim, 2007). The circumstances of the white university students' differs enormously in comparison to the children living in this community. This may have influenced the participant's perceptions of the student's ability to relate to the children and their parents and the conditions in which they live.

Despite some of the limitations of reaching out to learners through the SL programme, participants identified positive outcomes for the learners. Key among these outcomes was the opportunities that the forms of engagement offered.

4.2.3 SHINING A LIGHT

Participants in this study argued that the psychology students who participated in the SL programme drew on a range of techniques to engage learners at the school. Participants argued

that the value of this was that it meant that learners who were not academically skilled were given opportunities to demonstrate some of their other talents.

Extract 16: “They get a chance to shine”

- P3 For those learners, who were not performing well in the classroom, you will find out that by being involved in those projects, they get a chance to shine. You will see how good they are participating in drama, music and, you know, poetry. So that’s where we could say ah, ‘look at so and so, you know, in class he’s not performing at all but now, outside the classroom he’s doing wonders

Poverty and poor school performance are highly correlated, and both are antecedents of school dropout (HSRC, 2009). School dropout is also associated with early parenthood (HSRC, 2009). For these reasons, the State has become increasingly concerned to address poor school performance. Consequently, as the participants in this study explain, teachers are forced to focus on the curriculum, which does not afford them time to respond to the contextual factors impacting the learner’s poor performance. Arguably, focusing on the curriculum in a context where most learners perform substantially below national averages is likely to exacerbate learner’s frustrations and experiences of failure. In the light of this, participants viewed opportunities for learners to demonstrate other competencies and for these competences to be acknowledged as valuable opportunities.

4.3 COMING BACK

Numerous factors impact on building and maintaining SL partnerships. And, as Dorado and Giles (2004) argue, these factors vary from one context to another. In my analysis of the data, it emerged that, in this SL programme, commitment and consistency were key to maintaining the partnership.

Extract 17: “They are still here”

- P1 Every year, every year I get [The university] from 2008, I am getting [The university] students, new students, they graduate, next year, new group they graduate until now. This is now 2014. They are still here

In this extract the participant acknowledges the university partner’s commitment to the SL programme. Literature on SL programmes highlights the importance of consistency and continuity in services offered by the university. This is described as forming the basis of the relationship (Sandy & Holland, 2006). This particular community is located far from other

towns and therefore access to resources is scarce. Thus, the university continuing their services is very important to them.

Experiences of abandonment in the community are central to understanding the importance of commitment in the SL partnership to the participants in this study. Similar to the sentiments expressed in Extract 1 (“The school was left, abandoned”), the participant in Extract 17 describes the community as “forgotten”.

Extract 18: “And that makes it now to be a forgotten school, a forgotten population”

P2 It’s very important because of the situation here at the school. We are far from town, far from other schools, and that makes it now to be a forgotten school, a forgotten population. Everything passes us, we don’t get these opportunities. So, at least when the university comes in here, the learners can be able now to, to mingle, or to get what they need

While the South African government has implemented a number of policies and programmes aimed at social development, rural populations are less likely to benefit from these initiatives. In South Africa, as in most other developing countries, providing rural populations with access to information, services and opportunities is an on-going challenge. Research conducted by the World Bank (2006) indicates that schools play an important role in this regard because they provide a platform from which assistance such as health and nutrition programmes can operate. In developing countries, children who remain in school, generally have better outcomes – not only in terms of formal education and vocational skills, but also in terms of health. While remaining in school is an important factor in terms of the health and future prospects of learners, participants in this study expressed frustration that, given this potential, their geographic location meant that few opportunities were available to the school to draw on in order to better assist the learners and their families. Arguably, although the University is situated some distance from the school, because it is also located in the rural Eastern Cape Province, it is better positioned than most other universities to provide this much needed support, and on an on-going basis.

4.3.1 MAINTAINING CONTACT

Although the location of the University in relation to the school was a factor in maintaining the SL partnership, participants also acknowledged the importance of the University’s on-going communication with the school. While communication is important in any partnership, I argue

that where they are obvious power differentials, open and on-going communication is doubly important. In the context of this SL partnership, participants viewed this as an important factor shaping their perceptions of their University partner.

Extract 19: “They will never just vanish”

- P1 If the University students are not able to come in, they would call. They want to hear from you. They will never just vanish. They will tell you even if they are closing for holiday or bringing somebody new. All those things, as I said, respect and good communication. I am sure that is what is working very well with us.

Literature emphasizes the importance of communication as the building block of trust and respect in a SL partnership (Jacoby, 2003). In relation to respect and honesty, participants further discuss the university’s commitment to the partnership by preparing students each year.

Extract 20: “Because you get prepared people, more prepared people”

- P1 the respect and honesty because the [university] students they are friendly.. they are sent to me as if they have been told. Because you get prepared people, more prepared people

The students receive background information about the school where the SL programme is located and the circumstances of the community it serves. From the participant’s statement in Extract 20, it appears that community partners appreciate this effort. On-going contact with the school was also viewed as important in building a “good and solid relationship”.

Extract 21: “Come and visit each other like you are doing”

- P2 So I think each and everything should be built on a good and solid relationship and in doing, in doing so we need to talk with each other, to come and visit each other like you are doing

The participant discusses a solid relationship as involving on-going communication and visitation. This further reiterates the value they place on the commitment the university has with the community. As explored previously, the community’s sense of being forgotten and abandoned exacerbates their experience of being isolated. This may bring to question the power relationship in the partnership. To avoid power imbalances there needs to be effective university-community collaboration (Mitchell & Humphries, 2007). The participants speak of the communication and commitment shown by the university as indicating a genuine interest and commitment to the SL programme.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This research investigated a community partner's perceptions of a SL programme. This case study explored the perceptions of three participants based in a secondary school where a SL programme took place in partnership with the University. Three broad themes emerged in the analysis of participant's perceptions. In this chapter I draw together my conclusions with regard to these analytic themes.

The first theme presented in the results and analysis chapter is 'Aftermath' and it describes the impact of apartheid on this community in the post-apartheid era. The participants described the school as being "abandoned". Abandonment, in the context of this study, is political and raced. It speaks to the historical context of separate and unequal education as well as the continuation of this phenomenon in the post-apartheid era in the form of what Goldberg (1998) terms 'white flight' – the migration of white pupils from the school in response to the merger of this school with a historically Black school and a historically Coloured school in the same district. The sense of abandonment is exacerbated by the fact that the community is resource-poor. Arguably, the lack of resources at the school was compounded by the exit of comparatively affluent white pupils.

The second theme emerging in the analysis of data is 'Plugging the gaps'. The participants in this study also felt abandoned by not having access to adequate support to assist the learners in their school with the challenges that they faced in their personal lives. Participants remarked on the social circumstances that arise due to poverty and the impact that this has on the learners (e.g. starvation, poor academic performance, increased vulnerability to drinking and domestic violence). Participants viewed these challenges as significant factors shaping their teaching experiences. In the light of these challenges, participants viewed the SL partnership with the University as providing them with some assistance in terms of responding to these challenges.

While participants viewed the University students involved in the SL programme as offering valuable assistance in addressing the learners psycho-educational needs, they also acknowledged that the different techniques that were used to engage learners had a positive impact – specifically for students who underperformed academically. Participants also argued that specific personal characteristics of the University students were important factors

impacting their engagement. Two important personal characteristics were their younger age and isiXhosa language proficiency. In this study, participants viewed the language barrier as a significant challenge, not only in terms of engaging the learners, but engaging the community more broadly. Furthermore, while participants viewed broader community engagement (e.g. parents and caregivers) as necessary for improving the impact of the SL programme on the community, they also acknowledged that there are limitations to this. These limitations pertained to the additional time that was required to do this and, related to this, the community's ability to respond to this input.

'Coming back' is the title I gave to the third theme that emerged in the analysis of the data. One implication of the circumstances of the community in which the school is located, as well as its geographic isolation, is that it is perhaps more dependent on the SL partnership than better resourced schools in closer proximity to social service providers. Arguably, this exacerbates an already unequal relation of power between the school and the university – the two partners in this SL programme. I argue, therefore, that it is for this reason that the teachers placed a lot of value on the university's on-going commitment to the programme – described in the sub-theme, 'Coming back'. In addition to commitment demonstrated through continued engagement, the manner in which this commitment was managed by the university was a significant factor underpinning participant's perceptions of the SL partnership as "good and solid". An important aspect of this management was on-going communication from the University on various matters – e.g. to negotiate dates for visits or changes in student participants. Participants also argued that the teachers appreciated the University students' preparedness.

In conclusion, the results of my study shed light on key issues shaping community partners' perceptions of the SL programme. These include characteristics of the context in which the school is located, the responsiveness of the SL programme in relation to challenges emerging in this context, and University's commitment to the programme as demonstrated by continued engagement that is appropriately managed. In relation to the literature on SL and community engagement more broadly, the results of this study highlight the importance of awareness of context, responsiveness to context, and demonstrable commitment.

5.1 LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This case study is based on a single case (one SL programme) consisting of a small sample of only three participants who were interviewed about their perceptions of the SL programme. The implication of this is that the results are not generalizable. However, I argue that they are transferable; possibly relevant to similar programmes in similar contexts. I recommend further research in this area of service learning.

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX I: CONSENT FORM

RHODES UNIVERSITY - DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY AGREEMENT BETWEEN STUDENT RESEARCHER AND RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

I _____ (participant's name) agree to participate in the research project of **Kathryn Queripel** about **Community Partners Perceptions of the usefulness of a Service Learning Programme**.

I understand that:

1. The researcher is a student conducting the research as part of the requirements for a **Master's degree at Rhodes University**. The researcher may be contacted on _____ or _____. The research project has been approved by the relevant ethics committee(s), and is under the supervision of **Dr Jacqueline Marx** in the Psychology Department at Rhodes University, who may be contacted on _____ (office) or _____.

3. My participation will involve a **semi- structured interview, to give insight into the perceptions of Community Partners**.

4. I may be asked to answer questions of a personal nature, but I can choose not to answer any questions about aspects of my life which I am not willing to disclose.

5. I am invited to voice to the researcher any concerns I have about my participation in the study, or consequences I may experience as a result of my participation, and to have these addressed to my satisfaction. A counselling centre may be contacted for further support on _____ or _____.

6. I am free to withdraw from the study at any time – however I commit myself to full participation unless some unusual circumstances occur, or I have concerns about my participation which I did not originally anticipate.

7. The report on the project may contain information about my personal experiences, attitudes and behaviours, but that the report will be designed in such a way that it will not be possible to be identified by the general reader.

Signed on (Date):

Participant: _____ Researcher: _____

* Contact information has been redacted for the purposes of publication.

APPENDIX II: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Introduction

My name is Kathryn Queripel and I am doing my Master's thesis on the experiences you had with us coming here to your school. I'll start off by describing the purpose of this study and what will happen to the results and who will have access to them. Then I would like to chat to you a little bit about your experiences with this partnership.

I would like you to know that your identity and that of the school will be kept confidential. I will not identify you personally or disclose the name of the school when I write up my research. Of course, my academic department knows that I am conducting this research and will identify the location of my study. However, I also want you to know that I'm not doing this to evaluate you or the school. The purpose is to see how the university can improve its relationship and the programmes it collaborates on with community partners. You have the right not to answer any of my questions, or to stop participating in this study at any time.

Semi-Structured Questions (1 hour)

Please would you tell me a bit about this school and how you came to work here?

What do you think is the main purpose of this partnership?

What have been your experiences of the students who come to your school?

What do you think has been useful about this partnership?

What have you felt wasn't very useful?

Can you think of any particular child that the programme worked really well for? A child who benefited from having the students here?

What was it about the programme that was useful for that child?

Can you think of a child that the programme wasn't really useful and why wasn't it?

Is there one university student that stood out for you over the years? A student that you thought was well suited to being here? Why does that student stand out for you?

Do you feel the relationship between you and the university is important, and why?

What do you think is important in terms of maintaining the relationship with the university, and vice versa?

Do you think communication is important between you and the university, how so?

What do you think could be done to improve the relationship between you and the university?

Is there anything I haven't said that you feel is important to mention?

End of Interview

Thank you for your time. I really appreciate you speaking to me today. These results will be a guide for the university to improve their services to you and their partnership as well as encourage further research to understand the community's perspective of their experiences with universities and students.