

TURNING RESOURCES INTO ASSETS: IMPROVING THE SERVICE DELIVERY AND
RELEVANCE OF A PSYCHOLOGY TRAINING CLINIC THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH

BY
WILLEM PETRUS LOUW

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PROMOTER: PROFESSOR TERRI M BAKKER
CO-PROMOTER: DR GERHARD VILJOEN (DECEASED)

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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the inception and evolution of a combined collaborative action research project and living theory action research project. Six academic staff members attempted to improve our practice of generating locally relevant research in a university psychology clinic. This process impacted not only on the lives of the participants, but facilitated the enactment of the three tasks of universities and so influenced the lives of the student and residential communities to whom we had a responsibility. This thesis explores two research questions that formed the first part of the study, namely: “How can we improve the functioning of Itsoseng Psychology Clinic?” and “How can we increase our research output?” The second part of the study was a self-study action research project in which I examined my attempts to improve my academic practice by inquiring into my practice of facilitating the collaborative action research project as a peer support initiative. In the form of my living theory, this thesis therefore also explored my answers to the questions: “How can I facilitate a peer support research initiative?” and “How can I improve my academic practice through facilitating such an initiative?” I take a macro-level view of the relationship between a university and surrounding communities and discuss within the South African context three discernable mandates or tasks that universities fulfil: teaching, research and community engagement. I discuss the relevance of this study to psychology and specifically university psychology clinics as potential interface between the university and the surrounding community when enacting community engagement as the third academic task. I also discuss the implications of this study to action research methodology and the concept of transformation in emancipatory research. The main argument of my living theory of my academic practice is that the formation and nurturing of a regular, supportive and critical audience in the form of peer support research meetings contributed to the transformation of resources into assets when we worked towards improving the service delivery and local relevance of a university psychology clinic.

Key terms: Action research, living theory, higher education, transformation, emancipatory research, university psychology clinic, three tasks of universities, local relevant knowledge, improving service delivery, academic practice, South Africa, Mamelodi



DEDICATIONS

This thesis is dedicated to my two very special children, Maya and Max, who waited patiently for so many years for their father to “finish his thesis” – you are very dear to me.

This thesis is also dedicated to Gerhard, who brought me “songs from the wood, poppies red and roses filled with summer rain”.

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“Hallo!” said Piglet, “what are *you* doing?”

“Hunting,” said Pooh.

“Hunting what?”

“Tracking something,” said Winnie-the-Pooh very mysteriously.

“Tracking what?” said Piglet, coming closer.

“That’s just what I ask myself. I ask myself, What?”

“What do you think you’ll answer?”

“I shall have to wait until I catch up with it,” said Winnie-the-Pooh.

From Winnie-the-Pooh by A.A. Milne

If you come here to help me, you're wasting your time. If you come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.

*Lilla Watson (Australian Aborigine Organiser,
quoted from thesis of Radermacher, 2006)*

so much depends
upon

a red wheel
barrow

glazed with rain
water

beside the white
chickens.

William Carlos Williams

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