

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### SOME CONCLUSIONS

*Concerning the ways in which methods circumscribe the possible constructions of research subjects, the power relations inherent in the positioning of subjects, and the distribution of benefits from the research, outcomes should be of focal concern.*

(Gergen & Gergen, 1997, p. 33)

*Each versum of the multiversa is equally valid if not equally pleasant to be part of, and disagreements between observers, when they arise not from trivial logical mistakes within the same versum, but from the observers standing in different versa, will have to be solved...through the generation of a common versum through coexistence in mutual acceptance. In the multiversa coexistence demands consensus, that is, common knowledge.*

(Maturana, 1986, p.14).

The closing discussion that comprises this chapter will reflect on the process of the study and to where the flow of thought has taken the author. As has been previously stated the study began with a perturbation in the ecology of ideas of the author as she attempted to practice her discipline in a context foreign to her own. This is perhaps the reverse of what more commonly happens in South Africa at present when still many more white and black westernised psychologists, and those black psychologists who are not westernised before training, become westernised practitioners through it, practice in the local context. Very few psychological services are available outside the still dominant white areas of living spaces at a high fee for most and thus psychologists tend to see only the few who can afford private services

either through costly medical insurances or out of their own pockets. Non-western persons who either buy or are appropriated into such services, enter a western dominated domain encompassed and constricted by its conceptual structures. Yet the majority of the people of South Africa continue to live somewhere between the two ecologies. Practitioners trained in similar paradigms of practice provide the very meagre state sponsored services. While the focus of this study has been set on the situation in South Africa, it is suggested that the findings of this study could be useful to any other context in which psychology as a western discipline is being practiced among non-western peoples. In fact, when it is considered that each conversation is a cross-cultural event (Lifschitz & van Niekerk, 1990), the ideas emerging from this study may be useful to any therapeutic process.

This author found herself an estranged practitioner in an alien ecology trying to reach people who conceived of the world differently from the way she did. For a long time she firmly believed that it was a question of language and that learning to speak a new dialect was important for her to be effective as a practitioner in that context. What she did not fully realise at that stage was that languages really are more than words and semantics. The language that she needed to learn did not consist of words so much as it did of ideas forming mind in ecology. Even her own self-reflection and personal development kept her locked in her own ecology of ideas.

#### Training and Epistemology in an Ecology of Mind

*There is no place in psychology, or even discursive psychology, for critical work to start. A critical psychology has to be construed from theoretical resources, life experiences and political identities outside the discipline.*

Ian Parker (1997, in Fox & Prilleltensky, p. 298)

Training in psychological practice occurs from within a rich context of western thought that is most often self-critiqued and seldom critiqued from the

outside. Thus, shifts happen within the western epistemology of psychology but by its very nature, epistemology perpetuates itself. Reviewing the more recent history of psychological theory for practice, some of the few major shifts in thinking have been effected by theorists from outside the field (Kaye, 2000; Parker, 1999c). The reasons for this may be suggested in the preceding discussions of ecology of mind; by the controlling role epistemology plays in theory formation. In this role, epistemology can be likened to the eco-evolutionary structures described by Capra, Maturana, Bateson and other natural science authors discussed in the previous chapter when describing the limitations of sensory perceptions of the world. Just as sensory preceptors of organisms determine the limits of what may be perceived, epistemology contracted by mind prescribes limitations to what may be known.

Feral children raised by wolves become unable to speak human language after a while (Kenny, 1985). Similarly, students and trainees in psychology in the mainstream evolve academic ‘ears’ and ‘eyes’ for the western ecology of mind. Like the feral children who, after being introduced to human society, “never learn to speak, although they may know a few words” (Kenny, 1985, part 1, para. 17), such students are probably not easily able to acquire the language of the *other*, the non-western.

Because of the power differentials between west and non-west expressed in the arrogance and hegemony of the west, it is usual for the westerner to expect the non-westerner to make the change, to do the learning, to acquire the language. Contrarily, it is the contention of this author that precisely because the psychologist holds a possibly inescapable measure of power in a client-psychologist, or research participant-researcher relationship, the psychologist is accountable and responsible for reaching the other. The questions to be posed thus are how do psychologists do this and how do trainers train students to do this? When psychologists and trainees are required to work in settings other than their own, it becomes the psychologists’ or trainers’ task to facilitate the softening of epistemological boundaries. Some proposals on how this could be approached are set out in a further section below.

### Approaching Diversity

*The challenge has been to accept and celebrate the diversity, the ambivalence, the uncertainty, the **unknown**, the changing, the hidden and the visible. (chap. 2 of this text)*

Interrogation, if not suspension, or deliberate subversion of one's own beliefs, myths, and knowledge in one's own personal and cultural ecologies of ideas may be a necessary pre-requisite to making any meaningful contribution to knowledge production or practice in areas of psychology which operate outside of the mainstream Euro-American world. Such an attitude would allow the psychologist researcher or practitioner to be sympathetic to Parker's view when he states, "we do not discover psychology but live and *produce* it" (Parker, 1999c, p. 13). What the psychologist may need to recognise is that she does not live it and produce it for herself alone, but for the target group of her practice. When that target group is different from her own then she needs to question her life and her work.

### *Psychology – A Discipline for Change?*

It is necessary to refer back to the notion that psychology as a discipline, seemingly and ironically, does not take easily to change. It has often been left to outsiders to introduce new ideas into the discipline (mentioned above). Changes in socio-political arenas such as homosexual rights, gender equality, racial equality and non-discrimination, and so on, have not been effected so much by psychology, as they have been by politics and economics, mainly.

Indeed, psychology has often been criticised for its reluctance to take a moral and ethical social position, the discussion of which has been presented in earlier sections of this thesis. In the name of neutrality (non-political affiliation), the overall effect has been the evolvement of an insular, self-serving discipline. Part of this is probably a result of the strong focus on the

individual in mainstream psychology – a mainstream interest - and only recent interest in the socio-cultural context, as has been discussed. Accompanying this shift of interest is an imperative to research the relationship between people, - both as individuals and as human systems, - and their contexts.

As psychology turns its gaze outwards, adopting new ways of thinking about humanity in terms of networks, systems, cognitive and communication processes, and social dynamics, a kind of second order cybernetic (Capra, 2003) stance impels it to recognise its own impact on human systems. This awareness thus awakened insists on a deliberate position. The psychologist can no longer consider herself a neutral observer of human behaviour, but must recognise herself as a player, as an agent, as a proactive member of a human system, both subject to and protagonist of the rules of the processes she describes.

#### *Taking a Meta Level for Globalisation and Diversity*

It has been suggested earlier in this study that harmony between globalisation movements and local ecologies should be sought. The study has explored issues around both approaches and suggested that either end of the continuum is not useful in finding a praxis mode for psychologists in a multicultural world. In chapter seven the study took what could be referred to (metaphorically) as a meta position to examine processes and relationships in terms of ecological dynamics. The engagement and dialogues that occur in psychological practice emerge from a local level and are saturated in content. However, there is a danger that if these dialogues are not reflected on at a meta level the content of the dialogues becomes reified. Thus it is important to distinguish between the levels of involvement of the psychologist with her clients and research participants when she works with them, and then when she reflects on her work. At the first level she functions as a helper, a change agent or a consultant, subjugating her power as expert to the relationship process. At the meta level she reflects on her activities in the role of a responsible,

accountable expert in her field who minimises the distinction between *practicing* psychology and *producing* it.

The meta position allows the psychologist to disengage from the content of dialogue as practitioner and researcher, while reflecting on the process of her work. Watzlawick (n.d.) has stated that “nothing inside a frame can state, or even ask, anything about that frame”. While engaged in the content of dialogue, the psychologist remains within the frame, or epistemology, of the dialogue and thus is unable to critically question what happens inside it (Parker, 1997). In order to effectively critique practice, which subsumes knowledge and methodology, the practitioner must take a position outside the frame of practice.

It may be argued that the meta position of ecological and evolutionary processes emerges from a western ecology of ideas. However, the fact that this framework allows the researcher to comment on both western and non-western frames independent of content, suggests that it may not really belong to either, but has the potential to transcend both. It is not in any way being suggested here that this is a unique position, nor without recognition that the concepts used may be subject to their own critique, but rather that the lenses being proposed here in this meta (or outside) position may be useful. This advantage facilitates a process of validating the other’s world, seeking a solution from within the ecology of ideas of that world, and thus finding or creating solutions with a measure of ecological validity.

The meta position of ecological and evolutionary processes is the level at which the reflection of practice has been taken in this study. Thinking about content in terms of ecological and evolutionary processes can be universally applied to human social systems and thus the processes may be said to be global in nature. The processes include the practitioner as an integral part of the dynamics, and without a clear recognition of this fact dialogue on the local (content) level will remain disengaged. The psychologist and the other can only dialogue meaningfully within a shared ecology of ideas. The notion of a shared ecology of ideas implies a committed personal involvement on the part

of the psychologist to learn about the other's ecology of mind and to question her own.

Training in psychology as a discipline often engages trainees intrapersonally intensively at the local level. Trainees learn the language of psychology and most often this is from within an ecology of ideas already familiar to them. The challenge is to enable trainees to learn to “know with” their clients or research participants through learning how to learn languages of other epistemologies.

### Psychotherapy Practice and Ecology of Mind

Major models of psychotherapy practice continue to rely much on psychodynamic and psychoanalytic foundations. Exceptions to these processes have emerged with systemic therapies and narrative approaches especially popular in new world countries such as Australia, New Zealand and to some extent, South Africa (Parker, 1999c). However, training in South Africa at major universities remains largely focussed on traditional theories of psychotherapies. In an attempt, possibly to ameliorate the ill fit of traditional approaches, some practitioners have turned to the newly developing field of community psychology (Ka Sigogo, Hooper, Long, Lykes, Wilson & Zietkiewicz, 2004) that aims to address problems more broadly than only in the individual. Other sympathetic theoretical frameworks include those of cross cultural psychology and cultural psychology. These have, however, also been criticised for remaining subject to western metatheories (Gergen & Gergen, 1997).

What this study has attempted to achieve is to suggest a shift in the meta-reflection of where dis-solutions to problems lie. Psychotherapists working from even systemic approaches may do so without addressing the ecological origins of conscious human experience. The embeddedness of consciousness in ecologies of mind has been discussed in chapter seven and the importance of “knowing together” for psychologist and client has been discussed. Theories, methodologies and techniques all form part of the

knowledge bank that psychologists use in practice whether it be in the fields of psychotherapy, assessment or research. The question must now be posed as how to facilitate the shift in thinking for trainees and psychologists.

*Connecting with the Context*

An initial task for psychologists may be to critically explore an understanding of what Mind means in terms of consciousness and conscious experience. This could be accomplished on a very practical level in training. A self-reflexive process may be recommended. Questions to deliberate on may include the sort of questions suggested below:

- What is consciousness?
- What constitutes knowledge?
- Does knowledge differ from myth, belief, custom, and value, and how?
- Do these concepts play different roles in the lives of people?
- What constitutes ideas?
- How do ideas and knowledge interface with each other?
- How do ideas and knowledge interface with consciousness?
- Contemplate the notion of an ecology of ideas; mind.
- Do the concepts myth, belief, custom and value play different roles in the ecologies of minds?
- What is my own ecology of mind?
- How does my own ecology of mind sustain my living in my ecology?
- How does my own ecology of mind facilitate the acquisition of knowledge that is disseminated in my academic institutions (or not)?
- What kinds of knowledge alienate me?
- What kinds of experience alienate me?
- What is my personal experience of alienation?
- How do I know what I experience?

- What is experience?
- How do I language about experience?
- How does my language reflect my knowledge and experience?
- How does my experience inform my language?
- How does my language reflect the myths, beliefs and customs of my culture?
- Can I language in any other way?
- How do all of the above close me from the *other* in a multi-cultural society?

### Knowledge and Academia

It has been observed that it is possible to complete entire programmes and courses at South African universities without ever reading one book by a *black African* author (Maluleke, n.d). ‘Black African’ is used here to suggest the frame of reference of the authors as being of an African perspective as opposed to a western one. It is probably just as possible to escape reading even one journal article or published paper, or even unpublished paper by a *black African* author. While it is not being suggested that so-called *African* knowledge content is essential reading, it does give some indication that students generally have little opportunity for exposure to the thoughts of scholars other than western in South Africa. Reading the thoughts of scholars other than western permits sensitisation to different traditions of dialogue, to the ways in which other “intelligibilities enter into cultural life and are used by people to sustain, question, or abandon certain patterns of cultural life” (Gergen & Gergen, 1997, p. 33).

What have been presented in this study are some voices of the South African people who have previously been kept apart from general psychological services. As stated above, the voices of non-western scholars or scholars with non-western ideas are also generally kept apart from the mainstream of the discipline as it is practiced in South Africa. Thus, because trainees are generally prescribed texts only from western authors, trainees and

psychologists become locked into the western ecology of mind: insulated from ecologies of ideas of *otherness*.

Students in almost all disciplines (other than psychology) are expected to become familiar with the contexts in which they study. How is it then that psychology trainees are not required to acquaint themselves with the cultural ecology of the majority of the population of the country in which they train and aim to practice?

It is not surprising then that ten years into democracy (the time of writing), appropriate psychological tests have not yet been developed for the majority of the population. The majority of the population being non-western is still considered *other*. Ten years into democracy in South Africa finds many psychologists still convinced that interventions, practice theories, research methodologies and teaching of the discipline, as it has been developed in the west, is universally appropriate for all students of all cultures.

Psychology...will achieve a more effective stance toward the culture at large when it comes to recognize that the folk psychology of ordinary people is not just a set of self-assuaging illusions, but the culture's beliefs and working hypotheses about what makes it possible and fulfilling for people to live together.... It is where psychology starts and wherein it is inseparable from anthropology. (Bruner, 1990, p. 32)

#### Final Word

It is hoped that, through the exploration of the local texts presented in this study, some of the above may have been achieved. It is also hoped that, through some of the suggestions made above for the training of future and even existing psychologists, more will go some way towards achieving the above.

It is hoped that this thesis may contribute in some small way towards ensuring that in psychology in a globalising world, diversity does not become monoculture; ecology is more than engineering, and that life is far, far more than a commodity.

It is hoped that globalisation will in future be designed to be “inclusive, ecologically sustainable and respectful of human rights and values” (Capra, 2003, p. 187), and that “the new politics will be a cultural politics that...connects to values and issues that spring from peoples’ life experiences” (Capra, 2003, p.193).

It is hoped that this document has gone some small way towards *accepting and celebrating the diversity, the ambivalence, the uncertainty, the un-known, the changing, the hidden and the visible* which challenges the practice of psychology in local communities in South Africa in the present.